

Yet the most important lesson we have learned, by traveling inside the community during periods of political change and strife, is that all transformations in the Sierra de Puebla have occurred at the intersection of complex internal hegemonic processes and the successive waves of confrontation with colonizers, conquerors, and other outsiders experienced since the pre-hispanic period. The tendency of younger men to rise and challenge generational authority, in contexts of war or political flux, is a recurring one in this context. Compromises among generations, ethnic groups, and villages had helped fashion, by the late nineteenth century, at least three institutional and discursive transitions in local society: the ladder of civil posts associated with colonial *gobiernos de república*; the civil-religious hierarchies articulated, after independence, with the new municipalities; and the seemingly ephemeral democratic patriarchy of *pasados* and national guards in the 1855–1867 period. With the 1910 Revolution, village-based militias would once again attempt generational and ethnic negotiations with communal leaders; once again they would involve gendered relations of power.

4 Alternative Nationalisms and Hegemonic Discourses

Peasant Visions of the Nation

In the Xochiapulco municipal building in 1985, in a room beside the main office, there was a display of memorabilia from the resistance to the French Intervention. Alongside two small cannon captured from the Austro-Belgian Legion and two large, corroded cannonballs stood a wooden cabinet with glass doors, full of human bones. I asked the young municipal assistant hovering over me whose bones they were. He confirmed the explanation on the sign hung on the display: they were Austrian bones, dug up in the central plaza of the town about ten years before when the municipality was building a basketball court.

According to local memory, the bones were the remains of a major encounter in the village, when the Austro-Belgian Legion had invaded Xochiapulco. The whole population had evacuated the village before the Austrian advance, fleeing into the surrounding hills. The foreign soldiers had occupied the town, camping out in the central plaza. Then at two in the morning, dragging themselves laboriously on their stomachs through the thick fog, their machetes between their teeth, Xochiapulco national guard soldiers descended from their hiding places. Stealthily evading the sentries in the heavy fog, they pounced on the sleeping invaders. After the massacre the dead had been buried in the plaza, to be uncovered more than a century later and placed on display.¹

My purpose in this chapter is to engage in a process of excavation analogous to that of the municipal workers who built a basketball court in Xochiapulco's central plaza. In my case, however, the product of the archaeology will be not bones, but discourses. By focusing on the ideological, cultural, and political strands that are obscured during the process of construction of nationalism, I will provide a different perspective on the process as a whole. On the one hand, I will exploit the oxymoronic tension in the term *peasant nationalism* in order to explode our customary political understandings of both words included in it. On the other, I will provide a context for understanding how apparently ancient rural issues—

land, political demarcations, private versus communal rights—can become part of an emerging popular nationalism, changing its contours and being changed by it.

My conceptual starting point will be the idea of discourse as the product of an open-ended process of cultural, political, and ideological interaction. Particular ideas, concepts, or perceptions can become articulated with each other, as elements, either by emphasizing lines of similarity or by using difference to construct boundaries of antagonism. Whether two elements are joined in a discursive field by an emphasis on their similarities or divided by a discursive frontier that focuses on their differences, the identity of the elements is changed through the practice of articulation. In the case of nationalism, then, it makes sense to concentrate not only on the major discursive elements in the final product but also on the process of construction itself. Through open-ended processes of articulation, nationalist discourses are formed from already existing elements and newly emerging ones. By connecting these elements along new lines of equivalence and antagonism, social and historical actors transform the meaning of both old and new.

In the Sierra de Puebla between 1850 and 1876, practices of equivalence and antagonism created hegemonic discourses through the incorporation or submergence of particular practices and ideas at the communal, regional, and national levels. At each of these levels, already constructed discourses interacted with and modified each other. The ultimate products were already “official stories” that buried counterhegemonic elements in smoothed-out discourse that purported to speak for the whole community. Only by uncovering the elements of alternative nationalism and popular political practice buried within the remaining “official stories”—at the community, regional, and national levels—can we begin to understand the complex and conflictual processes through which rural folk, and their urban allies and antagonists, perceived and dealt with the painful political, cultural, and social questions surrounding the construction of a nation.

A methodological problem I have faced in this chapter involves the order of presentation. While doing the research, I began by reconstructing the historical narrative of events, conflicts, and political alliances in the Sierra de Puebla between 1850 and 1872; I then gleaned the discursive elements from the documentary evidence through a process of textual analysis. Only at that time did it become clear to me how most of the elements of the nationalist discourses I was studying had both a previous existence and a reorganized and transformed presence in the changing political alliances and opportunities of that period. My struggle with the presentation of these

materials, however, is an entirely different question. I have compromised by combining historical narrative with an analysis of discourse in discrete temporal fragments. The definition and order of these fragments presupposes a relatively traditional chronological periodization; but by putting it to a new purpose in this chapter, I hope to transform it, at least in part.

*Building the Boundaries:
Populist Conservatism and Communitarian Liberalism*

In 1850, when the indigenous peasants of Xochiapulco and La Manzanilla haciendas first rebelled against the landowners and their allies in Zacapoaxtla, they also involved themselves in the building of a new nationalist discourse. As we have seen, they entered this new discursive space through their meeting with Juan Alvarez, leader of the Liberal Revolution and a well-known populist *cacique* from “El Sur.” In exchange for supporting Liberalism, the Xochiapulquenses were promised land and municipal autonomy. From this first point of articulation—in which Liberalism as a political movement was tied, through the practice of equivalence, to peasant access to land and to local political independence—the peasants of Xochiapulco and their allies would build discourses on nationalism that dynamically tied local and regional struggles for social and ethnic justice to a broader vision of how to “make” a national polity.

Throughout the Sierra de Puebla the issues of landownership and political independence could serve as poles around which to arrange discursive fields concerning the contestation of power. Land issues concerned access to resources, both private and communal. They involved the definition of overlapping rights to common lands and forests, both between communities and between individuals resident in a single village; likewise, they involved individual rights in collective property and disputes over their potential privatization. A discourse on land could also embrace community membership and the responsibilities attached to it. Finally, land issues also connected to questions of religious ritual and political demarcation. Plots could often be set aside to meet the obligations of particular *cofradías*. And when villages were broken into newly autonomous municipalities or divided between distinct political districts, the process often left unresolved questions of boundaries and rights in the contested terrain along the edges of each population center.²

Political independence was also the tip of an entire iceberg of articulated issues. Conflicts between villages over the demarcation of political districts involved confrontations over the control of land, revenues, and labor power. Often these were contests between existing and emerging coalitions of the

locally powerful. Given the interrelationships between political and religious districts, moreover, local battles over political power might draw in the clergy, with both sides seeking the support of local priests. In the cargo systems, too, the intersections between religion, ritual, and political power could be intricate and intense.

In addition to questions of autonomy, discourses about political independence debated the definition of political participation. The old debates surrounding political participation in highland indigenous communities ultimately involved a contested process of constructing legitimate political arenas, in terms both of who could have a voice and of who could stand for elective office. At the communal level, especially with the establishment of cargo systems, these arenas of participation were delineated along gender and age lines, with further spatial distinctions between barrios that were often ethnically distinct. In the region's indigenous villages legitimate political power and participation tended to concentrate in the hands of older Nahua or mestizo men, while district or regional political arenas were mainly constructed around centers of mestizo or Spanish power and settlement. In this context local elections, by providing a space where alliances and bargaining between political factions could go on, were usually about the reproduction of existing power relations.³

The discursive threads of land and political independence could be woven into a tapestry that contained most arenas of conflict or debate in highland political culture. Land connected through community to religion and ritual; then through village cargo systems or parish priests to political demarcations and political participation; then back through political demarcations to conflicts over property; and then back to land again. Depending on when and where one started and the particular lines of equivalence or antagonism first constructed, the rest of the elements would fall into place in very different combinations. Clearly, Xochiapulco's particular way of articulating local discourses to an emerging national Liberalism was only one of many. Different people, factions, and communities in the Sierra de Puebla made their choices among the many possible discursive alternatives available to them through the medium of specific conflicts and coalitions.

One such moment in highland Puebla was the rebellion against the Liberal Revolution that began in Zacapoaxtla in December 1855. The Plan de Zacapoaxtla—an attempt by Conservative regional notables to put together a counterdiscourse tying local issues to an anti-Liberal agenda—and the ensuing uprising pitted military officers and parish priests against a young and struggling Liberal government. In articulating a local anti-Liberal discourse, Conservatives chose as their point of departure the Catholic religion

and its unifying effect among Mexicans otherwise divided in myriad ways. "It is unquestionable," read a paragraph often reproduced in the various manifestos of the movement,

that the only tie that still binds our people, so embattled by scandal, defection, and anarchy, is the religious sentiment so deeply embedded in the heart of all Mexicans, not only because they see this sentiment tied to the traditions of our primitive society and to the memory of our fathers, but because they instinctively know that once this sacred tie is broken, the only future for our homeland will surely be dissolution and ruin.⁴

Through this entry point, parish priests often became the leaders of the movement in the villages, using their influence in local political affairs to call for a return to the Conservative laws of 1836 or the Conservative constitution of 1843. From the time of the first Zacapoaxtla plan through the various Conservative uprisings in Puebla state during 1856, priests were the instigators or contact people. They led communal assemblies, were executed, were stripped of their goods, or were forced to present financial guarantees that they would no longer involve themselves in politics before being allowed to return to their parishes. Liberal government officials not only ordered the punishment of rebellious clergymen but commented openly in their letters and reports about the role of the church in Conservative rebellion.⁵

The clergy's clear conspiratorial role made it difficult for Liberals in positions of power to be sympathetic regarding any aspect of religion. They connected Catholicism to the abusive power of priests and publicized as many incidents of this abuse as they could find. In one such incident the priest in Ixtacamazitlán refused to bury the dead infant of the illiterate Indians José Lorenzo and María Josefa because they did not have the money; when María Josefa protested, the priest slapped her. The prefect of San Juan de los Llanos district had a field day: not only did he order an immediate burial for the baby, but he sent the case to the national newspapers, where it was published under the title "A Priest Similar to Many." Certainly there was enough evidence of abusive behavior to keep Liberals happy: for instance, Father Venancio Gavino López, parish priest in Zapotitlán, recognized in his last will and testament eleven illegitimate children.⁶

Such intense hostility toward religion, however, made impossible any attention to the importance of ritual in local political culture. In 1857 in Tulancingo, for example, General Manuel F. Soto reported a Conservative conspiracy in the darkest of tones, accusing the clergy in the locality of refusing to swear loyalty to the Liberal constitution and of stirring up the

rural population against the government. He needed reinforcements, he wrote, to avoid problems "in a town where priests and reactionaries have always dominated." Yet the issue at hand turned out to be somewhat less than apocalyptic. People were interested in having the Holy Week processions that year as usual.⁷

In other instances as well, a by-the-book Liberal reaction to requests for approval of communal rituals confused clerical hierarchy with religion and closed off potential articulations between Liberalism and popular culture.⁸ In the worst cases Liberal articulations of racism with anticlericalism resulted in ugly representations of indigenous peasants and of popular religion that pushed rural folk into the arms of the very enemies the Liberals were condemning. Such was the case in a letter received in 1865 by Rafael J. García, later governor of Puebla, from a Liberal friend, a Señor Arellano. The people remained the same through all political convulsions, wrote Arellano.

Their erroneous customs in the area of religion, instead of becoming more enlightened, are further darkened in the chaos of their ignorance, and slowly they walk to the edge of the precipice. The Indian works the whole year, suffering the worst privations; he lives almost naked and badly fed; yet he is obsessed by money, only money, and for what? It pains me to say it: to invest in functions called religious, and in every church they have a multitude of statues, and none is kept from taking the throne, or going out to the street in its yearly procession.

