

# Place making and place breaking:

## Migration and the development cycle of community in colonial Mexico

### ABSTRACT

Although scholars increasingly recognize that community survival depends on ongoing processes of renovation and innovation, and not simply on the persistence of past identities into the present, the historical processes of community formation and fragmentation in colonial situations is seldom documented. In this article, I examine both the tactical engagement of indigenous peasant migrants with the colonial Mexican state over spatial rights and the migrants' emergent sense of place in a newly settled locale. I suggest that place making involves place breaking, and I seek to add a diachronic dimension to understanding of indigenous societies and identity politics. [*colonialism, community, colonial Mexico, indigenous society, migration, place, identity*]

In this article, I explore processes in the formation and fragmentation of indigenous communities in colonial Mexico through the case study of Palula, a Nahuatl-speaking migrant village in the Balsas River basin of Guerrero, some two hundred kilometers south of Mexico City. The history of this settlement and the legal rhetoric that was articulated during a century and a half of disputes over community rights exemplify the complex interplay between strategic discourses and identity politics that has characterized indigenous interactions with nonnative entrepreneurs and the state administrative apparatus from conquest to the present. The colonial litigation analyzed here demonstrates not only the tactical engagement of indigenous peasant migrants with the state over spatial rights but also the migrants' emergent sense of place in newly settled locales. I outline a gradual shift from a pragmatics and politics to an ontology and experience of place, as exemplified at three distinct moments in history, stages in a developmental cycle of community that illuminate key moments of place making and place breaking in colonial indigenous society.

Palula was founded by a steadily increasing stream of indigenous peasants who flowed from the native communities around Oapan into the southern portion of the Iguala Valley. Originally a *sujeto* (subordinate village) of the *cabecera* (head village) of Tepecuacuilco (see Figure 1), during the 17th and 18th centuries Palula became a site of contention between various sectors of society that offered differing interpretations of the history and identity of this locale. The situation was not the prototypical dispute over territory and historical rights between a hacienda and an Indian village, and the processes were more complex than simple battles between colonists and colonized. Rather, the conflict was a complicated social and cultural process that reflected the changing paradigms of colonial law; the shifting regional economy, as new landowners, merchants, and entrepreneurial intermediaries transformed the Iguala Valley into an increasingly capitalized rural hinterland; and an incipient and coalescing sense of local identity in the growing community of Palula. That this

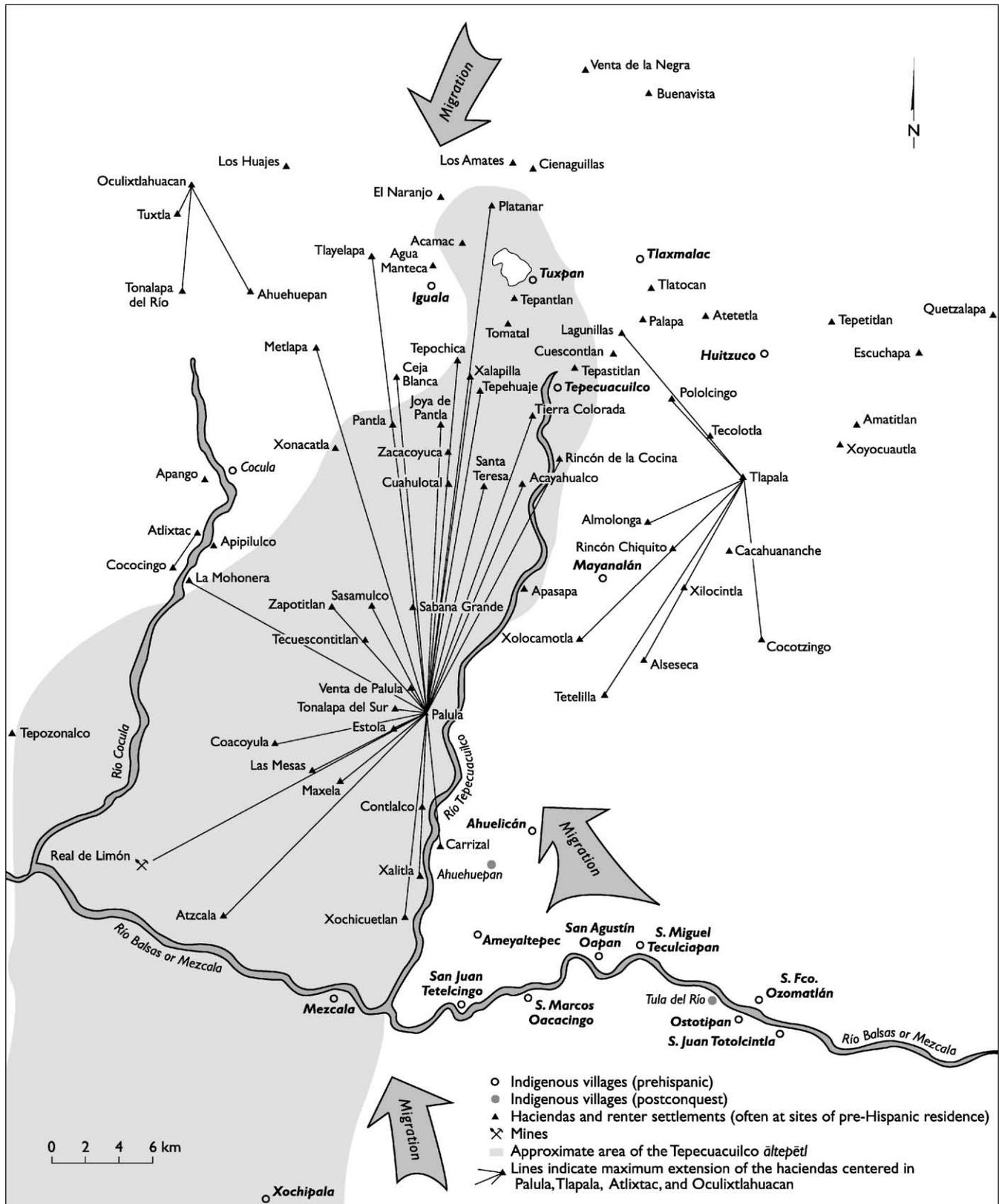


Figure 1. Palula and other Iguala Valley haciendas (with approximate extension of the Tepecuacuilco *āltepētī* and direction of 18th-century migration).

identity emerged amid a struggle for control over community reveals the unstudied strategies and processes of place making in a colonial migrant community that bear relevance for indigenous struggles today. When such disputes flared, they served to highlight, like brief flashes of lightening over a jagged plain, the lines of tension in a multi-ethnic rural society spread over a vast colonial terrain.

This process—of identity formation and the coalescence of community—played itself out in something akin to a development cycle of three stages. The first stage began in the 1680s, when mention of migration to Palula first appears in the documentary record, and lasted until the first decade of the 18th century. During this period, migrants appealed to pre-Hispanic patterns of regional authority and utilized patron–client alliances among indigenous groups with common interests in resettling the site of an abandoned village. The second period extended from the early to mid-18th century, as migrant residents of Palula combined a pragmatic politics of independence (no longer beholden to native elites) with symbolic assertions of community identity. During this period the litigants abandoned regional structures of indigenous authority in favor of a village-based discourse of community. By the mid-18th century, Palula had begun to establish its own social and religious identity; the only element lacking was political: *pueblo* status and 600 *varas* (a vara measures about 33 inches) of land.<sup>1</sup> By that time in litigation, residents developed and expressed a self-identity attached to their new locale, and they deployed the most salient colonial symbols of community—*pueblo* and church—to reorganize rural society around their sense of place. Finally, by the third phase, the mid-18th century to the end of the colonial period and beyond, community structure had become fragmented. Migrants were spatially dispersed and divided between those who identified themselves with the community and those considered outsiders, who often returned to their villages of origin during the dry season. By this time, social relations within the village had become diversified and conflictive. Those in Palula who did not develop a sense of community either became the illegitimate, aggressive faction of late colonial conflict—the *arrendatarios* (renters) whose comings and goings and threats oppressed and terrorized the *naturales* (natives) and *vecinos* (residents) of Palula—or they avoided friction through spatial displacement around Palula and seasonal migration back to their home villages.