And no matter how paradoxical this behavior might seem, Arellano concluded, it was an infallible truth, along with the fact that these abuses always benefited the clergy.⁹

The discursive antagonism between Liberalism and religion thus limited the possible articulations between Liberalism and communal hegemony, opening potential spaces for Conservative populisms through the connection of religion to ritual. Such was clearly the purpose of the communal assemblies held in Zacapoaxtla and Zapotitlán in late 1855, both called and led by the local parish priests. Bringing together political officials and notables from the various surrounding villages, the priests used the assemblies as forums to bemoan the failure of the Alvarez government and the danger to Catholicism its policies represented. The documents elaborated at the meetings declared the districts in rebellion against the Liberal government, accepted the 1836 laws, and garnered the signatures of as many people as possible. Particularly in the case of Zapotitlán, the authorities from the various anexos signed only with a cross, unable to write their names. At the

at the very bottom of the document, the local notable Pascual Mansilla declared that he signed "in the name of the multitude of Indians who cannot write, from all the surrounding villages."¹⁰

This attempt to articulate populism with Conservatism through religion was successful in a variety of towns and villages, particularly in areas with conflicts between cabeceras and anexos or in places where the Catholic church had a populist presence. In Chignahuapan, for example, the local parish priest had been extremely generous in his loans and aid to the community. But as these examples bear out, religion was simply an entry point to an entire articulation that connected political independence and participation to control of land, labor, and revenue and finally to general questions of conflict over power.¹¹

In this context there were always boundaries to what could be constructed. From the perspective of Conservative leaders, the potential populism of the anti-Liberal articulations might easily get out of hand. So it happened in the town of Huamantla, in the territory of Tlaxcala and along the sierra's western flank. In January 1856 a group of eighty people gathered and, to the rhythm of wind instruments, marched to the house of the local priest, then to that of the local colonel. Taking both authorities with them, the crowd proceeded to the house of the prefect and announced their intention to support the Conservative general Güitián, who had joined the Zacapoaxtla rebellion after having been sent out to repress it. Neither the priest nor the colonel would take responsibility for the movement, and when the prefect asked who was the leader, the crowd responded, "The people." "Since there wasn't a single notable person among them," the prefect reported, "on whom I could place the responsibility, I thought it convenient to send them away, telling them to return quietly to their houses without disturbing the peace, and they obeyed me in a docile fashion, dispersing in a moment." The whole movement, it seemed, had been prompted by the rumor that Güitián, along with 250 men, was about to arrive in Huamantla. But when the crowd tested the waters, rounding up the usual Conservative suspects in the persons of the local clergy and military, they found conditions were not right, probably at least in part because the initiative did not come from above.¹²

If religion served as the point of articulation downward, toward communal processes of hegemonic politics, the Catholic church as an institution under siege by Liberalism served as a point of articulation that led sideways to the military institution, which was in a similar position. It is interesting to note, in this context, that the Zacapoaxtla plan also criticized Liberalism's lack of respect for established military officers. This helps to explain why,

during the two months between the original Zacapoaxtla declaration and the formation of a special national army, four different military expeditions sent to the sierra to repress the rebels all joined them instead, ultimately taking Puebla city. When the Liberal government was finally able to repress the Conservative Puebla revolution in March 1856, it was only with an army formed expressly for that purpose and composed mainly of national guard rather than regular army soldiers.¹³

The Liberal victory in Puebla helps us map the lines of discursive conflict between Liberals and Conservatives over how to articulate popular political culture. We have already seen that Liberal discourses were generally antagonistic to religion, abandoning the territory of ritual to Conservatives. At the same time, the Conservatives could not entirely dominate the terrain of populist construction because of the hierarchical representations of power within their movement. As the case of Huamantla suggests, Conservative populisms worked best when controlled from above. Conservatives wanted to incorporate communal hegemonic discourses not to change relations in the communities but to reproduce and further centralize them. To this the Liberals opposed an alternative discourse whose point of departure was political decentralization and the democratization of property rights.

Here was a different view of community and communal hegemony whose center was not ritual and political power but instead political participation and individualized access to land. This vision of community worked especially well in Xochiapulco, an hacienda with no previous communal tradition or local civil-religious hierarchy, where political participation among equals and individual access to land was opposed to political, social, and economic control from the outside. We have already seen, in part, how the story might have been different in other villages, where both discursive poles in the Liberal agenda might cause internal struggles over legitimacy in property rights or political access.¹⁴ Yet in the end, by raising the issue of power and its potential decentralization, liberal attempts at populist discourse created the potential for new dynamics not only at the communal level but at regional and national levels as well.

In this context the role of the national guard battalions in the struggle for Puebla becomes even more crucial. The national guard, by providing an alternative political arena for younger and indigenous men within the villages, challenged the factions of powerholders who were in control of communal politics. These national guard battalions also provided a vehicle for the articulation of a Liberal populist discourse. In contrast to Conservative populisms, this discourse did not proceed from religion to ritual to traditional lines of power. It began instead from democratization and po-

litical decentralization and moved through the individualization of land rights to the creation of a new political leadership. The potential promise contained in this alternative communal discourse is highlighted in the effectiveness of Liberal national guards against the regular army and its Conservative village guards. But in Puebla in 1856, the lines were just beginning to be drawn. They would continue to be contested and articulated, in a dizzying number of combinations, village by village, throughout the next twenty-five years.

After the Conservative defeat in Puebla, the next conflict that provided a medium for renewed discursive constructions was the three-year civil war (1858–1861), and in particular the internal divisions within Liberalism that were fought out in the sierra between 1859 and 1860. I have already dealt with the details of the split between Méndez and Alatríste (see chapter 2). Suffice it to recall here that, in the context of competition with his rivals, Méndez sought indigenous allies in previously Conservative communities. Perhaps for the first time he took seriously the democratic potential of Liberalism in a communal context. The result was a rethinking of democratic participation and community property rights within an expanded Liberal definition of autonomy and political decentralization.

This rethinking of democratic participation entailed not only the incorporation of new groups and communal constituencies into an already defined Liberal agenda but also the very transformation of Liberal discourses and agendas in interaction with popular political culture. It produced an especially radical and decentered form of Liberalism. In an attempt to reflect its popular, everyday, and inclusive nature, I will refer to it as “communitarian” Liberalism. This term reflects both the contradictions inherent in collectivizing Liberal principles and the internal communal tensions intensified by a coalition with Liberalism. It suggests as well that, under the extraordinary conditions created by civil and foreign wars, a whole host of notions and elements not found routinely within Liberalism might become a part of it.

Elaborated during ten years of civil war and foreign intervention, communitarian Liberalism united the broadest possible coalition for the confrontation with Conservative and foreign enemies. The frontiers of discursive antagonism became especially flexible in this context, allowing for the articulation, through equivalence, of elements that otherwise might not have formed part of Liberal discourse. The flexibility of boundaries sometimes produced ambiguous connections among elements, or unclear, almost floating promises and expectations. In many of these cases contradictions would resurface when the emergencies of war were over. Mean-

while, the stage was set for the evolution of particularly powerful and innovative forms of alternative popular nationalism.

To illustrate the forms of articulation that could occur within communitarian Liberalism, I will analyze some examples of discursive construction occurring in the Sierra de Puebla between 1859 and 1867. Three of them are related to the issue of land and municipal politics and demonstrate the flexibility of articulations through equivalence in this period. The fourth, more difficult to pin down, is the growth of a "floating" sense of entitlement, of a variety of expectations regarding how "good" citizens would be rewarded after the conflict. In all four cases, however, the very ambiguity of discursive frontiers elicited dramatic political and cultural creativity on the part of rural populations.

*Stretching the Boundaries:
Conflict and Coalition, 1858–1867*

In 1859–1860, when a dispute among Liberal factions in the Puebla highlands erupted in the interstices of the Liberal-Conservative civil war, the faction led by Juan N. Méndez and Ramón Márquez Galindo connected through the Xochiapulco national guard to the Totonac communities of Tenampulco and Tuzamapan. A distinct interpretation of Liberal land laws on disamortization of communal or municipal properties underlay this alliance. As is well known, the original Liberal laws on the privatization of corporate properties applied equally to church and communal lands, calling for the privatization of both in the interest of developing a market society of individuals who could all be equal before the law. In practice, however, such principles proved to be illusory.¹⁵ After the original passage of the disamortization law in June 1856, therefore, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada issued a series of clarificatory decrees concerning the disamortization of small municipal or communal properties. These decrees can be seen as an alternative interpretation of how Liberal law could be applied to the communal and smallholding peasantry. It was to this alternative tradition that the Méndez-Xochiapulco-Tenampulco alliance attached itself, stretching its boundaries in the process.

Lerdo explained in his original and most important circular of 9 October 1856 that attempts to apply the June land laws had generated confusion. Certain individuals, he said, "are abusing the ignorance of poor peasants, and especially the Indians, to make them see the disamortization law as opposed to their interests, [but] whose principal purpose was, quite to the contrary, to favor the most humble classes." There were also abuses, according to Lerdo, in the application of the June law. Most important, the poorer

peasants were being left out of the adjudication process because they did not have the money to pay the necessary fees or because speculators beat them out in presenting petitions to adjudicate specific plots. It was necessary to remedy these abuses and to convince the poor smallholding peasantry that the law was meant to benefit them; otherwise, "the law would be nullified in one of its principal goals, which was the subdivision of agricultural property." Thus, Lerdo ordered that all plots whose value was under two hundred pesos be adjudicated for free and of necessity to their de facto possessors unless they clearly and specifically renounced their right to such plots.¹⁶

A month later, in a case brought before the president by the village of Tepeji del Río, the democratic interpretation of the Liberal land laws was pushed even further. The villagers of Tepeji had requested, only a week after Lerdo's original circular, that their common plots in individual usufruct ("de repartimiento") not be included in those affected by the adjudication procedures. The president chose instead to declare the tradition of communal property, which he interpreted as the Spanish crown extending ownership of land to indigenous communities while prohibiting its sale or transfer, to be entirely relevant and legitimate in a Liberal context. Thus, he declared,

the relevant lands should be held and enjoyed by the referred Indians in absolute property, receiving thus the right to pawn, rent, and sell them, and to dispose of them as any owner does of his things, and without the mentioned Indians needing to pay any cost, since they are not receiving the lands in adjudication, since they already owned them, but simply are being freed of inappropriate and anomalous impediments attached to that ownership.

In this interpretation Liberal legislation modified communal property rights only by allowing the free circulation of the plots. The identity of the proprietors and the tradition of proprietorship should remain otherwise unchanged.¹⁷

The Méndez-Márquez alliance took this kind of interpretation as its starting point when it protected the rights of Totonac Indians over those of white vecinos in the adjudication of municipal land in the Teziutlán-Tenampulco area. The contested terrain between districts, in this case where Teziutlán, Tlatlauqui, and Jonotla all bordered on one another, became especially difficult to define during processes of adjudication. Commercial agriculturalists from Teziutlán had rented or possessed lands in these regions, prime tropical lands for livestock or other commercial uses, and wished to privatize them. Municipalities were also not clear on where the dividing lines stood between them. Under such circumstances the allies of Alatríste in Teziutlán began a process of Liberal disentanglement that they

hoped would benefit them. They used the most literal interpretation of the June 1856 law as their guide: land to whoever possesses it at the time. Márquez and Méndez, by contrast, articulated the claims of villagers to the spirit of the 1856 law, as represented in the clarificatory circulars and decrees of October and November, and supported indigenous self-defense actions against white landowners adjudicating themselves municipal properties.¹⁸

When Rafael Avila, vecino of Teziutlán and a local political official named by Alatríste, protested Márquez's actions in his town, he couched the protest in terms of the first interpretation of Liberal land law. "Márquez's provisions regarding land continue to give bad results," he wrote, "because today all the Indians from Tenampulco not only want to grab part of my lands but now they want them all, and about half of those that belong to this municipality, and they have already tried to take possession of them with weapons in their hands." Avila further accused Márquez of offering weapons to the peasants from Tenampulco and El Chacal in order to expel Teziutlán vecinos from municipal lands, predicting there would be a "caste war" if Alatríste did not take stern countermeasures. From Avila's point of view, his predictions began to come true three days later when indigenous soldiers sent by Márquez invaded the town and sought to arrest the local officials in charge of the disentailment process.¹⁹

Yet it is instructive to view the conflicts from the perspective of the other interpretation of Liberal law. If the original and legitimate right of proprietorship was the grant given indigenous communities by the Spanish crown, and if indeed one of the main purposes of Liberal land legislation was the redistribution of land, then the indigenous peasants of Tenampulco, Tuzamapan, El Chacal, Jonotla, and associated villages had a better right to disputed municipal lands than did the wealthier white inhabitants of Teziutlán. Moreover, since these peasants had not renounced their right to the land in any legal or explicit way, any process of adjudication being carried out in Teziutlán was not only illegitimate but illegal. Indeed, in light of the circular of 9 October 1856, Avila and his ilk might well be considered "speculators." In this context the actions of indigenous peasants, when they attempted to recover the lands and to arrest the political authorities in charge of adjudications, were legally justified.

In the Sierra de Puebla, then, through specific alliances, conflicts, and discursive practices, an alternative interpretation of Liberal land law already present in debates within the Liberal state was articulated to an emerging regional discourse on the meaning of property. In this context the ownership of land was neither foremost nor most legitimately a question of individual or private rights but was instead interconnected with histories of

common right and usage dating back to the Spanish conquest. In conflicts over land, moreover, the humble and indigenous had greater legitimacy simply by their status. They were owners unless they expressly and publicly said otherwise. Small wonder that the indigenous peasants of the Tenampulco-Tuzamapan area gave Márquez and Méndez their enthusiastic support. Small wonder, too, that the remaining factions of white Liberals in Teziutlán, Huauchinango, and Zacatlán, as well as the southern *llanuras* of Puebla state, did not. That both continued to fight against Conservatives, and later French Interventionists, exemplified the problematic unity of communitarian Liberalism.

During the French Intervention two other moments of discursive construction further developed the alternative Liberal discourse around communal land. Both occurred in 1864, at a moment when the region was under attack from Interventionist forces. Both had as their prime inspiration the need to maintain or expand the coalitions fighting against the invaders.

In March 1864 José María Maldonado, then military commander of Zapacoxtla, issued a circular to the commanders of the indigenous villages of Xochitlán, Nauzontla, and Cuetzalan explaining the Reform Laws. As we have already seen, Maldonado's main message was that the laws of reform had as their first beneficiaries the humble classes, saving them from the abuses of a priestly elite and giving them access to land; he was interested in expanding the popular base for his resistance.²⁰ But what is most interesting for our purposes here is that his circular's discourse on land built on the tradition already detailed. It connected to the national circulars and resolutions of October and November 1856 as well as to the articulations occurring in the 1859–1860 conflict between Méndez and Alatríste.

According to Maldonado, the purpose of the disamortization laws was "to turn national property into private property, enriching multitudes of families," and he argued that "communal lands in the villages should be distributed among the Indians in equal parts in order to meet their needs and without their having to pay anything." Yet despite his attempts at carrying out these dispositions in the fairest possible way, he continued, some people had felt their interests had been hurt, in particular those who, "abusing the authority they had held, had grabbed for themselves the communal lands existing in the highlands, to the detriment of the villagers." Thus, he ordered the village commanders, it was their duty to enforce the law and to make sure that all white landowners ("de razón") and those owning more than one fanega of land paid the necessary taxes in order to make their adjudications legal. Those who were unwilling to do so would lose access to the land, which would then be distributed among the poor.²¹

To this point Maldonado built on existing alternative discourses, selecting community members and poor Indians as especially entitled to justice under the reforms. In his discussion, as in the previous examples, property rights were tempered with justice and put in the context of redistribution and a commitment to equality. But Maldonado went even further: he connected the right to property to defense of the nation. "Since traitors have proven themselves undeserving of consideration by the government," he concluded, "all those who possess communal land in the villages and do not immediately seek a pardon will have the lands taken away and distributed [to the poor]."²²

In connecting the defense of the nation to entitlement to property, Maldonado opened up a new line of equivalence along which to articulate a popular Liberal discourse. Along this line the ownership of property was not simply an individual issue; rather, it became reembedded in questions of collective behavior, collective good, and community responsibility. The community and its representatives had the right to judge who was deserving and who was not, according to political and moral principles. And those who did defend the nation—soldiers of whatever rank—were entitled, by implication, to own land.

An analogous articulation occurred in December of the same year, when the Liberal governor of Puebla state, Fernando María Ortega, signed a decree giving Xochiapulco formal ownership rights over the lands of haciendas Xochiapulco and La Manzanilla as well as the lands of the extinct village Xilotepec. In a direct follow-up to the original pact with Juan Alvarez, Ortega also granted Xochiapulco independent municipal status, making it a *villa* instead of a simple *pueblo*, and calling it "Villa del Cinco de Mayo." As the new name for the community attests, the decree was justified in a discourse of entitlement concerning the rewards that "good" citizens received.

The state had the right to grant land in such a context. The three justifications appearing at the beginning of the decree were that the state has the right to reward the services of citizens and populations; that the inhabitants of Xochiapulco "have given eminent service in the noble cause of Mexico's independence, and their soldiers among other brilliant actions of war distinguished themselves in the glorious battle of the Fifth of May"; and that, for the public good, it is sometimes necessary to take over property, after having estimated and paid its just price. The state was designated, in the decree, as the mediator between Xochiapulco and the hacendados. Legitimate access to land was granted, through a series of nested justifications, to all members of the community because of the village's role in the resistance to the French

but also, according to rank, to the soldiers who had fought on the Fifth of May.²³ In the end, therefore, the issue of private property, and of access to it, was set in the context of service to the nation and to the community.

Although access or right to land was the entry point in this discourse of entitlement, other rights were also articulated through the concept of entitlement, most clearly in Ortega's decree of December 1864. People who defended the nation were good citizens and thus entitled to land, political independence, political participation, education, economic prosperity, and so on. By using defense of the nation as the common point of access, this discourse decentralized power and privilege as nodes of entitlement and replaced them with bravery and service, much in the same way that the national guard presence shook up existing hegemonic coalitions within the communities. A discourse of entitlement thus established, in a floating and hazy way, the possibility of a more democratically organized political community, one where membership and rights depended on behavior rather than on birth, age, class, ethnicity, or regional origin. At least until the defeat of the Intervention, these free-floating discourses of entitlement and citizenship worked extremely well in keeping together the broad coalitions defending the republic. But there were dangers to communitarian Liberalism as well. Once the end of the conflict caused fighters to claim their rights as citizens, no one was really sure what these rights entailed. Debates over their definition would be felt in Mexican politics throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Indeed, with the defeat of the French Intervention and the execution of Maximilian in 1867, the political alliances that underwrote the construction of Liberal discourse began to change. No longer was the main goal the defeat of a powerful military enemy. Increasingly, the newly emerging Liberal agenda centered around the reorganization and institutionalization of power. As this process occurred, the flexible discursive frontiers, fashioned during war to facilitate broad and floating practices of equivalence among elements, began to harden. As Liberal soldiers began to envision the rewards to which they were broadly entitled for having defended the nation, attempts to reconstruct tighter frontiers of antagonism met with strong and concerted resistance.

Former Liberal allies worked out the meanings of popular discourses on land and municipal autonomy—and of the more "floating" definitions of citizenship, political participation, and access to resources and prosperity—in the context of the political and military confrontations generated by reconstruction. In the Sierra de Puebla three specific struggles were crucial: the rebellion over the election of a state governor in 1868; the Arriaga

rebellion of 1869 and associated uprisings through 1870; and the local movement associated with Porfirio Díaz's revolt of La Noria in 1871–1872. While each conflict was organized around a slightly different political and discursive center, all three involved the definition of interconnected elements in communal, regional, and national Liberal discourses. I will therefore combine a general consideration of the discursive themes that applied to all three rebellions with a more specific discussion of their interactions in each political moment. Finally, I will ponder the more general problem of building a national hegemonic discourse, the monumental task faced by Liberal politicians in late-nineteenth-century Mexico.

*Shrinking the Boundaries:
Reconstruction Through Repression
During the Governor's Rebellion of 1868*

Beginning in the first months of 1867, before victory against the Intervention was complete, people in the Puebla highlands began to debate what the future would look like. If we can judge from surviving documents, their highest priorities were land, education, and compensation for sacrifices made during the war. In many ways these questions were connected. The poverty and scarcity brought on by the war made support for schools or returning soldiers difficult to come by. Families desperate to eke out a living found it impossible to send their children to school.

The question of land was also connected to subsistence. The overlapping titles of adjudication issued during the war often made the definition of property rights even more confusing in the postwar period. These questions were also interlaced with notions and expectations of entitlement whose hazy, floating quality had been crucial, as inspiration, during the fighting. During peacetime, however, these expectations returned to haunt villagers as they tried to define their rights and determine to whom they must turn to have those rights recognized.

The definition of rights was made even more complicated by the general economic depression that rocked the country at the end of the war. Between February and July 1867 the mayor of Tetela de Ocampo learned that funds were so scarce in Puebla city that municipalities and national guard soldiers could expect no compensation for losses suffered during the conflict. By August of that year individual fighters could do nothing but apply for one of the honorific medals decreed by the national state in recognition of bravery. According to letters sent out by the state government in July, political officials had no recourse but to tax local merchants to provide national guard soldiers with a week of severance pay. Officials

were also encouraged to make a list of the dead or disabled so that their families could apply for pensions.²⁴

Such problems were perhaps inevitable after ten years of violence. Yet, as municipal officials in Tetela discovered, villagers had high expectations for peace. One such expectation was, as we have seen, the development of education. Already in February the people of San Nicolás barrio were looking forward to its advancement during an era of "lasting peace." In the following months, however, communities throughout the district faced local problems with school attendance and financing, problems deep and difficult enough to cause the resignation of teachers and confrontations between some local officials and vecinos.

In a letter to Tetela's jefe político in late July, municipal officials from Aquixtla explained that their five schools were financed with the Chicon-tepec tax—when it was possible to collect it. Given the scarcity of maize, families were migrating in search of seed. The teacher from one of the schools had finally left because they owed him twelve pesos. Whether because they were not paid or because the children simply did not come to school, other teachers also left their posts in the first six months of 1867. Yet the villagers kept on, demanding resources from the state government to cover the sustenance or construction of schools. In some cases they even held communal assemblies to legitimate renting municipal lands to pay for education.²⁵

Another postwar debate was over the disentailment of communal lands. In communal assemblies held during March 1867, several villages, building on the regional discourses constructed during the civil war and the Intervention, connected popular access to communal land with bravery and with contributions made to the cause of the republic. Among the documents that supported village efforts was an 1864 letter from Zacapoaxtla's jefe político to the community of Cuetzalan, in which he emphasized that traitors who had not taken advantage of the 1863 pardon would not have legal access to communal land and that these properties should be repossessed and distributed among "peaceful citizens."