Palula represents a type of rural settlement often neglected in the study of demographics and community in colonial New Spain: a village of migrant tenant farmers who aspired to *pueblo* status. Their struggle sheds light on how indigenous society might have dealt with the reconstruction of place in the vast spaces of *terra nullius* that were themselves created on both physically unoccupied and occupied land by the European invaders and of how,

in effect, the land was at times recolonized by its original inhabitants. This study also offers new insight into what may be considered “lost” indigenous communities of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. These communities were formed in open spaces by Indian migrants, who, without official recognition from the colonial state, reconstructed many aspects of traditional community political and social organization in their new settlements. After independence many of these new villages effectively became indigenous villages.<sup>2</sup>

The specifics of settlement at Palula itself were highly unusual. First, the village was a pre-Hispanic *sujeito* resettled by Indian peasants who, although not the original inhabitants, initially enjoyed the political support of *cabecera* authorities. One of the most salient facets of the history of settlement at Palula is precisely the effort of residents to reestablish community rights and identity at the core of a *hacienda* while, paradoxically, indigenous villages at the northern perimeter of the *hacienda* (Tepecuacuilco, Iguala, and Cocula) were struggling to reduce *hacienda* property rights in that area, having conceded these rights at the same embattled core that was contested by Palula migrants. Second, given that migration to Palula was dominated (at least during the initial stages) by Indians from adjacent areas within the same jurisdiction of Iguala, the tensions that were produced were localized—between home communities in the Balsas River valley and the point of destination at Palula, and between priests of the neighboring parishes of Oapan and Palula, who struggled for control over the rights to fee-paying souls whose residence shifted with the seasons.

By the end of the colonial period, migrants from the Balsas River basin had begun to shift their destinations to new *cuadrillas* southwest and south of Palula. But in the newer *cuadrillas*—Maxela, Las Mesas, Potrero, and Xalitla—a more positive relation with the home village was maintained, probably up to and beyond the time of the Mexican Revolution, as migrants often stayed in the tenant settlements only during the rainy season. What had been a flood moving outward from pre-Hispanic indigenous communities was now an ebb tide of sentiment flowing back to the Balsas River basin, as migrants to the newer, less-established *cuadrillas* professed their emotive and religious bonds (exemplified by their choice of where to perform the sacraments) with their home villages—Ameyaltepec, Ahuelicán, San Marcos, and Tetelcingo—in the parish of Oapan. The final change in migration patterns gradually occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The economic opportunity that migrants saw in the open fields of the southern valley started to disappear, not simply as population density increased and land became scarce but also as the inhabitants of the *cuadrillas* themselves began to exercise increasing control

over settlement and tenancy in the lands that they traditionally rented and farmed.<sup>3</sup> As opportunities for emigration in the southern Iguala Valley steadily decreased, the illusion of traditional closure that now engulfs indigenous peasant communities of the Balsas River basin was created. Yet this closure was more the result of exclusion and a limitation of options beyond the community than of any direct defense of a corporate structure in the original indigenous communities themselves.

### Place making and place breaking: Indigenous communities in historical perspective

Colonial migration research became of greater concern in colonial Latin American studies after Rolando Mellafe (1970) published a short but influential article on the subject. In it, he suggested that “the basic characteristic of colonial Hispanic American people was geographic mobility,” and he called for the study of “the causes and characteristics of the migrations, their direction and rhythm, and their social results” (Mellafe 1970:303, emphasis added). Empirical research has tended to examine the first two concerns, to the notable neglect of the third. Migration studies of colonial Mexico generally stress demographics: marriage patterns among caste groups, the structure of demographic hinterlands in relation to urban and mining centers, and the manner in which migration responds to an uneven distribution of economic opportunity.<sup>4</sup> There are two notable gaps in this literature.

The first is what Akhil Gupta calls “place making”: “the structures of feeling that bind space, time, and memory in the production of location” (1992:76).<sup>5</sup> This process becomes particularly significant for studies of rural colonial Mexico after the 16th century, when a wide range of individuals—from the upper echelons of the Spanish elite to the poorest of Indian peasant migrants—resettled and restructured vast areas that, although litigated and contested, were often beyond the direct control of Indian villages. Place making affected both new and old settlements. New communities emerged from the constructive practices of migrating groups of peasants, workers, and merchants.<sup>6</sup> Old communities were continually reproduced through the regenerative village practices of indigenous peasants, who were in this manner linked to spaces pregnant with historical memory and communal identity. Viewed from this perspective, the construction of locality in colonial society involved a complex tension in how mobile individuals (in the case being studied, indigenous peasants) experienced and produced a sense of place at both their points of origin and of destination. The sphere of analysis for ethnohistorical research becomes, therefore, the extended terrain of physical presence and social activity in which colonial subjects appear and perform. For migration into rural settlements, this means

a unit of analysis that embraces both the home and target settlements.

Gupta’s terminology contemplates migration as a process not simply of physical movement but also of shared personal experiences that develop into (or maintain and reproduce) public patterns of identity and community. Gupta borrows “structures of feeling” from Raymond Williams, who used the phrase in various ways, most frequently to capture the dialectical relation between the individual and the social, the particular and the general, the private and the public, and process and structure, as well as the imbricated relationship of the present with both the past and the future.<sup>7</sup> “The concept of ‘structure of feeling’ implies feeling as a crucial human response to existing social relationships rather than as an emotion solely experienced and articulated at the subjective level” (Eldridge and Eldridge 1994:159). In this sense, it mediates between phenomenological and psychological perspectives that stress the role of personal events in experiencing and defining place and certain anthropological perspectives that infuse space and place with an agentive, structuring role in social reproduction.<sup>8</sup>

The first gap in the migration literature, then, is essentially a gap in the experience and production of place, the fluidity of detachment and attachment that characterized population movements in the colonial period. Hispanic colonization itself was deeply concerned with the supervision of identity (the caste system) and the administration of place (the grid system). The “two-republic system” that legislated a physical and social separation of the Indian, the *congregaciones* (forced resettlements) that equated nucleated settlement with rational society, and the constant tension in colonial law between freedoms allowed and restrictions imposed on Indians’ right to move all point to the manner in which the Spanish state structured location and delimited space as part of its colonizing project.<sup>9</sup> Indian migrants opened up this space by casting off the two basic indexes of their colonial identity: family and community. Michel de Certeau provides a useful analogy for interpreting this process when he asserts that “the long poem of walking [read migration] manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them” (1984:101).<sup>10</sup>

Gupta’s place making, Williams’s structures of feelings, and de Certeau’s spatial tactics of everyday practice are all metaphors for actions that challenge the geographic and social order of colonization. If the Indian migrants who moved into the Iguala Valley were just, so to speak, “going to work,” then perhaps there would be less of a problem for sociohistorical analysis. But the points of tension—which terms such as *temporary migration*, *return*

*migration, flight, drift, and dispersal* leave surprisingly slack—lie in the unstable dichotomy of rural societies in flux: the succession of structures of feeling affecting work places and lived-in-spaces, the anxiety that comes with the realization that place making requires place breaking, and the continual effervescence of landscapes of aspiring identities as communities melt into air and condense (sometimes in the same spot, sometimes dispersed over the colonial terrain) while tenuously holding onto localities, structures, and reminiscences of the past.