In March 1867, then, while the fighting was still going on, the communities of Jonotla, Tuzamapan, and Tenampulco—the same who had joined with Méndez in 1860 to articulate a Liberal counterdiscourse on land—held assemblies to consider the Liberal government's circular on disentailment. All three agreed with the privatization as long as all adjudications went to inhabitants (vecinos) of the village or the district; the disentailment of the plots held by vecinos was done without charge; and all preexisting problems of boundaries and land usurpations were resolved ahead of time and with

justice. Perhaps most interesting, however, was the justification given for exemption from fees in the adjudication. Since the villages had collaborated assiduously and paid all their taxes during the 1860s—that is, during the wars—now they were entitled to their properties without charge. Jonotla and Tuzamapan mentioned especially the thirteen hundred pesos they had contributed to the resistance in 1863, while Tenampulco recalled always being on time with its contributions, plus having provided labor to build a field hospital in Espinal.²⁶

Also related to these issues of entitlement was the treatment of those citizens who had collaborated with the invaders. As we have already seen, from the very early part of the war against the French the citizens of the Sierra de Puebla had been led to believe that resistance to the invasion would result in preferential access to resources. In June 1867 the state government transcribed further orders from the high command of the Eastern Army, exempting from fines and confiscation of property only those citizens who had occupied municipal office without salary during the French Intervention. Small wonder, then, that when Benito Juárez issued the Convocatoria for national elections in August 1867, people protested the idea that those who recognized or served the empire should be forgiven.²⁷

Within these broader debates about collaboration with the empire, deputies in the Puebla State Congress argued over exemptions to the congressional decree of 25 January 1868, which gave state employment preferentially to those who had fought against the empire and prohibited anyone who had received a salary from the imperial government from holding a public post. The debates around exemption were passionate and deeply gendered. Those who sought pardon justified their behavior in terms of their families. In response, the *serrano* deputy Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla told the story of Mexicans whose heroism forced them to burn their own houses before submitting to the enemy, a clear reference to Xochiapulco. While the same level of heroics could not be expected of everyone, Bonilla continued, at least Liberals could have refused to take a public post. When a deputy suggested that a contradiction existed between duty to family and duty to country when sons needed bread and daughters were about to become prostitutes, another *serrano* congressman answered that many dedicated Liberals who had undergone misery without serving the empire were now entirely forgotten by their country. Finally, a last passionate speaker asked, Who now thinks about the widows of the heroes of the resistance? Yet in the end a majority of the petitions for exemption were approved.²⁸

It is especially clear, from these debates on the rehabilitation of state bureaucrats, that floating promises of entitlement and rewards meant

very little when the task at hand was reconstitution and centralization of state power. No matter how heroic an individual's service to the nation, political loyalty, social class, and administrative skills were much more important than war record or previous political stripes. This would become clear once again in the election for state governor, which pitted Juan Nepomuceno Méndez against Rafael J. García. Wounded after leading the Sierra de Puebla's Sixth National Guard Battalion in the first charge against the French on 5 May 1862, Méndez had a stellar military record dating all the way back to the Liberal Revolution and the three-year civil war. He had confronted French and Austrian troops on the battlefield throughout the 1860s, becoming an important figure in the heroic Eastern Army. By contrast, García had a one-page military file that recorded his honorific title of brigadier general, granted by Minister of War Ignacio Mejía in November 1867. This title was given a scarce couple of months before the election for governor and was most likely a reward for García's loyal service to Juárez during the political struggles of that year. Indeed, García's only claim to fame during the Intervention was that he was persecuted and placed in jail by the Imperial government for publishing, in his Puebla newspaper *La Idea Liberal*, an editorial suggesting a plebiscite on the empire.²⁹

These were some of the underlying issues confronting the Puebla State Congress when it met on 15 February 1868 to consider the results of the state election for constitutional governor. During the previous six months the primary presidential elections and the contest for state congress had served as dress rehearsals in the conflict over which Liberal faction would control state politics. As provisional governor during these battles, García had done Juárez's bidding, struggling town by town to construct political majorities against Méndez, whose wartime record defined him as an ally of Juárez's rival, Porfirio Díaz. While Juárez's presidential victory was never in doubt, state congressional elections yielded a complex set of crosscutting alliances in the legislature. And in terms of numbers the elections for governor constituted a clear popular victory for the Mendista forces.³⁰

In local elections held in every district, under the principle of universal manhood suffrage, no gubernatorial candidate had received the majority mandated by law. When the congressional electoral commission met to consider the results, it found that Méndez had received 48.5 percent of the vote, while García, Ignacio Romero Vargas, and Fernando María Ortega had received 18.1, 16.4, and 5.2 percent respectively. The commission's majority felt that Méndez should be declared the winner: there had been irregularities in two of the state's electoral districts, and if the tallies from these two

districts were annulled, Méndez had a majority of the popular vote. The commission's minority disagreed, however. They pointed out that Méndez had a majority only if all the votes from the two questionable districts were annulled but not if the clearly illegal votes were annulled and the rest left to stand. The minority therefore argued in favor of a congressional vote among the four top contenders.³¹

These, then, were the undercurrents at work on 15 February, with control of a key state in the balance for the Juaristas. Méndez's allies in Congress, led by his fellow resistance fighters and war heroes Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla and Ramón Márquez Galindo, were understandably suspicious of the minority position. In a first impassioned speech on 15 February, Bonilla told a packed and emotionally charged auditorium that certain members of congress sought to delegitimize Méndez by rejecting the majority position of the electoral commission. This rejection, Bonilla concluded, would be an annulment of the popular will.³²

Before it was possible to vote on the majority and minority positions, however, the congressmen needed to decide whether Romero, both a member of congress and one of the contenders for governor, could vote without conflict of interest. Romero offered to retire his name from the candidates' list in order to stay and, after some debate, was allowed to do so. With Romero present and voting, the majority position was defeated by one vote, eliciting passionate protests from Márquez and Bonilla. Both serrano congressmen insisted, in separate speeches, that some of their colleagues were colluding against Méndez. After the minority position, without Romero's name, was approved for a vote, Bonilla stood up. "As an honest man, my conscience rebels against this procedure," he concluded, "and I am leaving, because I cannot continue to form a part of a legislature that violates the law and scorns the popular will."³³

When the vote for governor actually took place, Rafael J. García won by a vote of nine to two. Six members of congress previously voting had either left the assembly, as Bonilla did, or expressed their alienation by not casting a vote.³⁴ Through internal manipulation and conflict and a questionable call on Romero's presence in the assembly, a candidate supported by less than one-fifth of the electorate defeated another with nearly one-half of the popular vote. Technically, of course, procedure had been followed—at least most of the time. But when a population had just emerged from foreign occupation with claims and expectations about the rewards to which their resistance had entitled them, such a clear rejection of a war hero and of "the popular will" could have explosive results. To the chagrin of Juárez, García, and all their allies, that was exactly what happened. First, however, the

discourses of rebellion would be articulated slowly and painfully, over a period of three months. At their center lay broken pacts of entitlement and political participation.

García's supporters tried to depict the sierra rebels as irresponsible, violent people who thoughtlessly joined an uprising to further the personal ambitions of a militaristic leader. Yet the people in the highland villages most closely tied to Méndez during the previous ten years of struggle—Tetela, Zacatlán, Xochiapulco, Jonotla, Tuzamapan, Tenampulco—were not really interested in rebellion. People were "very tired and . . . desire[d] peace," Juan Francisco Lucas had written to Juárez in October 1867. Referring to Xochiapulco, he continued: "This municipality has suffered much there was no other town that suffered as we did on our entire front everything was burned by the invaders, and if we do not work every day there is nothing for the subsistence of our families."³⁵ Although the intensity of Xochiapulco's experience had indeed been unique, other villages shared the same sense of fatigue, of yearning for peace and better times. Under such circumstances only the most direct and violent insult to their hard-won rights and independence could possibly make them change their minds. Between February and June 1868 the election for state governor was successfully constructed as such.

The effort began with a letter from five of the six Puebla congressmen who had refused to vote in the last part of the 15 February session. Published in the national opposition newspaper *El Monitor Republicano* less than a week after the event, it blamed Romero directly for the illegal outcome in favor of García. In the next few days some of the strongholds of Mendista sentiment in the sierra held village assemblies to discuss the election results. We have an account of such an event in Zacatlán on 25 February, prompted by the arrival of four hundred rifles from Tetela de Ocampo. According to Rafael Cravioto, a Juarista Liberal in neighboring Huauchinango:

A great multitude of people came out to receive them [the rifles] with the military and governmental authorities, and music [was played], fireworks were set off, and the church bells were rung. A cry went up: Long live citizens Juan Méndez and Vicente Márquez, and death to the governor Rafael J. García and to the [local] jefe político Dimas López [a García appointee]. They finished off this scandal by tearing down all the government decrees posted in public places.

Immediately afterward, according to Cravioto, a municipal assembly was held. Political authorities, municipal employees, and notable citizens all

signed an *acta* protesting the election of García as governor. In the following weeks this *acta*, along with several signed in other sierra municipalities, was forwarded to the congress in a formal and legal protest against García's election.³⁶

The Liberal discourse formulated in these petitions was organized around two central elements. One was the people's right to decide political outcomes through the medium of elections and to have that right protected through respect for law and for the right to petition. The other was that popular participation in the wars of the previous decade had entitled people to sovereignty and to social and legal guarantees, all of which were being trampled by manipulative politicians. In Zacatlán the municipal secretary Pablo Urrutia emphasized that the events were especially "undeserved by a noble, courageous, and generous people, who had conquered, through the sacrifice of their own blood, their freedom and their most precious [legal and social] guarantees." In Tetela the node of moral outrage was the abuse of confidence perpetrated by the congressional deputies on a naturally patient and simple people.

It is a sad thing, sir, for the villages, people who by their very nature are tolerant, . . . [but] cannot be so when they are humiliated, their rights and sovereignty wounded and trampled upon, and with the further aggravating circumstance of abuse of confidence, abuse of the simplicity and innocence of the people.

The only way to redress these grievances, all the *actas* agreed, was to declare García an illegal governor and to give the post to Méndez, the legitimate contender who deserved popular support.³⁷

Although the petitions were presented to the congress by Ramón Márquez Galindo, the deputies refused to hear them because they had not been presented through appropriate channels. No one saw fit to point out that the congressional refusal placed the petitioners in a political cul-de-sac: the appropriate channel was the governor; yet by presenting the petitions to him, the villages would have been forced to recognize the authority against whom they were protesting in the first place. No single deputy, moreover, was willing to take the petitions on personally, which would have been an alternative route to formal consideration. Thus, the petitions were not admitted, and Márquez Galindo took them back.³⁸

The petitions became a political hot potato, tossed back and forth between the congress and the governor, between the state and federal governments, between the sierra villages and the state government. For the people in the sierra, this refusal to hear the *actas* further legitimated their right to rebel.

No one in the government wished to disavow the petitions entirely, since this would have questioned a sacred Liberal right. The federal government needed to get to the bottom of the controversy in order to close off all legitimate ground for rebellion. García's legitimacy also rested on being reasonable about the petitions. And the congressional deputies were eager to show they had acted legally and according to principle.

The fate of the petitions in the state legislature was officially reconstructed, in a three-stage process, between April and May 1868. Even though García agreed with Juárez that considering the *actas* would remove all legal pretext for an uprising, he was initially convinced that the documents had never been presented because they had not passed through his office. By early May he was writing to Juárez that he planned to use his influence in congress to get an official declaration that the petitions had never been received. In a secret session on 7 May, however, during which the legislature debated the rebellion in Zacatlán and authorized a military expedition to the area, the *actas* came up once again, and the deputies were forced to admit they had seen the documents. Despite a long and defensive discussion about legitimate channels and lack of time to consider the documents, the approval of a military expedition badly muddied the moral waters. On the next day the three representatives from the sierra districts stopped attending the sessions.³⁹

This was still not the end of the issue. In a third stage of official reconstruction García sent an official note to the congress more than two weeks later, asking that they reach a formal decision on the *actas*. In the meantime he suspended preparations for the military expedition already authorized. García explained that he wished to avoid spilling blood and that this last legal alternative might change the minds of inhabitants in the sierra districts, who, believing that the congress had simply refused to hear their protests, "judg[ed] therefore that they have exercised their right to petition in vain." In an immediate special session congress declared formally that it recognized the right to petition, as long as it was done through appropriate channels. But given the election law of 1868, which stipulated that no protest against the legality of the election could be heard beyond the day of the election, it was impossible to hear protests regarding the change or nullification of the election procedures. Thus, in perfectly circuitous official language, the illegitimacy of the sierra rebellion was constructed.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, in the sierra itself municipal and communal assemblies in many villages took the final step in articulating a legitimate discourse of rebellion during the first few days of June. A municipal assembly in Tetela

declared that town in rebellion against the state government on 1 June, naming Juan Francisco Lucas commander in chief of the northern front. Over the next week communal assemblies discussed and approved that document in Zapotitlán, Jonotla, Escatlan, Zoquiapan, Huitzilán, and Tuzamapan. On 10 June, Juan Francisco Lucas established the formal bases for governance during the rebellion. He made clear in a letter to the jefe político in Tetela that all relations with the federal government should remain normal, for the revolt had nothing to do with the national state. As of mid-June, therefore, most of the highlands was in revolt. The process of open confrontation and repression had begun.⁴¹

I treat the military and political implications of the rebellion in chapter 8. For now, suffice it to say that the federal government did not accept Lucas's separation of state and federal issues, sending a division of the federal army to the area to help in the repression. Ignacio R. Alatorre, previously a comrade in arms of the serranos during the French Intervention and more recently known for his successful repression of a movement in Yucatán, led the governmental attack. The presence of the federal army raised two new questions for the rebels, each of which was resolved through debate in municipal assemblies.⁴²

The first was whether or not to confront the federal army. As Juan Francisco Lucas put it in his call for a general assembly of representatives from all the rebellious districts, the presence of the federal army "has put these villages in the painful position of choosing either to accept the shameless trampling of their rights or to compare the strength of their weapons against those of the federal army." The choice was left to each district. In the end all attempted to avoid confrontation with federal forces while maintaining in principle the right to question García's legitimacy.

Alatorre put the question to Lucas on 9 July, when he wrote an official letter from Tlatlauqui demanding to know Lucas's plans. Lucas's answer showed how deeply he felt the dilemma, yet in the end he stood by the principles of the revolt. "In the districts that form a part of this front," he wrote, "and that consider me their leader," there had always been respect for the federal government. That had been demonstrated repeatedly in the past days, as the national guard battalions evacuated Teziutlán, Tlatlauqui, and Zacapoaxtla before the federal advance. But in the name of the districts he represented, Lucas continued, it was important to point out that this respect

could not make the villages sacrifice their conscience by recognizing don Rafael García as legitimate constitutional governor of the state

of Puebla, since the fact that his election was null and illegitimate can be perceived by all the citizens.

We still trust that the supreme magistrate of the nation will not want to impose upon us this painful sacrifice, which would be tantamount to admitting that the right of the people to elect a governor is nothing but a vain whim.⁴³

Negotiations continued for another week, leading to a personal meeting between Alatorre and Lucas on 17 June. But a basic antagonism emerged between the rebels' core argument that the people had the right to decide and the government's bottom-line need to defend the principle of authority. This antagonism was clear in the two generals' distinct understandings of the 17 July agreement. Alatorre reported to the minister of defense that Lucas "offered to inform his subordinates that he wished to separate himself from the political question of the sierra, putting down his weapons before the federal government." Lucas thought he had offered to take the issue of surrender back to the districts he represented and discuss it in municipal assemblies. By 26 July all the communities and national guards in rebellion had discussed the issue, and all had agreed that surrender was impossible under the conditions presented. In his answer to Alatorre, therefore, Lucas explained that after consulting the national guard forces and officers under his command, the answer was

that with the deepest sentiment, they see the humiliating conditions that [the federal government] wants to impose on them, and that before accepting these they are willing to sacrifice all, even their very lives, for they are conscious that they have not committed any crime, but that quite the contrary they have made heroic sacrifices in the name of national independence, and in the name of those very same national principles and of liberal principles, if they would allow themselves to be disarmed of their weapons, the majority of which they took off [the bodies of] the foreign enemy and Mexican traitors, they would no longer be deserving of the name "citizen."⁴⁴

The second question the rebels needed to answer was intimately related to the first. In the context of a possible confrontation with the federal army, were they willing to lay down their weapons unconditionally? Lucas made clear in his letter to Alatorre that the answer was no. The weapons in the hands of the sierra national guards took on great symbolic value. They were more than their mode of defense. They represented the people's earlier struggles, and what the soldiers felt entitled to; indeed, the weapons almost

became their medals. Whether in Tetela de Ocampo on 22 July, when the national guard agreed in municipal assembly to keep their weapons, or at the Apulco Pass outside Zacapoaxtla on the twenty-sixth, when the national guard soldiers from that town disagreed with their officers on the very same issue, the weapons came to symbolize entitlement through bravery.⁴⁵

The Tetela document, signed by all the members of the national guard, is particularly coherent on the issues involved and merits close analysis. The document states at the beginning that to give up their weapons would deprive the national guard of the laurels they won on 5 May 1862 and at the sieges of Querétaro, Mexico City, and Puebla city. The national guard soldiers had always used their weapons in defense of republican institutions. Even the foreign invaders never tried to impose unconditional disarmament. The local soldiers had sacrificed everything, suffering hunger and many other calamities, in defense of the republic. The specific formulation deserves to be quoted at length:

Decimated, the Citizens of the District conquered with their blood the fame of the land where they were born and where various fathers mourned the death of their beloved sons, many widows weep over the absence of their husbands, and a multitude of orphans feel the lack of food that the physical labor of their parents previously provided them: With this in mind how could the fathers, brothers, and friends of these victims abandon the weapons that they have sealed with their blood, carrying them until the end of their days?

And finally; understanding it to be their duty to conserve their honor, their glory, their dignity as Citizen-soldiers [*Ciudadanos milicianos*], the general interests of the District and the private ones of each individual and finally their rights as free men, in honor of their compatriots [*paisanos*] who were sacrificed while defending republican institutions, they declare: that it is their entire free [*plena*] will to keep in their possession the weapons they carry.⁴⁶

In the process of struggle, then, hemmed in by a lack of alternatives, the citizen-soldiers of the Sierra de Puebla constructed complex discourses about rebellion and refusal to surrender. These discourses began from moral outrage. Although articulated differently in each village or communal assembly, they all centered on broken pacts, on covenants that had been built on the battlefield, through death and privation, over an entire decade. These covenants had been shattered by a series of simple acts: disregarding the popular will in an election; ridiculing the right to petition through circuitous official doublespeak; and sending in federal troops, commanded by a former comrade in arms to demand unconditional surrender and disarmament.

In the face of these conditions, even as they were being treated like common criminals or intractable enemies, the serranos gathered up the threads of a tattered popular Liberalism. They wove the strands stubbornly and patiently, through unequal battles, village disagreements, and renewed loss of life and blood, into a new and more specific pattern of alternative nationalist discourse. In their documents and assemblies they remembered who they were, where they had been, what they had done, and ultimately what they felt entitled to expect from a national government. In 1868 they were defeated. But those who lived to fight again took with them the lessons of that year. In the starker, more militant regional political culture they helped build, it was bravery, constancy, and service—rather than privilege, wealth, and connections—that earned the title of Citizen, with a capital C.⁴⁷

The Struggle Within:

Alternative Nationalisms, National Guard Soldiers, and Communal Hegemony in 1868

The political culture emerging in the Puebla highlands was itself a product of internal hegemonic processes, within and between communities. As had been the case during the Intervention, the cabeceras of Zacatlán and Tetela led the movement, sending their declarations out to their anexos to be heard and acted on. In Jonotla and Tuzamapan the language of response to Tetela was hierarchical, using such phrases as “obeying” or “following orders.” Within the municipalities and villages as well, communal assemblies were hegemonic processes. The literacy of the secretarios and the presence of the pasados constructed particular types of political spaces in which not all possible positions could be heard effectively. We do not have access to the counterdiscourses murmured along the edges of the crowd. What did the widows so reified in the Tetela national guard document have to say about the struggle? Perhaps they would have preferred peace to another war, caring less whether their husbands’ blood-covered weapons were hallowed by further loss of life. Perhaps they wanted to labor for their children and families rather than for yet another round of tortilla rations delivered to the troops.⁴⁸

We also lack specific information on the renegotiations between pasados and national guard soldiers once the latter lost bargaining power with the federal government and consequently lost influence in the communities. One source of clues is the Tetela national guard document, where the national guard’s weapons symbolize citizenship in two distinct ways. One argument for keeping the weapons is that they represent the losses suffered

by families and communities: the dead lived up to their communal responsibility, and their sacrifice in turn obligates the living to pay back their debt to the dead. The other argument for refusing disarmament is that the weapons symbolize the glory and dignity of the citizen-soldiers and thus also the interests of the political district, the individual rights of all citizens, and ultimately their abstract general rights as "free men." If the first argument represents the communal hegemonic process and leads finally to the *pasados*, the second argument is the counterhegemonic Liberal process of the national guards. The two meet as equals in the unanimous, public refusal to surrender and in their common fight against the federal government. They thus share the effort to revindicate and reclaim the struggles and sacrifices of the previous ten years, struggles and sacrifices once again represented in the central articulation of weapons and citizenship.⁴⁹

A second source of clues about communal negotiations is the presence of indigenous elders among the prisoners taken in battle from Cuetzalan. In most rebellious villages in the sierra in 1868, concepts of entitlement were articulated predominantly through questions of political legitimacy and participation. In Cuetzalan, by contrast, communal and popular Liberal notions of property in land served as the centerpiece of negotiations between national guards and *pasados*. Victims of a concerted push by entrepreneurs from Zacapoaxtla, who were using Liberal disentailment as a wedge to separate indigenous villagers from their lands, national guards and *pasados* together negotiated a common strategy of defense of communal property. The discourse of rebellion in Cuetzalan was therefore organized mainly around the question of communal disentailment, deepening an already existing Liberal counterdiscourse while confronting the federal army. National guard soldiers protected other community members and, in conjunction with the elders, led them in direct actions against the fences and improvements erected by the interlopers.⁵⁰

Already during the French Intervention, earlier struggles over common land in Cuetzalan, especially in the indigenous barrio of Tzicuilan, had helped formulate a popular Liberal discourse on land. In 1862, while José María Maldonado was military commander in Zacapoaxtla, two *alcaldes* and fourteen *pasados* from Tzicuilan had complained that several recent *vecinos* in Cuetzalan had been allowing their cattle to damage the crops of the barrio. Given Maldonado's reputation for "ideas . . . highly liberal," he would undoubtedly "incline [him]self to be a decided supporter of the weak and especially the Indian race that always suffers [at the hands of] its dominators." Maldonado indeed lived up to his Liberal reputation, working out an agreement between the villagers of Tzicuilan and the three white *vecinos* in

which all cattle needed to be removed from the area. Ultimately, Maldonado also supervised the rental of communal land to two of the three *vecinos* for a period of five years.⁵¹

As a part of communitarian Liberalism, expectations about disentailment in Cuetzalan were thus well developed. Full-fledged, these expectations would come home to roost in the postwar period. In January 1868 the villagers of Tzicuilan rebelled against what they saw as the continued abuse of their communal land rights. The villagers echoed many of the notions of entitlement earlier presented by the communities of Tuzamapan and Jonotla. This echoing is particularly clear in a letter from Francisco Agustín, Cuetzalan's national guard captain, to Ignacio Arrieta, the district's jefe político. According to Agustín, the people of Tzicuilan barrio considered their rights in communal land to be buttressed by what Guy Thomson has called "a contractual association" with Mendista Liberalism.⁵² As we have seen, that association was itself based on the complex construction of a popular Liberal counterdiscourse on land since the 1850s.