Whereas the first gap in colonial migration literature concerns experience (the construction and deconstruction of affective bonds of attachment that create places of personal and shared identities at the center of geographical systems), the second gap relates to the particularization of space, part of the theoretical and empirical focus of what is often called the “new regional geography.”<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, this approach responded to the ahistorical and decontextualized algorithmic models of location studies. From its “isolated state” origins in the early 19th century, location theory has plunged further and further into a bottomless pit of mathematical “precision,” generating spatial arrangements that only demonstrate how very imperfect humanity actually is.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the new regional geographers asserted the positive role of space (as well as productive relations) in shaping social processes.<sup>13</sup> In this way, by declaring that “space matters,” they responded to and critiqued the universalizing discourse on class common to more orthodox Marxist perspectives.<sup>14</sup> The practitioners of this new regional geography, as one commentator notes, “attempted to mediate the spatial analysts’ concern with space, the neo-Marxists’ concern with social relations and structures, and the humanists’ concern with agency and meaning” (Entrikin 1991:20). Doreen Massey (1993:66), a founder of this approach, embraces the specificity of place, which she relates not to “some long internalized history” but, instead, to its construction out of a particular constellation of relations, social processes, experiences, and understandings, articulated together at a particular locus. Locations, then, may be considered nodal points uniquely characterized by their embeddedness in wide-ranging webs of social, cultural, political, and economic relations. As loci of relations, places are neither static, internally seamless and undifferentiated, nor necessarily bounded.

Migration, then, clearly involves two distinct aspects of an articulated polarity between places of departure and points of arrival: the centered experience of place (the focus of humanist geography) and the decentered political economy of spatial differentiation (the focus of the new regionalism). In colonial Mexico, however, the nature of the documentary evidence (usually parish records on the administration of sacraments) pulls the historian to the quantifiable end of the migrant’s journey into

towns and cities. Mapping points of origin does little to decipher the intricacies of either the experience or the political economy of space: Migrants’ home villages become just so many decontextualized dots on an otherwise bland terrain, where physical distance is left as the principal marked feature. Space becomes precisely what recent regional studies have so directly criticized: an undifferentiated playing field for social action, rather than a dynamic field of interaction that directly affects social processes. There is, then, still a need for a political economy of population movement and a move to explore the experience and particularities of both places of origin and points of destination.

In this article, I attempt to deal with these lacunae in migration studies of colonial Mexico. The underlying pattern of change in the area under study is simple. By the early 17th century, the hacienda of Palula had emerged as a vast field for potential agricultural development in the Iguala Valley. Sheep ranching there ceased by the late 17th century, and during the 1750s the last major cattle rancher was expelled. The valley then opened up to a flood of migrants; resettlement meant the incorporation of indigenous people into the very changed circumstances of agricultural society during the late colonial period.

But if the overarching process was simple, the details of change were complex. The valley itself had a sedimented past: layers of meaning, memories, and economies that, at least in some circumstances, shaped both the discourse that Indians used to reassert their rights to valley land and the patterns in which they accommodated themselves into a developing rural economy. Rather than a “body-count” approach to migration—a statistical documentation and sociological interpretation of fluctuating rhythms of demographic movement—I focus on socio-cultural changes in home and destination settlements: the integration and disintegration of place as articulated through discourses of community.

### **Early struggles for place: Land rights and regional structures of authority**

By the early 17th century, Palula seems to have shifted from the indigenous to the colonists’ domain. This was the fate shared by many villages that, located along trade routes or in the best agricultural terrain, became the coveted first prizes of colonial expansion into rural areas. In 1569, Palula had been the most heavily populated of over three dozen of Tepecuacuilco’s subject villages.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, along with every other settlement, Palula was forcibly relocated to the cabecera at the beginning of the 17th century. Shortly thereafter, the naturales of Palula fled Tepecuacuilco; but instead of returning to their original settlement, they escaped to the lands of another sujeto, San Cristóbal Mezcala, situated some three leagues

(one league is approximately 2.6 miles) south of Palula at the point where the royal highway (*camino real*) to Acapulco crossed the Balsas River.<sup>16</sup> The original inhabitants of Mezcala remained congregated in Tepecuacuilco.

There was reason to avoid a return to Palula. Between 1603 and 1607, the viceroy had given a land grant (*merced*) to don Melchor de Tornamira, *encomendero* (holder of an *encomienda*, an early crown grant assigning tribute from an indigenous village) of Tepecuacuilco, who rapidly expanded and consolidated his holding.<sup>17</sup> Property along the royal highway was becoming the focus of colonial interests, although the point at which the road intersected the Balsas River remained an accepted domain for continued Indian settlement: Indian labor was needed to assist transport across the river.<sup>18</sup> For the Indians of Palula, flight to Mezcala offered both the refuge of a desolate frontier (which sheltered them from the fiscal and service demands of the colonial state and indigenous authorities) and the prospects of a nascent commercial society (which promised profits from supplying colonists with food and fodder and from working to ferry travelers across the Balsas River). The attraction of Mezcala was precisely the balance it struck between “refuge” and “prospect.”<sup>19</sup> Another tension, located between fiscal control and economic exigency, informed the viceroy’s pragmatic response to the Tepecuacuilco petition that fugitive Indians from Palula be returned to the cabecera. Although he ordered the *corregidor* (head Spanish judicial and administrative officer in a district) of Iguala to repatriate the renegades, the viceroy also directed him to leave in Mezcala the number of Indians needed to attend to the travelers and traders.<sup>20</sup> Mezcala “survived” as an Indian village, but it survived, at least at first, with residents of Palula.<sup>21</sup>

Indigenous settlement at Palula had a more complex and revealing history. During the 17th century, the hacienda centered at Palula expanded inexorably through the Iguala Valley, eventually occupying approximately fifteen hundred square kilometers of fertile farmland south of Iguala, mostly between the Cocula, Balsas, and Tepecuacuilco rivers. Yet about the time it reached its maximum extension, pressing northward against Iguala and Cocula, a conflict abruptly emerged at the hacienda’s core: Indian peasants claimed their patrimonial rights to Palula itself.

The initial dispute for control over Palula occurred in the midst of profound changes in the regional economy centered in Taxco and the Iguala Valley. By the late 17th century, the indigenous population was beginning to recuperate from its postconquest nadir and the Iguala Valley was starting to produce grain for the Taxco mines as they recovered from the “century of depression” (Borah 1951; cf. Israel 1974). It was in this context of shifting land use and demographic recovery that the first indigenous attempts to claim and define space in the valley occurred. But the discursive strategy that underpinned these early

Indian efforts to resettle and reassert rights to Palula, a key center for the control of valley land, manifests a rearticulation of preconquest patterns of regional authority in which rights to Palula were defended more on the basis of pre-Hispanic territorial and political jurisdictions than on simple rights of continuity and descent. In this case, indigenous litigants utilized extracommunity political and social structures that were soon to disappear as the colonial period progressed.