Between February and June 1868 rebellions in Zacatlán, Tetela, and Xochiapulco centered around the election of García but intertwined politically and militarily with ongoing unrest and rebellion in Cuetzalan. In late February the indigenous villagers of Tzicuilan and the white citizens in Cuetzalan reached an agreement with the mediation of Juan Francisco Lucas. It allowed the *adjudicaciones* to continue in the hands of a commission that would define which lands were to be left as *ejido* (collective communal property that was legally untouchable under the terms of the Land Law enacted 25 June 1856) and common mountain land and which could go up for adjudication. Yet in late April, Tzicuilan's municipal officials, *pasados*, and national guard soldiers were still disputing the boundaries defined by the commission. They demanded clearer explanations from the jefe político and other authorities and insisted on redress. "That alcalde and those who call themselves *pasados*," the commission's report to Zacapoaxtla's jefe político predicted, would not cooperate with the orders presented to them.⁵³

Through the beginning of the general armed conflict in the sierra in June and July, Tzicuilan's national guard soldiers, elders, and other villagers resumed direct action. They pulled down walls, destroyed coffee crops, and attacked the residences of white *vecinos* in the area. For political, ideological, and military reasons, an alliance with the serrano rebels to the south therefore made a great deal of sense. Indeed, Pilar Rivera, Tetela's national guard commander, reported from Apulco Pass on 25 July that federal troops had managed to arrest Francisco Agustín "from Quetzalan [*sic*], who was com-

ing with one hundred Indians to get arms in Xochiapulco." In his orders to Rivera on the same day, Lucas warned him to stay alert for the arrival of the Indians from Cuetzalan and informed him that rations for the soldiers would also be coming from Cuetzalan and Xochitlán.⁵⁴

These intersections and articulations among local struggles also allowed Ignacio Arrieta, juez municipal of Cuetzalan, to use the presence of federal troops as a cover broadly to repress the movement in Tzicuilan and associated barrios. By mid-October approximately twenty indigenous prisoners from Cuetzalan had ended up at Alatorre's general headquarters in Zapcoaxtla. Identified as leaders of the movement, they had been arrested in Apulco at the end of July and in several encounters with and raids on Tzicuilan's and Tzinacantepec's national guard soldiers. Those considered capable of military service—one assumes the younger national guard soldiers—were drafted into the army. The rest, elders among whom the youngest was 64 and the oldest 104, were sent to internal exile in Yucatán.

The pasados and their relatives in Cuetzalan repeatedly petitioned for the release of the old men. Although the surviving elders were returned from Yucatán within several months, state and local officials resisted their release from house arrest in Puebla city well into 1869. The officials argued that "they had positively been among the conspirators in [Cuetzalan] . . . and were only turned over to the second division [of the federal army] once all attempts at leniency had proven useless."⁵⁵

In the initial petition to Juárez, the kinsmen of the pasados insisted that their village had been forced to participate in the movement led by Juan Francisco Lucas. Being powerless, they said, they had no choice in the matter. While Lucas, the movement's leader, was free, a few poor old men were in prison, and "the Indian families of our unfortunate kinsmen are dissolved in tears [seeing that their relatives] are condemned to die in the burning regions of deadly Yucatán." Yet later in the document the petitioners softened their earlier claim, suggesting that "this is not the place where we should say whether or not we wished to defend General Lucas's plan." Instead, they wished only to point out that in 1862 "we resolved to support the flag that with such honor had been carried by the illustrious citizen Benito Juárez; and the Austrian legions and the French army and its allies were unable to force us to change our minds."⁵⁶ The specific language of the document did not belong to the petitioners, since none of them knew how to read or write. Waiting in Jalapa, Veracruz, for news of their relatives, the kinsmen from Cuetzalan most likely engaged the services of a local *tinterillo*, a small-time lawyer who specialized in this sort of thing, to embellish the words into something worthy of a president's eyes. Yet the connection

to the resistance against the French was always there, in subsequent petitions from the elders as well, very much a part of local discourse.

Again and again the pasados returned to three basic themes. The first was that they were not directly a part of Lucas's rebellion but that Ignacio Arrieta had used it as a cover to arrest and repress them. The second was that they had been political officials in their villages, authorities who upheld the law and did not rebel against the government. And the third was that they had defended constitutional principles and the Liberal cause throughout the last ten years of war.⁵⁷

Evidence from Apulco Pass suggests that claims of innocence in the broader sierra rebellion were untrue, although probably de rigeur in any request for freedom. Given what we know also about internal community tensions—between older and younger men, between pasados and national guards—the various fissures in the documentation may well reflect interior discord over the costs and process of the rebellion. But what emerges most clearly from the combination of different documents is that legitimacy, as defined by defense of Liberal and constitutional principles, was at the center of the petitioners' own self-identification. As Indians from Cuetzalan, communal officials, national guardsmen, or simply members of the community, they were entitled to their rights because no one—not the Austro-Belgian Legion, not the French army, not even Mexican Interventionists—had been able to interfere with their support for republican institutions.

And so we come full circle in this discourse of entitlement: from the original construction of an alternative interpretation of Liberal land law, through the justification of rights, to participation and resources as rewards for bravery and defense of the nation, to the articulation of discourses of rebellion around broken pacts of political participation and responsible adjudication. This was the form taken by an alternative Liberal populism in the Sierra de Puebla during 1868. This was the Liberalism that supported the Montaña party and Méndez against the centralizing Liberalism of Juárez and his ally García.

In 1868 the central axis of struggle was the governor's election and the issues of political accountability, respect for the popular will, and the right to petition. In this sense the rebellion in Cuetzalan, centered on issues of land privatization, remained on the fringes of the broader serrano movement. That would change quickly in the next few months, however. Villages throughout the highlands began to confront the same questions, comparing the floating promises of communitarian Liberalism to the much starker realities of who was getting common lands and how and

why they were getting them. The new uprising in late 1869 would reverse the order of the issues. From a much narrower political rebellion quickly evolved a broad movement that challenged, from within, Liberal practice on land adjudication.

*The Struggle for Land and Citizenship:
Popular Liberalism and Communal
Property, 1869–1872*

Although matters had come to a head more quickly in Cuetzalan, by the later months of 1868 the mess that was de facto Liberal land policy had gotten out of hand in many villages. The practice of communitarian Liberalism was contradictory on the issue of land. While Liberals made inclusive, populist promises about the people's right to property, they celebrated rental agreements and adjudications that more often than not violated that very same right. Between 1858 and 1867 Liberal officials had carried out adjudications and rental agreements on municipal properties in a fairly ad hoc way, usually to raise funds for the war effort. In so doing, they filled a vast graveyard with broken and overlapping promises that would come back to haunt them.⁵⁸ Starting in the second half of 1868, the ghosts of broken promises invaded the Sierra de Puebla along three broad fronts.

The first front involved disputes over boundaries between districts or municipalities. Many disputes were extremely old, dating back to previous separations of one municipality or district from another. The need to privatize or disentail all municipal property increased the importance of a clear boundary, since each individual municipality would receive the right to privatize what was considered theirs. Particularly on the frontiers, where overlapping usufruct was often the rule, conflicts could deepen and continue for years. Often they were exacerbated by renters of municipal lands, who extended the edges of their plot and then presented a petition for adjudication in one of the two municipalities.⁵⁹

Disputes between Jonotla and Tuzamapan, for example, were generated at least in part by rental agreements and attempted adjudications. According to Antonio Sánchez, juez from Tuzamapan, the representatives from Jonotla had arrived at a conflictual meeting of both communities on 14 May 1868 claiming that only Jonotla would have access to certain lands because they had disentailed them. Sánchez argued that this claim was in direct contrast to what had occurred before, when both municipalities had lived "enjoying the lands in unity and harmony." It was necessary for the federal government to decide on the disagreements of the adjudication, since people from Tuzamapan had also disentailed land in the disputed areas. In the end,

Sánchez insisted, "all we want is peace and unity, since the lands where all these villages are located belong to all of us, without distinction." The juez from Jonotla, Francisco Rodríguez, countered that his village wanted only to define the boundaries of the plots adjudicated in March 1867, but the people from Tuzamapan had refused. He added that people from Cuetzalan and Zacapoaxtla had also usurped Jonotla's lands and that a commission should therefore be appointed to look into the matter.⁶⁰

By the first half of 1869 deep and widespread conflicts between municipalities prompted action by the state congress. On 22 May congress issued a decree by which villages were obligated to resolve their differences over lands by naming "árbitros amigables componedores," or individuals with a reputation for honesty and rationality who would oversee a process of arbitration between the two parties. According to the decree, representatives from each municipality would select an arbiter and draw up a notarial contract with him. Once the sides had named their arbiters, the two would examine the land together and reach a decision within two months. The day following the decision, formal markers would be fixed clearly to designate the boundary. Several communities in the sierra attempted to fulfill the terms of the decree in the months that followed, but conflicts continued well into the 1870s.⁶¹

The second front of conflict over disentanglement concerned the identity of those who adjudicated communal lands as well as the different kinds of property affected. In dispute were the rights of individuals and communities, outsiders and vecinos born in the village. In February 1868, for example, the vecinos of Nauzontla protested the disentanglement of the pasturelands named Xiliapa to Rafael Bonilla, a resident of Zacapoaxtla. "From time immemorial," they explained, Xiliapa had been a common grazing area. Several inhabitants of Nauzontla had suggested that it be divided among "the poor who have nowhere to sow their crops." The authorities of Jonotla and Escatlan protested the privatization of property to José María Ortuña and Benito Vásquez in December of the same year, insisting the lands had already been adjudicated in favor of the communities in March 1867. "First must come the proletarian class, before the interests of an individual," they wrote. And in August 1870 the alcalde of Tuzamapan legitimated his protest against Lauriano and Gavino Mora, who possessed plots in individual usufruct in Los Reyes and were planning to sell them to outsiders from Cuetzalan, by saying that "those little pieces of land belong . . . [to the] *pueblo* ["village" or "people"]."⁶²

The issue of overlapping rights was immeasurably complicated by rental agreements. It was established local practice to rent communal lands called *propios* to outsiders as a way to increase communal revenues or pay for a

yearly fiesta. Yet these rental agreements could then become permanent simply through the practice of adjudication. This was unacceptable to the villages.

Luis Cabañez, an entrepreneur from Papantla, used precisely this kind of strategy when he rented the lands of Poza Larga in 1864, during the war of the French Intervention. He paid six years in advance. Then, in his request for adjudication to the jefe político in Tetela, he explained that he needed the lands as a cattle path for his *finca* San Pedro. He charged that all other attempts at adjudication by neighboring villages were illegal because they did not possess the land. Besides, their real purpose was to retain communal possession.

Octaviano Pérez had a similar purpose in mind in Tzicuilan in 1864, when José María Maldonado rented him a piece of communal property. Pérez managed to adjudicate it five years later, in May 1869. In fact, he had migrated to the municipality in question and established residence first, becoming a vecino as a strategy for land privatization. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that Juan Rosas, originally from Nauzontla, was kicked out of Jonotla after a six-month residence in 1868 in the midst of the furor over adjudications. Yet in his protest to Tetela's jefe político, he expressed his consternation because he had participated in all the pueblo's *faenas* or work parties and therefore saw no reason for his removal.⁶³

In some cases these disputes dragged on painfully, multiplying ill will on all sides. In the hotlands between Tenampulco and Tuzamapan, an area with much commercial potential, the communal properties of La Junta de Apulco and Paso de la Canoa underwent a series of overlapping adjudications and disputes between 1867 and 1870. It seemed impossible to reach an agreement despite repeated meetings among representatives of the different villages and despite renewed petitions by all the entrepreneurs involved. At one point the village of Tenampulco declared part of the area its ejido only to find that several villagers had already carved out plots in the area. Officials in Tetela, without consulting local authorities, adjudicated some of the same territory to the entrepreneur Pascual Sánchez. The lands claimed by Vicente García had been collectively owned by the villages of Jonotla, Tuzamapan, and Tenampulco, making even more difficult any kind of demarcation. And finally, when the vecinos disputing Sánchez's adjudication in El Chacal, "leaving aside their rights, offered citizen Sánchez, that they would give him a part of what he had claimed, all his pasturelands . . . and all he wished to take in land from the uplands," Sánchez refused. Clearly, the lowlands were the prime territory.⁶⁴

Disentailment continued, seemingly unabated despite the controversies, between 1869 and 1871.⁶⁵ Yet because of ongoing litigation or protest in individual cases, local governments were also forced further to develop alternative interpretations of Liberal land law. Contestation over these new interpretations constituted the third front of conflict over disentailment.

People used their interpretation of existing Liberal land legislation to defend village rights and access to resources. Article 8 of the 1856 Land Law was especially useful to the communities because it exempted from expropriation, in the case of municipalities, "ejidos and lands destined exclusively for public use by the populations to which they belong." Also valuable were the later decrees in the same year that reinforced the right of smallholders preferentially to privatize their plots.⁶⁶ Responding to state requests to define ejido lands, communities elaborated detailed and well-informed petitions, further extending and transforming the meaning of existing Liberal land policy.

Between 1868 and 1870 the villages of Xochitlán, Yancuitalpan, Tzicuilan, Xocoyolo, Nauzontla, Jonotla, Tenampulco, and Tuzamapan declared ejidos. The discourses and political conflicts underlying these petitions were extremely complex. Often the lands declared to be ejidos were precisely those under dispute with individual entrepreneurs. The petitions also initiated tugs of war with the local jefes políticos. Villages would attempt to declare large tracts of territory as common lands, then prepare to negotiate smaller pieces once their initial requests had been denied.⁶⁷

Most striking throughout is the conscious and concerted engagement with Liberal discourses on land. Village documents strain at the edges of what is acceptable within Liberal discourse yet at the same time claim legitimacy within it. In November 1868, for example, the juez of Xocoyolo wrote to the jefe político in Zacapoaxtla wanting to know how his village could claim the only communal virgin forest left to them. The wood had great public utility, and the village wished to claim it before "someone else from outside adjudicated a piece." Was it possible, he wondered, "to denounce only once for the village [as a whole], or does each vecino need to denounce separately the number of *almudes* [land measure equal to approximately 3,300 square meters] needed?"

Between December 1868 and January 1869 the authorities and vecinos of Santiago Yancuitalpan also negotiated with Zacapoaxtla's jefe político, suggesting several common lands as their ejidos. Throughout the legitimation of their request referred to the June 1856 law: "since the law of 29 [sic] June 1856 and later superior decrees give the villages ejidos for public use"; "since it is so necessary and indispensable for this village to declare a plot as

ejido for public use, and since article 8 of the Law of 29 June 1856 grants it to us. . . ." Similar discourses were used by Tzicuilan, Jonotla, and Tuzamapan in 1869 and 1870. In August 1870 Jonotla also mentioned Lerdo's circular of October 1856, making a further oblique reference to Juárez's decision on the case of Tepeji del Río by saying that, since the original formation of the pueblos, each individual vecino had recognized the land occupied as their property. And in November of the same year Tuzamapan went as far as to declare that the purpose of the ejido was to provide funds not only for the needs of the municipalities but also "for the religious communities" in their yearly fiestas.⁶⁸

The ongoing tug of war between official policy and communal practice forced new strategies on Liberal policymakers and provided opportunities for articulating discourses of legitimacy and citizenship. In Yancuitlalpan in January 1869, for example, the acta establishing ejido land was legitimized by claiming the combined terrain of democratic citizenship and respect for tradition and communal authority:

We the undersigned in the name of the pueblo in general, [and] called to this session by established custom, in all that has to do with the public [interest], to hear the opinion of those people with greatest influence who have held office in the administration and today are named *pasados* . . .

In Jonotla as well, in August 1870, those signing the petition did so "in the name of all the communities in this municipality and each one of the individuals that form a part of it." And in Tuzamapan two months later, the municipal assembly came together "after having celebrated a popular [town] meeting in which all the vecinos of the village preceded by their authorities discussed sufficiently the need for an ejido to serve the public for livestock grazing."⁶⁹ Thus did the villages of Zacapoaxtla and Tetela districts redefine and reorganize Liberal discourses on land and citizenship, not only through rebellion but also through legal action. Between 1869 and 1872 unredressed grievances on both counts simmered only slightly below the surface, facilitating the inclusion of these villages in political movements that called for a reorganization of power. Yet such inclusion was never automatic or simple, as evidenced by the Arriaga rebellion of 1870.

Francisco Javier Arriaga had no clear political agenda when he took Apulco Pass in November 1870, declaring himself in rebellion against the Lerdo-Juárez government and in favor of the 1857 constitution and the "Michoacán plan." A commander of the Zacapoaxtla national guard, Arriaga possibly still harbored resentments toward the jefe político Juan Francisco

Molina, who during the 1868 rebellion had surrendered to the federal army and imprisoned several of the national guard officers who refused to turn in their weapons. Molina's manipulative and self-serving attitude during those months had gained him much favor with the state and federal governments, to the detriment of other ambitious locals in Zacapoaxtla district, Arriaga among them. Whatever his motives, however, Arriaga was not inspired by a wish to support the pueblos in their struggle to keep control of the disentailment process. Only a few years later he would be one of the entrepreneurs wishing to complete the adjudication process in his favor. But in the context of 1869–1870, with political and discursive lines as they were, Arriaga's strongest allies turned out to be precisely those communities and national guard forces most interested in redefining Liberal privatization of property.⁷⁰

Arriaga knew well that the key to successful mobilization lay in convincing Xochiapulco to join. Although rumors abounded about Xochiapulco's participation, it does not seem that Arriaga's initial declaration was enough to convince Lucas or any other leader of that village's national guard. Ironically enough, it would be the federal army itself, with the ubiquitous Alatorre at its head, that provided the reason to involve Xochiapulco and generated yet another major military uprising in the area through the middle of 1870.⁷¹

Alatorre explained in his telegraphed report of 3 December 1869 that the Sixth Battalion of the federal army—with twenty-two officers and four hundred soldiers—had marched from Zacapoaxtla to Xochiapulco on 2 December. It had done so "peacefully," according to Alatorre, simply to find out what that pueblo's intentions were in the Arriaga conspiracy. José María Vásquez, lieutenant colonel in command of the Sixth Battalion, reported reaching Xochiapulco about midday and finding the village entirely deserted. When he consulted Alatorre, the commander in chief ordered him to do all that was possible to inform the local inhabitants that the army offered them "all kinds of guarantees." If there was no answer, the battalion should return to headquarters the next day. In his official report Vásquez wrote that

I did all that was humanly possible to publicize this; but when I saw my efforts were having no result, since even the last women of the village were gone, and given the dark and fog of the night, I ordered the battalion to form and camp out in the central plaza.

Although the soldiers set up sentries, these were powerless in the attack that followed, which according to Vásquez occurred around two in the morning.

The enemy, numbering between six and eight hundred infantry and favored by the dense darkness, came into the village cautiously and in all directions among the various vegetable gardens that exist there, using all the precautions they knew, since the tracks we found afterward suggest they carried out their operation dragging themselves on their stomachs.

Pouncing on the sleeping soldiers, the Xochiapulquenses began the attack by giving, in Vásquez's words, "a savage howl."⁷²

"The truth be told," wrote another officer in the Sixth Battalion, "they pressured us severely." A little before dawn, after managing to secure the wounded and the remaining ammunition in Juan Francisco Lucas's house, the survivors from the first attack built trenches in the central plaza. Surrounded by guerrillas, they fought a long and intermittent battle until reinforcements arrived, approximately twenty-four hours after the first ambush. "After having chased the enemy as far as possible," wrote the commanding officer of the reinforcements in his report, "I began to prepare a transport for the wounded, burying one officer and forty soldiers, ours, who had died in the battle, and fourteen enemy dead."⁷³

Alatorre used the encounter in Xochiapulco to legitimize an intensification of repression throughout the area. He declared a state of siege in Zacapoaxtla district on 3 December because

without this measure my military operations in the area would be useless, since here the majority of the inhabitants are unfamiliar with the principle of authority, because of the lowness of their customs and their marked tendencies toward scandal and licentiousness, as well as their ferocious instincts to destroy all those who are not of their race; . . . the inspiration for this measure is the treacherous attempt perpetrated against the Sixth Battalion last night in Xochiapulco.

Actually, given the details of the events on 3 and 4 December, it seems fairly clear that Alatorre ordered the invasion of Xochiapulco precisely to force a reaction, which would then allow him to step up repression. Otherwise, why send an entire battalion, composed of four hundred fighting men, on a "peaceful" mission to inform a village—whose entire population, including children, women, and elderly—was probably not much more than twelve hundred—that they had all the guarantees before the law? Could such a message not have been equally well delivered by a single messenger?⁷⁴

The Second Division of the federal army had attacked Arriaga's rebels at Alpulco Pass on 30 November and found no rebels from Xochiapulco or

of Tetela. Nonetheless, Alatorre sent an order to Juan Francisco Lucas on the hacienda Taxcantla. If Lucas did not appear in Zacapoaxtla, Alatorre would consider him in rebellion against the government. Lucas answered that he was sick and that Alatorre could send the necessary information in writing. Allegedly pushed on by some of the political officials in Zacapoaxtla, who assured Alatorre that Lucas had a huge stash of arms and ammunition, as well as by his own ambitions and growing enmity with the Nahua general, Alatorre formed his plan. In the weeks following the invasion of Xochiapulco, the federal army once again burned that village to the ground, the second time in five years its inhabitants had suffered such a fate.⁷⁵

Even as these specific events provided the spark that rekindled rebellion in Xochiapulco and drew to it dispersed troops from throughout the sierra, the tinder was, as elsewhere in the highlands, the neglect of promises around land and citizenship made during the period of communitarian Liberalism. For Xochiapulco these promises were organized discursively and politically around the Liberal governor Fernando María Ortega's original 1864 decree that had granted the village autonomous municipal status and legitimate right to the lands of the former haciendas Xochiapulco and La Manzanilla. In the months between December 1869 and June 1870, Xochiapulco led soldiers from the villages in the districts of Teziutlán, Tlatlauqui, Zacapoaxtla, San Juan de los Llanos, and Tetela in a military confrontation over these basic demands. They fought for land and political participation, as rewards for and recognition of popular sacrifices in the cause of the nation.⁷⁶

By June 1870 the local and regional options for rebellion and redress had played out to stalemate. On the one hand, the state governor, Ignacio Romero Vargas, explained to the ministry of defense that a complete military victory was impossible. Facing a thousand guerrillas, most armed only with garrotes, Romero calculated that the government would have needed four times as many men, during an eight-month campaign, across the whole sierra from Teziutlán to Chignahuapan, from San Juan de los Llanos to Tetela de Ocampo, in order to win militarily. Already this could not be accomplished because of the government's lack of resources. But even if it could have been done, he emphasized, the origin of the rebellion—in issues of land and of political conflict between Zacapoaxtla and Xochiapulco—would not have been resolved. So the only route was pacification and negotiation.⁷⁷