In 1686, the indigenous authorities of Tepecuacuilco petitioned for their right to resettle Palula and rebuild its church. Some four years previously, Indians from the parish of Oapan, jurisdiction of Tixtla, had begun to migrate to Palula.<sup>22</sup> Their resettlement efforts were resisted by the priests of Oapan and Atenango del Río, who were undoubtedly afraid of losing their flocks; by the *encomendero* of Oapan, for similar reasons; and by Alonso de Rivera, then owner of the hacienda of Palula, who adamantly defended his legal title to the land. One of his principal arguments was that the migrants were not descendants of the original inhabitants but, rather, Indians who had fled their religious and community obligations elsewhere and should be forcibly returned.

Interestingly, the Oapan migrants did not assert their rights to Palula directly. Instead, the claims were presented by the authorities of Tepecuacuilco, a village that in preconquest times had housed an Aztec garrison and served as the entrepôt center for tribute collection in the area. At contact, a large area had been under its direct control, with sujetos dispersed up to 17 leagues to the west and 10 leagues to the south (see shaded area in Figure 1). In 1686 (approximately eighty years after Palula’s inhabitants had been relocated to their cabecera and the abandoned land given in a grant to their *encomendero*), Tepecuacuilco petitioned for the right to resettle its erstwhile sujeto and rebuild its church: “Even though it is true that [the recent settlers at Palula] are from various pueblos, the lack of opportunity that they must face [in their home villages] undoubtedly inspired them to appeal to . . . [the authorities] of Tepecuacuilco, requesting admission into their community so that they could resettle the aforementioned pueblo [of Palula] and obtain in the said village clear benefits” (AGN-I 28/262, dated 1686).

Although noting how settlement at Palula would result in personal benefits for the migrant Indians and public benefits for commerce (provisioning muleskinners) and the state (increased security), the Tepecuacuilco authorities were also adamant in defending their right to resettle Palula with Indians from other villages. In fact, whereas the hacienda owner Rivera argued his case by asserting that the migrants to Palula were not related to the original inhabitants and, hence, were without rights to the land, Tepecuacuilco authorities freely admitted that the settlers were from various other villages but claimed their right to

resettle their sujetos however they saw fit. Tepecuacuilco's role as the leading arbiter for indigenous rights in the region was augmented a few years later when the village of Iguala began a struggle to defend its land in the northern valley against encroachment by don Alonso de Rivera. Iguala joined the opposition to the colonization of Palula headed by Tepecuacuilco.<sup>23</sup> No longer simply litigating for Palula on behalf of the Oapan migrants, Tepecuacuilco authorities now requested permission to "return to settle the ancient pueblo of Palula with the naturales of the pueblo of Iguala" (AGN-I 30/251, dated 1689). This development suggests how common interests among indigenous villages—the efforts of Iguala to defend community land and limit the size of a hacienda, the search of Oapan residents for more fertile soil, and the initiative of Tepecuacuilco to regain control of an ex-sujeto while reasserting authority over a region it previously controlled—could foster intercommunity cooperation in parallel and joint litigation. In this early dispute, there was still no claim by the recent migrants to Palula that they had a direct link to the land they occupied. The link between the present and the past was mediated by a formerly powerful indigenous elite at the twilight of its influence.

In spearheading the bid to retake Palula, the indigenous authorities of Tepecuacuilco formed patron-client alliances with indigenous peasants from at least two neighboring villages: Oapan and Iguala.<sup>24</sup> The situation is highly suggestive of an appeal to pre-Hispanic patterns of authority and jurisdictional or territorial rights while at the same time demonstrating the mechanisms that might have worked in affecting fission and fusion among the indigenous population and settlements. It suggests that migrants from Oapan still perceived the regional indigenous elite as the final arbiter in the adjudication of rights to land. The situation in regard to Iguala was slightly distinct but manifests a similar pattern of obsequious respect to a regional hierarchy of indigenous rule. In the 1680s, both Tepecuacuilco and Iguala were embroiled in the turbulent land tenure struggle situation that was developing in the northern valley. Whether Tepecuacuilco's petition for a license to resettle Palula "with" the naturales of Iguala ("con los naturales de el pueblo de Iguala") indicates an instrumentalist use of poor peasants or an alliance of convenience between besieged elites is unclear. But combined with the case of the Oapan migrants, it does suggest that, even at this relatively late date, Tepecuacuilco authorities held some sway in regional indigenous society beyond their own community and its former sujetos.

This first phase in what I have referred to as the development cycle of the community involved an appeal to pre-Hispanic indigenous patterns of land rights and authority and an openness of community that belies a "closed corporate" model. In their 1686 petition to the colonial state, the Tepecuacuilco elite was not reticent to

admit that it sought territorial rights for migrant Indians who themselves had no historical claims to the land at Palula. In fact, the elite had previously sought the return of Palula migrants from Mezcala, where they had fled, to the cabecera. Thus, in a sense, the regional elite was attempting to retain close fiscal and social control over its tributaries while at the same time inviting outsiders into the community by offering to litigate for outlying land that had been given away in a royal land grant. Moreover, this unusual prolongation of a regional and hierarchical structure of indigenous authority suggests that intercommunal sociopolitical structures and processes existed at conquest and remained in place for over 150 years afterward. It is also noteworthy that, whereas residents of Oapan and Iguala sought to establish community rights at Palula (or, perhaps, the authorities of Tepecuacuilco sought to use Indians from Iguala and Oapan to reclaim land that was at the core of an expanding hacienda), those more directly attached to this site, the descendants of the original inhabitants of Palula who had been forcibly relocated to Tepecuacuilco, sought instead to establish rights or residence in Mezcala. In central Guerrero, similar cases of intercommunity links, involving individuals who sought patrimonial rights to sites of pre-Hispanic occupation to which they had no historical or hereditary rights, occurred in Tuxpan, near Iguala.<sup>25</sup> The receptiveness of indigenous villages to newcomers suggests a permeability of community boundaries and a continual readjustment and reformulation of village identity and membership. The litigation of Tepecuacuilco authorities on behalf of emigrants from Oapan and Iguala indicates tenacious regional social and political structures. Nevertheless, during the following phase, the politics and language of community formation at Palula were to change.

### **Incipient identity: The nascent community and the emergence of sentiment**

A second moment of confrontation occurred in 1717, some three decades after the first. By this time the structure of the dispute, if not its superficial presentation and arguments, had changed considerably. No longer were Tepecuacuilco's indigenous authorities litigating on behalf of other villages. By 1717, migrants to Palula, in the parish of Oapan, had taken charge of their own destiny and were constructing their own past at the site they had settled. At this time, two Indians appeared before the viceroy and identified themselves as "naturales of the pueblo of Palula . . . in the name of the entire community (*todo el común*)" (AGN-I 40/134, see also M 71/fols. 26v–31f, both dated 1717). The key words—*naturales*, *pueblo*, *el común*—indicate an inchoate relation to place; the second-generation migrants were now directly identifying themselves with a space that had become the pueblo

of Palula, a village whose existence was predicated on the denial of the rights and authority of the indigenous authorities of Tepecuacuilco. The language of the petition from Palula, although pointing out the benefits to the state and to highway security of having a pueblo at this location, also referred to key symbols of village identity—church bell and church—that the servants of Captain Antonio de Ayala, then owner of Palula, were accused of stealing and desecrating (AGN-I 40/134, AGN-M 71/fols. 26v–31f, both dated 1717).<sup>26</sup>