On the other hand, by April and May 1870 increasing resistance from allied villages made financing and feeding the rebel troops a problematic venture at best—small wonder, when a generation of war and violence had left the sierra "a desolate field, a mountain of ashes, a desert where one hardly distinguishes the places where the houses and cabins of the peasants

used to stand." In their surrender, signed on 3 June by eighty-one officers and soldiers from a number of different communities, the rebels still recalled their participation in the wars against the French Intervention, remembering the Fifth of May and other battles. But when they agreed that "civil war had been the principal obstacle to the progress of the republic," a new note crept into the document, one of resignation to the present balance of forces. Democracy, in this context, stopped being the fulfillment of Liberal promises and became respect for constituted authority.⁷⁸

Yet it took a full year, and much struggling against the current of establishment opinion, for Romero Vargas to gain congressional approval for the final pacification agreement. In a report to the state congress at the end of October 1871, Romero compared the price of pacification to what a complete military victory would have cost. Instead of an estimated expenditure of 300,000 pesos across eight months, Romero had promised to pay 10,000–15,000 pesos, spread out over public works, schools, and musical instruments for municipal bands. He approved the separation of Xochiapulco from the district of Zacapoxtla and its addition to Tetela district. He created the new district of Alatríste, to include the municipalities of Chignahuapan, Aquixtla, and San Francisco Ixtacamaztitlán, all of which had long-standing and violent disagreements with their respective cabeceras. Finally Romero recognized the legitimacy of Ortega's 1864 decree. Thus, the state at last took responsibility for the expropriation of lands from the former haciendas Xochiapulco and La Manzanilla and their distribution to the national guard soldiers from Xochiapulco who had defended their country against the French.⁷⁹

Romero was able to rest on his laurels as peacemaker for a mere two weeks. By mid-November 1871 Xochiapulco had declared in favor of Porfirio Díaz in the revolt of La Noria. The whole Sierra de Puebla, most notably Tetela and Xochiapulco, became an important center of mobilization, occasionally serving as headquarters and hideout for Díaz himself. Juan N. Méndez was named commander in chief of the region's Constitutionalist—otherwise known as Porfirista—army. Juan Francisco Lucas and Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla held important military posts.⁸⁰

What was new about La Noria, both nationally and from the perspective of Puebla's serranos, was that it was not simply a regional rebellion. Over the next six months it represented a deep military and political challenge to the regime of Benito Juárez. By fixing his own reelection through the manipulation of the national congress, Juárez had broken some key connections in his alliance. If we are to judge from the Sierra de Puebla, moreover, the repression and authoritarian centralism of the previous five years had fi-

nally angered the entire country. The only thing that seems to have stopped the success of the La Noria revolt was Juárez's death. The subsequent confusion among regional leaders made effective Lerdo's policy of selective co-optation and amnesty. From the perspective of the Porfirian forces, however, this was only a temporary setback. In 1876 the Sierra de Puebla joined with other regions in the uprising of Tuxtepec, finally carrying to power their old ally and comrade, Porfirio Díaz.⁸¹

The Archaeology of Discourse:

The Plan of La Noria in Regional Perspective

Let us return to the bones buried in Xochiapulco's central plaza, uncovered in the 1970s during municipal improvements and placed in a cabinet in the municipal building. We can now say with fair certainty that they are not Austrian but Mexican. Given the number of battles fought in Xochiapulco between 1864 and 1872, there could well be some Austrian bones buried somewhere in the central plaza, in a deeper archaeological layer, waiting to be discovered in a subsequent public works campaign. But the timing of the attack on the Sixth Battalion of the federal army in 1869, plus the profound similarity between surviving oral memory and the reports we have of the later ambush, make clear that the first bones to be uncovered belonged to Mexican soldiers.⁸²

Following the report of the officer who organized the original burial, there was a curious intimacy to this common grave. Xochiapulquenses lay next to the federal soldiers they had killed, officers next to enlisted men. Mexican soldiers who had probably fought the French together, only to confront each other on a dank and foggy sierra morning in an ambush portrayed as the triumph of barbarism over civilization, were finally reunited underground. A century later their descendants retrieved them, labeled them Austrian, and displayed them all together. The ironic appropriateness of this intimacy, as well as its inaccurate display behind glass doors in Xochiapulco's municipal building, becomes all the greater when we realize that the checkered history of these bones is strangely paralleled by that of regional-popular Liberal discourses on the nation. Repressed in battle, these discourses too were buried by official stories of nation-state formation, to be dug up during the Revolution of 1910, mislabeled, and displayed in curious intimacy next to their enemies.⁸³

But in addition to the inaccuracy and irony of these discursive manipulations, their effectiveness has also prevented us from digging out the complex and multilayered meanings of Mexico's political history from 1855 to 1876, better to understand not only the Porfiriato but also the Revolution

of 1910. Later I will have occasion to return to the broader implications of this fact. For now an analysis of the Plan de la Noria from the perspective of the Sierra de Puebla can provide an initial example of the discursive richness that has been buried alongside popular Liberalism.

According to Daniel Cosío Villegas's influential commentaries, the Plan de la Noria is not an important political document. Aside from its brevity, "passable prose," and "effective demagogic language," Cosío Villegas writes, the plan is poor because

the analysis of the ills affecting the country is superficial and barely goes beyond laying personal blame on the bad head of state; its positive part, that concerning the cures available for the national ills, has few ideas; and even more, Díaz does not even make his the few solutions he suggests, instead confessing to have gotten them from others, which then explains why he leaves to a constituent assembly the task of looking over the country's situation in order to find the way of improving it.⁸⁴

Cosío's explanation for these lacks is that the plan was simply a personalistic document, inspired by little beyond Díaz's desire to attain power. Yet if we examine the plan from below, some of its apparent weaknesses are transformed into strengths. Familiar language connects it to the experiences of localities over the previous generation.

The bulk of the plan is dedicated to explaining the situation of the country, one of crisis and political illegitimacy. The centralization and reproduction of power has caused a series of abuses, including the indefinite reelection of the executive and the increasing domestication of the legislative and judicial branches. "Various states have been prevented from installing their legitimate authorities and are under the sway of unpopular and tyrannical governments, imposed by the direct action of the executive."⁸⁵ Certainly this description fit the case of Puebla, still in 1871 governed by Ignacio Romero Vargas, whose illegal 1868 maneuver in the state congress facilitated the questionable election of Rafael J. García over Juan N. Méndez.

The army, glorious personification of the principles conquered from the Ayutla Revolution to the surrender of Mexico [City] in 1867, which should be listened to and respected by the government in order to preserve the gratitude of the people, has been vilified and debased, forced to serve as the instrument of odious violence against the freedom of popular suffrage, forcing it to forget the laws and customs of Christian civilization in . . . [numerous] massacres that make us return to barbarism.

„ The national guard soldiers themselves could not have put it better. Restated here were their expectations of entitlement: as the "glorious personification" of Liberal principles, they deserved to be respected and thanked; instead, they had been repressed by their comrades from the war against the French, regular army soldiers who were now forced to kill their own kind. And what worse vilification of the heroic reputation of the army than to have it step in to enforce questionable electoral results, as happened in the Sierra de Puebla in 1868?

What follows in the plan is the criticism of Juarista economic and fiscal policy, a critique rightly denigrated by Cosío as showing little economic sense or sophistication. But from a regional perspective—in a situation of widespread economic depression when the widows of fallen soldiers and the veterans themselves were unable to collect on pensions, when municipalities lacked the funds to open schools or rebuild public buildings—the assertion that federal funds were "more than sufficient to [cover] all public services" must have sounded awfully attractive. So did a phrase much later in the document, where, in a new reference to internal repression by the army, Díaz wrote, "They have soaked the hands of [the nation's] brave defenders in the blood of the vanquished, forcing them to change the weapons of the soldier for the ax of the executioner." This rhetoric was buttressed only a few lines later by Díaz's assertion of his obligation to "my comrades in arms with whose cooperation I have been successful in many difficult enterprises."⁸⁶

The recurrent theme throughout the first pages, then, was the recognition of the people's contribution to the Liberal Revolution and to its defense against Conservatives and Interventionists. A small group of powerful men was perpetuating itself at the summit of power, refusing to recognize national guard soldiers or listen to local needs and criticisms, trampling the electoral will of the people. "We will fight, then, for the cause of the people, and only the people will own the victory." Give back to the people their justly won victories—this is what regional constituencies heard. "The constitution of 1857 and electoral freedom will be our banner; less government and more liberty our program." Decentralization of power, more local and regional autonomy—this was also an important element in the communitarian Liberal discourse of the war years.⁸⁷

The other key theme in Cosío's criticism of the Plan de la Noria is that Díaz refused to stand behind a specific and substantive plan of reform, proposing instead that a convention of three popularly elected representatives from each state decide the course of policy. Yet again, in the context of combining regional needs and discourses within a responsive

national movement, this approach seems to have made the most sense. This would have been the case especially if Díaz's prediction about the convention came true: "The delegates, who will be pure and honest patriots, will take to the convention the aspirations and ideas of their respective states and will know how to formulate with loyalty and sustain with interest the needs that are truly national." There was no stacked deck, in other words. People chosen by popular election would decide the course of the country. Díaz promised to abide by the decisions of the convention, which, in contrast to Cosío's interpretation, was not a constitutional but rather a Constitutional-ist—the name given to the Porfirista movement—convention. To ensure no misunderstanding about where the power should lie, among his suggestions for possible reforms Díaz listed the following: a direct election for president; the installation of popular tribunals to judge the accused; and a guarantee of resources and autonomy to municipalities. And the final, oft-quoted flourish: "That no citizen shall impose and perpetuate himself in power, and this shall be the last revolution."⁸⁸

The frequency with which the last phrase is quoted is directly related, of course, to its irony: the man who wrote the document perpetuated himself in power so long that he brought on the greatest revolution of Mexican history. Yet to leave it there, especially with some knowledge of existing regional discourses in the Mexico of 1872, is too facile.

A different, more populist, more responsive interpretation of the Plan de la Noria does not transform Porfirio Díaz—or Juan N. Méndez or any other general—into a popular hero. It simply demonstrates that, in the ongoing formation and transformation of nineteenth-century Mexican Liberal discourses, the plan was an important, experimental articulation. Through the practice of equivalence it brought together ready, although increasingly frayed, discursive elements from popular Liberalism. This was its great attraction, and it goes much further than a simple patron-client or *caciquismo* model in explaining the popularity of La Noria in the Sierra de Puebla and other areas of Liberal resistance to the French.

Once the conquest of national power became a real possibility, however, this same experimental articulation was transformed into a weakness. Cosío's perspective is more relevant here and helps us explain the modification of the Plan de la Noria in Ameca in April 1872. In the modified version, the discursive codes and references pertaining to the previous ten years of war and sacrifice were gone; so were the statements of trust in the wisdom of the people. In their place was the suggestion that the president of the Supreme Court become provisional president when the movement succeeded, a clear effort to mend fences with Lerdo and his followers. Appended

was a specific and much more orthodox program to be installed once the movement took power.

This tension between the decentralization and regional articulation of interests, and the need to revindicate the principle of authority and the centralization of power, lay at the center of all Liberal debates and practice from the time of the Ayutla Revolution and the Constitutional Convention of 1856–1857. It reemerged during the Restored Republic in the conflict between Juarismo and the defenders of communitarian Liberalism. It emerged again between the two versions of the Plan de la Noria. It would reemerge once more in the contrast between the early and the late Porfiriato.⁸⁹