Although the dispute was phrased in terms of settlement rights based on patrimonial privileges and a previous writ of protection (*amparo*), the underlying conflict seemed to be over land use in a changing regional economy.<sup>27</sup> The Indian litigants began their petition by noting that Ayala wanted them to abandon the land so that he could establish a cattle ranch, as he, in fact, had started to do. Ayala alleged that he allowed the Indians, whom he refers to as tenant farmers (*terrazgueros*), to rent his land for two *cargas* (about five hundred pounds) of maize per cornfield (*milpa*), regardless of its size. He admitted to having recently rented the site of Palula to Antonio Rodríguez, a cattle rancher, but added that Rodríguez and the Indians had come to an agreement over continued subrental. Apparently, tenant farming continued. When the hacienda of Palula was embargoed in 1728, the Indians residing in Palula were called to testify. Eleven tenant farmers appeared; six others were absent. Those present certified that the land belonged to don Antonio de Ayala, and that they paid two *cargas* of maize in rent (or two pesos in the event of harvest failure) regardless of the amount of land planted. If, for illness or any other reason, a tenant did not farm, he was not charged any rent. In 1728, 12 Indians had farmed; in 1727, only 11.<sup>28</sup>

The early struggles in Palula—the first in the mid-1680s, the second in 1717—reveal the convergence of regional political-economic change with the production of place and the emergence of identity. The two disputes occurred at two separate moments of profound transformations in the economic structure and tenure arrangements of the Iguala Valley. In the late 1680s, Jesuit ranching in the Iguala Valley, which had involved some thirty thousand sheep in the 1660s and 1670s, began to decline. Shortly thereafter, the Jesuits definitively withdrew from the region, leaving open a vast expanse of underutilized land. The timing of indigenous migration to Palula in the south-central valley suggests a process parallel to that occurring in the north, where cattle ranchers took over Tepantlan, a Jesuit hacienda, as soon as it was abandoned. The number of migrants to Palula, however, was minimal. After a short period of litigation with don Alonso de Rivera, then the hacienda owner, a temporary accommodation seems to have been reached. The handful of tenant farmers was allowed to remain.

In 1717, the second flare-up occurred, this time between the Indian tenant farmers and Ayala, the effective owner of Palula, who just two years previously had been the major beneficiary when litigation over ex-Jesuit haciendas had been definitively resolved. Land ownership questions had been settled and titles quieted. Data from 1728 show that Ayala rented out various sections of his hacienda; all but the site of Palula were leased to ranchers. Nearby at Carrisal and Tepochica, the rents were 50 and 60 pesos per year; Palula barely yielded 24 pesos (or *cargas* of maize) from its tenants. The evidence suggests that in 1728 Palula was being leased at below its market value, a consequence of indigenous peasants maintaining hold of a tenancy arrangement in the face of a changing regional economy, pressure from ranching, and competitive leasing elsewhere. Although phrased in the idiom of rights to patrimonial land, the dispute in 1717 seems to have been over rights to exploit the land: Ayala wanted to promote ranching and raise income in an increasingly dynamic regional economy; the indigenous farmers wanted to preserve their tenancy and peasant lifestyle as well as their historically low rents. For them, the most effective discourse, however, was that of patrimonial rights to ancestral land. To accomplish their objective, they had to redefine themselves as *naturales de Palula*, citizens of the village of Palula.

During the initial decades of the 18th century, another important change was taking place: the territorialization of indigenous space concomitant to a series of *composiciones* (issuance of titles to defective possessions) that stabilized and legally certified land boundaries in central Guerrero.<sup>29</sup> Economic crises, often linked to international conflicts, had motivated the launching of *composición* programs as revenue-raising efforts by the crown.<sup>30</sup> In central Guerrero, however, the early 18th-century *composiciones* were exceptional in that they affected indigenous villages as well as colonists. Communities acquired titles expedited by a Spanish judiciary agent and confirmed by viceregal authorities. These documents protected an explicitly demarcated territory, the borders of which were established during a legal process known as the *vista de ojos*, in which the land commissioner would perambulate the land accompanied by village members and officials. The land laws and resolutions of this period established a paradigm of indigenous land tenure that molded the nature of agrarian disputes: the integration of territory (at the very least, the *fundo legal*, the minimal land unit measuring 1,200 by 1,200 varas, or 101 hectares, to which all independent indigenous villages were entitled according to Spanish law; see N. 1) could be most directly achieved through pueblo status legally recognized by viceregal authorities.

This early 18th-century struggle in Palula, then, reveals how new mechanisms of state-authorized territorialization influenced indigenous discourse relating to the

production of place and the emergence of village identity. By 1717, the morphology of struggle had changed; the locus of activity had shifted to the residents of Palula themselves. No longer did they solicit the patronage of indigenous authorities from a regional center; instead they sought land rights within the legal and political economic structures of the colonial regime. This change was not sudden but had begun on the cusp of the previous, regionally based struggle. In 1689, Ayala accused the Oapan immigrants in Palula of having elected a *governador* (village head) and *alcaldes* (minor village officials) “as if [Palula] were a fully constituted pueblo” and of having obtained viceregal confirmation by hiding the fact that litigation was pending (AGN-I 30/179, dated 1689). He successfully requested that the election be annulled and that the residents be enjoined from building a church. At a time when Tepecuacuilco authorities were still presenting a claim to Palula based on their right to resettle the lands of a congregated *sujeto*, the efforts of Palula residents to elect a *governador* and *alcaldes* were at best paradoxical, at worst counterproductive. In the late colonial period, petitions for a license to elect a *governador* were often the most public secular symbols (churches and cemeteries were the religious counterparts) of a *sujeto*’s political independence from an erstwhile *cabecera*, although *de facto* separation of finances and tribute payment had often occurred well before the formal breach in political structure (see Dehouve 1990). In their early struggle for pueblo status, Palula residents quickly faced a defining moment: They could maneuver behind the authenticity of Tepecuacuilco’s resettlement claim and the authority of its regional domination, or they could assert their own independent identity and community heritage within a new colonial legality. They could not effectively do both: A reliance on Tepecuacuilco signified dependent status, whereas the election of a *governador* signaled independence.

By 1717, however, the metamorphosis toward a discourse of primordial rights and community tradition was virtually complete. A petition from that year opened by presenting “Miguel de Santiago and Juan Mathías, naturales of the pueblo of Palula”; the rights they defended were to a place where, they noted, “we and our ancestors have maintained and fostered a small pueblo (*pueblesillo*), and have not neglected the things that are our responsibility, both in regard to the Church and to the crown” (AGN-I 40/134, dated 1717). Future litigation involving Palula would fit, often somewhat awkwardly, into the paradigm of village-versus-hacienda struggles, a constant feature of colonial historiography. But woven into the explicit conflict over spatial control was a more subtle struggle of definition, the divergent perspectives on place and identity that informed the language of dispute over Palula. The referential lexicon of each party reveals the underlying hermeneutics of litigation. The immigrants to

Palula once referred to Ayala as their “master” (*amo*), which suggests at least a subconscious recognition of subservience (AGN-M 71/fols. 26v–31f, dated 1717). But usually the linguistic breach in perspective between Indian and colonist is more clearly marked. Thus, the indigenous parties would represent themselves as “naturales de Palula” (not “arrendatarios de” [renters of], a phrase that their opponents would use); they would call Palula a “pueblo” (not a “paraje,” “puesto,” or “cuadrilla” [place, spot, or work settlement], again, the language of their adversaries); and they would refer to the “reedificio” (rebuilding) of the church (not the “fábrica,” or “building,” as the owners of the hacienda of Palula would say). In sum, they would present arguments that combined pragmatic and symbolic aspects in a rhetorical attempt to convince the colonial state of the utilitarian benefits and intrinsic legitimacy of their position.

The church was the *sine qua non* of community stability; it was the physical, symbolic, and, indeed, legal center of village life. The church was situated in the town square, the building and consecration of churches was frequently the most significant act in establishing community identity, and village lands were measured outward from the church.<sup>31</sup> In their 1686 petition, the Tepecuacuilco authorities requested a license to resettle Palula and rebuild its church, and they referred to the still-visible foundations of an old church, an implicit legitimization of present rights based on past residence (AGN-I 28/239, dated 1686).<sup>32</sup> When, in 1689, the viceroy annulled the election of the *oficiales de república* (village authorities) in Palula, he specifically enjoined them from building a church (AGN-I 30/179, dated 1689). In 1717, Ayala’s servants are accused of having torn down the church walls (AGN-I 40/134, M 71/fols. 26v–31f, both dated 1717). One century later, the church continued to play a central role in the discourse of identity and community rights. At this time, litigants from Palula placed special emphasis on providing testimony that their village had a modern church in which the sacraments could be administered and that next to it were the walls of an ancient church that had been built by “the ancestors of those of Palula, at great expense” (AGN-M 83/fols. 19v–21f, dated 1794). Yet, to adumbrate the situation, the church was also a point of contention: Late colonial documents refer to emerging factional divisions between permanent residents and recent or temporary immigrants over the latter’s disobedience to church commandments and disregard for the requirements of religious service, including participation in rebuilding the village chapel (AGN-M 83/fols. 74f–75r, dated 1793; AGN-BN 929/55, dated 1807).

Throughout the colonial period, then, Palula’s church or chapel figured as a central element not only in the contentious rhetoric presented to colonial courts but also in day-to-day interaction of residents. To outsiders, the

existence or the lack of a church was public evidence of Palula's sociopolitical status; among residents, the church (or the willingness to maintain it) functioned as a practical measure of an individual's commitment to place.

But early conflicts often revolved around the church bell itself, a mobile and much more ephemeral symbol of identity in the amorphous landscape of a rural society in flux.<sup>33</sup> In most villages, the bell was hung on a crossbeam set between forked posts and sheltered under a low-lying canopy of clay slates or palm.<sup>34</sup> It was easy to steal. In 1686, Tepecuacuilco's indigenous authorities accused the priests of Oapan and Atenango del Río of imprisoning Indians who had moved their corporeal bodies and administered souls to Palula, of interfering with church reconstruction, and of having stolen the church bell. They requested that the prisoners be released and allowed to live in Palula, that church construction be allowed to proceed, and that the bell be returned (AGN-I 28/262, dated 1686). The priests' attack against the new church at Palula was an attack against the Indians' efforts to establish ecclesiastical and religious independence from the parishes under the priests' control. Two decades later, Palula's representatives leveled charges against Ayala and his servants that culminated with the accusation that they had "even taken our church bell and desecrated our church, which they have tried to destroy" (AGN-I 40/134, dated 1717). The rhetoric of "even" (*hasta*) at the end of the list of grievances effectively shifts the theft to the fore; it becomes the ultimate yet definitive indignity, a coup de grâce that struck at the heart of a distraught village (AGN-I 40/134, AGN-M 71/fols. 26v–31f, both dated 1717).<sup>35</sup> Ayala responded that his father-in-law, don Alonso de Rivera, had lent the bell to Palula. But what can be given can also be taken away, and Ayala claimed that the bell, like the land, was his. With both, he concluded, he could do as he wished. In Ayala's bleak discourse of absolute property—which left room for neither morality nor sentiment—there was no indignity, indeed, no deeper meaning, in removing the bell or vacating the land. In his vision the bell and the land were linked, but not as symbols of identity and the basis of subsistence; they were simply objects of ownership to be manipulated at will.

Ayala asserted his indefeasible, absolute rights to Palula in 1717, only two years after major litigation in the northern Iguala Valley had been resolved in his favor. But, by this time, the status and structure of the Iguala Valley was changing. Between 1701 and 1705, in order to place administrative control over the distribution of valley maize directly in the hands of the urban and mining elite, the province of Iguala was briefly incorporated into the Taxco jurisdiction (AGN-RC 89/141, dated 1766). The realignment was short-lived; but in 1724 don José de la Borda, a wealthy and deeply religious miner, led a group of his peers in petitioning that Taxco be given political jurisdiction over

the once again separate province of Iguala. Early 18th-century administrative pressures adumbrated a tension between urban and rural interests that came to dominate the political economy of Taxco–Iguala relations during the final century of the colonial period (AGN-GP 25/fols. 49f–52f, dated 1724; published in Zavala and Castelo 1939–46, vol. 8:231–236). This tension was played out both politically—in struggles over the incorporation of Iguala into the jurisdiction of Taxco—and economically—in efforts to increase agricultural production in the Iguala Valley and control the distribution of its grain. Administrative reincorporation occurred in 1768. The restructuring of production and distribution was a more gradual process; it depended on the continual immigration to the valley of mostly indigenous peasants from surrounding areas. In 1728, don José de la Borda acquired Ayala's embargoed landholdings. In addition to his political activism for administrative reorganization, he now possessed the material means to vertically integrate Iguala Valley maize production with market demands created by Taxco's mining industry and urban population. Gradually, he turned his lands over to tenant farmers, evicting the last major cattle rancher in the late 1750s. For over 75 years, from 1717 to 1792, immigration to Palula and its environs proceeded at an accelerated pace, with little apparent friction.

### Consummated community and a fractured society

Moments of increased tension at the village level coincided with overall structural changes at the regional level, particularly the Jesuit abandonment of sheep ranching during the 1680s and the final settlement of lengthy litigation over land rights with the *composiciones* carried out between 1705 and 1715. Analogous changes took place in the late colonial period. Again, shifts in the nature and process of place making coincided with transformations in the sphere of economic and political processes. And as the struggle over Palula shifted from one phase to another, the language of contention and terms of debate shifted with it.

When de la Borda owned Palula, he seemingly had unproblematic relations with his tenant farmers, apparently keeping his monetary demands temperate.<sup>36</sup> But late 18th-century changes in property ownership, and an increasing commodification of the rural economy, led to shifts in the structure and composition of extant rental arrangements. Taxco's Archicofradía del Santísimo Sacramento, which by the late 18th century had acquired de la Borda's lands through a donation, experienced serious problems in administering its real estate and monetary assets. It attempted several solutions to its problems of solvency. One of these was to lease its Iguala Valley lands to local merchants and agricultural entrepreneurs, who met their payment obligations to the archicofradía by

subleasing to indigenous tenant farmers. These merchants and entrepreneurs were not only situated in an intermediate position between the titleholders and the peasant producers, but they were also more focused on profit than on urban provisioning, which had been de la Borda's primary concern. In 1795, one of these entrepreneurs, don Lucas de Pineda, leased Palula, raised rents, and altered the customary arrangement whereby individual tenants would not be charged for pasture. He also reintroduced ranching, grazing his cattle and horses dangerously near his tenants' fields. Palula Indians charged that Pineda had increased rents and initiated ranching to deter them from soliciting the 600 varas of land that was the right of all Indian pueblos (AGN-T 1264/5, dated 1795).<sup>37</sup>

If the etiology of conflict in the 1790s was similar to that of 1717, so, too, were the institutional symbols around which struggle revolved: pueblo and church. The 1794 *interrogatorio* (list of questions for a judicial proceeding) that the *común y naturales* of Palula drew up for their witnesses' depositions reveals how they planned to justify their claim to pueblo status and the 600 varas of land that such status entailed (AGN-M 83/19v–21f, dated 1794).<sup>38</sup> Ninety families of tribute-paying Indians lived in Palula: 50 in the nucleated center and 40 others within a league. Many heads of households had been born in Palula. Others had immigrated over the previous 10 to 30 years and during that time had built homes and had children born in Palula. The original villages of these immigrants—pueblos such as Chilpancingo, San Marcos, and Ajuchitlán—were distant, overpopulated, and situated in unfavorable terrain; residence in Palula offered the migrants a means of subsistence that they would otherwise have been lacking.<sup>39</sup> The *interrogatorio* continued with questions about the proper condition of the church, the presence of ruins from an earlier church, and the great benefits (in an argument that echoed that put forth by Tepecuacuilco authorities 100 years previously) that a pueblo at Palula would offer to “the travelers, muleskinners, troops, prisoners, and couriers who would there be accommodated and provided with what they needed.” Finally, the witnesses were to comment on the assertion that “the person who rented the lands of Palula has burdened the naturales who live there with many heavy charges, which had meant that they live in continual servitude, and many in great misery, from which they would be free if they had their own land on which to plant.”

The image of pueblo that the litigants now presented was a structural and functional one—ahistorical except for the passing reference to the church ruins. Thus, when, in 1798, immigrants from Ameyaltepec and San Marcos protested against being imprisoned and forcibly returned to their original village, they objected that they were “settled in the aforementioned place [Palula], congregated in a Pueblo (*reducidos a Pueblo*), carrying out the personal

services that are required and promptly paying their tribute” (AGN-I 71/13, dated 1798). The phrase “*reducidos a Pueblo*” conjures up the image of congregación, the early colonial program designed to bring social order and religious conversion to what the Spaniards considered the uncivil state of small, scattered settlements. The metaphor of “*reducción*,” conjuring an image of migrants from a dispersed demographic hinterland becoming fixed in space by an indigenous corporate structure that would satisfy both the fiscal and the economic demands of the pragmatically oriented Bourbon state, was a tactic that responded both to the transformed regional economies and to the rationalized state administration of the late colonial period.<sup>40</sup> The arguments for Palula's status as pueblo had now come almost full circle.<sup>41</sup> In 1686, Tepecuacuilco authorities had asserted their right to resettle an outlying sujeto, an argument for the right to disperse. In the 1790s, litigation was not only over the right of migrants to remain in new settlements but also over the rights of a recently nucleated population at Palula, *reducido* to a pueblo de indios, that was structurally (if not historically) an indigenous pueblo.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the result of a successful petition during either the late 17th or late 18th century would have been similar: an “Indian” pueblo with land rights, tributary obligations, and service responsibilities.

Concomitant with and complicating the late colonial litigation for pueblo status was a localized breach in the social fabric of Palula, the defining feature of this third phase in the development cycle of place making in this locale. In 1795, the lawyer for “those of the pueblo of San Francisco Palula” reported hostility between renters and subrenters and alleged that, despite orders that the renters not harass the newcomers or wrongfully assess them charges for back rents owed, don Lucas Pineda continued his mistreatment (AGN-T 1264/5, dated 1795). In trying to collect from their Iguala Valley tenant farmers, the archicofradía also reported a fragmented community at Palula. Among those who punctually paid their rent were others who had fled their own pueblos and taken refuge in the paraje (stopping place; note that the word *pueblo* was not used) of Palula, refusing to pay rent or to leave and benefiting from the land “with no other title than force and violence” (AGN-M 83/fols. 74f–75v, dated 1793). In the same document, the archicofradía requested that the *subdelegado* (highest district authority) of Taxco forcibly repatriate those who had usurped land while making sure that legitimate tenants paid their rents.

The dichotomization of Palula was also manifested in a third context: a contemporary struggle over the construction and consecration of the village church or chapel. On June 8, 1792, the archbishop of Mexico authorized the renovation of the Palula chapel, then on the verge of collapse (AGN-BN 929/55, dated 1807).<sup>43</sup> It was not until June 20, 1807, however, that don Juan José Cadrecha, the

vicar residing in Mezcala, was issued a license to sanctify the recently completed house of worship. The delay, he commented at the time, occurred because the naturales and vecinos of the cuadrilla had for a long time neglected to repair the church, frightened by threats from the tenants (arrendatarios), who with “obstinate impiety” had tried to thwart the reconstruction and prevent the “imponderable benefit . . . of increased worship” that would follow should the chapel be rebuilt (AGN-BN 929/55, dated 1807).

In each of the three cases, some sort of localized conflict is mentioned (see Table 1). Litigation for pueblo status pitted renters against subrenters. For the archicofradía, Palula was divided between legitimate (rent-paying) and illegitimate (recent immigrants who refused to pay rent) occupants. For Cadrecha, the struggle pitted the “naturales y vecinos de la cuadrilla” who wished to rebuild their church against the “arrendatarios,” or tenants, who obstructed them. In this final opposition there is a hint of an ethnic division, for the “arrendatarios” were said to be opposed to allowing the “aforementioned Indians [to] construct their church” (AGN-BN 929/55, dated 1807).

These sets of divisions represent the fractured quotidian structure of late colonial life in the oldest *cuadrilla de arrendatarios* (tenant settlement) in the Iguala Valley. The hundred years from early recolonization to mature settlement generated more than a quantitative demographic change in Palula. In addition, a layered pattern of confrontation began to emerge. This conflict represented not simply the political implications of hierarchized productive relations: owner, capitalist entrepreneur, *capitán de cuadrilla* (unofficial authority of a cuadrilla, apparently in charge of administering rental arrangements and payments), renter, subrenter, and squatter.<sup>44</sup> Rather, the production and political economy of place embraced a temporal element, a developmental cycle.<sup>45</sup> One may use a geological metaphor and refer to the sedimentation of

sentiment, in which attachment to a new place represents not only a logistical choice of location in the context of the relative advantages of home settlement or destination but also the increasing weight of an affective bond that emerges as a consequence of time’s impact in constituting social identity.<sup>46</sup> In Palula, speculative investment in agriculture, furtive cultivation by elusive tenants, and seasonal migration by enterprising peasants all meant that permanent residents could easily contemplate their own situation as “we versus they,” generating boundaries and oppositional categorizations that are key to meaningful social identification. By the late colonial period, then, a discursive practice involving a peasant’s self-identification as a natural de Palula had shifted away from pragmatics (a means to engage the colonial state in a debate over spatial rights) and toward ontology (the way in which a person defined him or herself through reference to a particular place). For some, the place named Palula had become a symbol derived from a personal experience of affect and identity.

Although the intensity of affiliation with Palula was, in part, a function of the impact of time—permanence or transience in space—in structuring identity, it was also the consequence of a complex spatial politics that characterized late colonial rural society around Palula. In 1794, the interrogatorio drawn up by Palula residents suggested a dispersed settlement pattern: 50 families living in Palula and another 40 scattered within one league. By 1807, however, the vicar of Mezcala was able to assert that “the cuadrilla named Palula . . . comprises 367 families within its environs and immediate vicinity” (AGN-BN 929/55, dated 1807). The dramatic increase of 277 families in a dozen years might indicate a different area of reference; the vicar could well have been including all families under his ecclesiastical administration and not simply those residing within a league of Palula.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, population growth undoubtedly did occur (compare the preceding figures to the 16 tenants less than a century before).<sup>48</sup>

This constant threat of emigration and dispersal points to a final element in the complex restructuring of late colonial rural society in the Iguala Valley. In addition to divisions in the organization of productive relations (that ranged from owner to squatter) and to the implications of time for identity formation (emotional distance from or attachment to the core settlement of Palula), the evolution of Palula as place was complicated by spatial and jurisdictional divisions that developed as a result of increased migration and demographic pressure. This increase, in turn, was closely related to intervillage land struggles among indigenous communities in the Balsas River valley (see Amith 1995). Yet, at a certain point, increased migration to Palula effected a qualitative, as opposed to simply quantitative, change: New cuadrillas (potential identities) and a more dispersed settlement

Table 1  
The Language of Dispute: Place Makers and Place Breakers in the Settlement of Palula

Source of Description	According to Source, Identities of the Parties in Dispute	
	Committed to Community	Resistant to Community
Litigants for pueblo status	Renters	Subrenters
Landowner (Archicofradía de la Santísima Sacramento, Taxco)	Legitimate (renters)	Illegitimate (tenants)
Vicar of Palula	Those with a religious commitment (long-time residents)	Those without a religious commitment (recent migrants)

pattern emerged in the southern Iguala Valley, and as these developed, a permanent vicarage was established in Palula. The result was a new line of tension and division in the southern valley, as priests fought for control over a shifting population of seasonal migrants dispersed over increasingly large areas.

Colonial secular and religious administration of indigenous society was based on the illusion of a fairly rigorous bond between person and place.<sup>49</sup> The indigenous “closed corporate peasant community” was the quintessential example of this link; and the layering of preconquest and colonial units noted by Gibson (1964)—indigenous *cabecera*–*sujeto* complexes, *encomiendas*, *corregimientos* (provincial, intermediate-level colonial administrative and judicial units, often used interchangeably with *alcaldías mayores*), and parishes—points to the reproduction and persistence of sociospatial divisions over time (see Lockhart 1991a). But a model that stresses the structural isomorphism of political–administrative units runs the risk of generating complacency in examining the politics of place that often intruded into the historical geography of colonial spatial organization. Migrants were a powerful challenge to the production and maintenance of boundaries by the state. Insofar as migrants permanently moved to places within areas already classified within the taxonomy of colonial administrative units, problems of spatial definition and delimitation were mitigated. But in the late colonial period, new seasonal and permanent rural settlements—ranches, haciendas, and *cuadrillas*—multiplied. The location of major jurisdictional boundaries, such as those delimiting *alcaldías mayores* and *corregimientos*, was perhaps not seriously affected, but parochial divisions were more problematical. The parish, in general, was particularly susceptible to the pressures of population growth; there was a practical limit to the area, number of settlements, and volume of souls that a priest could effectively administer. To accommodate increases in population and settlements, many new vicarages and parishes were created in the 18th century.<sup>50</sup>

By the late 18th century, migration to the Iguala Valley was becoming increasingly disperse; legitimate tenant farmers formed new *cuadrillas* south of Palula at Contlalco, Cuajiotal, Maxela, Las Mesas, Potrero, Real de Limón, Atzcala, Xalitla, and Xochicuetla (see Figure 1). Many of these locations undoubtedly experienced a high level of temporary, seasonal occupation. The archicofradía complained that in addition to Palula’s legitimate tenants there were others, fugitives from their home villages, who refused to pay rent or vacate the land. And the vicar residing in Mezcala commented on the threats and intimidation that the *naturales* and *vecinos* of Palula suffered at the hands of renters who obstructed the repair of its chapel. The presence of all of these individuals created the aforementioned new settlement pattern in the south-

ern valley and led to tensions in the identification of person with place. Although the southern settlements were clearly within the political jurisdiction of Iguala, their ecclesiastical affiliation—to either the parish of Oapan or the new vicarage at Mezcala—was problematical. This final moment in the production of place around Palula, then, involved a dispute over the boundaries of a new parish and its control over the souls of migrants to recently formed tenant settlements.

Between 1807 and 1819, the vicarage administering the southern valley was transferred from Mezcala to Palula.<sup>51</sup> Documentation on the origin and status of the new tenant settlements comes from an 1836 dispute between the priest of Oapan, José Ildefonso del Castillo, and the vicar at Palula, Dionicio Crispín Urcuyo. The dispute began before independence, and the issues raised accurately reflect the situation during the last decades of the colonial period. This conflict, which crossed the chronological line dividing colony from independent state, reflects the final phase of the development cycle, one in which the social and spatial fragmentation of community was a key element.

Upon returning to Oapan in 1836 after an 11-year absence, Ildefonso del Castillo found that the vicar of Palula was no longer honoring an 1819 accord (AGN-BN 769/17, dated 1836). This agreement allowed southern valley tenants from Ameyaltepec, San Marcos Oacacingo, San Juan Tetelcingo, and Ahuelicán to freely choose whom they wanted to administer their sacraments: the priest of Oapan or the vicar of Palula.<sup>52</sup> Del Castillo supported his accusation with letters of complaint sent to him from the *cuadrillas* surrounding Palula.<sup>53</sup> Officials from Potrero, Maxela, Xalitla, and Las Mesas all stated that their communities buried their dead in the church of Ameyaltepec.<sup>54</sup> A representative of Maxela added that his *cuadrilla* gave a weekly Sunday contribution to Ameyaltepec, and a Las Mesas official complained that the Palula vicar prohibited residents of his *cuadrilla* from being buried, marrying, or baptizing their children in Ameyaltepec, which the official described as “our pueblo.” Finally, in the clearest statement, a representative from Xalitla wrote that “we are from the *cabecera* of Oapan, legitimate sons of Ameyaltepec; and given that *we recognize our pueblo*, we insist on being buried there” (AGN-BN 769/17, dated 1836, fols. 12f–13f, letter dated August 2, 1836, emphasis added). The parish priest from Oapan complained that, in defiance of the 1819 agreement and the tenants’ preference, the vicar compelled the migrants to receive the sacraments in Palula. Worse, he repeated marriages that had already been conducted in the parish of Oapan or simply charged for religious services that he had not carried out. The evidence against the Palula vicar includes a letter that he sent to a *regidor* (minor official) of Xalitla, which reveals the mellifluous

language of rigorous control with which the vicar hoped to tame an elusive and fugitive flock. After threatening the official—"if you permit anyone from the cuadrilla [of Xalitla] to be taken to Oapan to be baptized or buried without informing me, you'll wind up in jail"—he signed his letter "I am your father who loves you" (AGN-BN 769/17, dated 1836, fols. 21f-v, letter dated August 2, 1836).

In sum, the late colonial period witnessed an increasing fragmentation of society in the southern Iguala Valley around Palula. Social relations were becoming more complicated—renters dominated subrenters, mestizos apparently lived alongside Indians, and legitimate tenants planted alongside illegitimate ones, who seemed to have been able to avoid paying rents. At the same time there was a temporal division. Some tenants (permanent residents who fulfilled all the obligations that would be expected of a citizen in an Indian village) could probably trace their families back several generations at Palula. Other tenants were seasonal migrants whose main commitment was still to their home indigenous village. Then there was the imbricated space, with no clear-cut boundaries or firm procedures for determining community membership, of more permeable tenant settlements that spread through the southern valley (at Potrero, Xalitla, Contlalco, Xochicuetla, Maxela, and Las Mesas) after the core village of Palula had approached a point of effective demographic saturation and community closure. Finally, a new ecclesiastical division, and the breakdown of a compromise on shared jurisdictional claims, created an additional domain of dispute. As two priests skirmished for lucrative rights to charge for the administration of sacraments, they essentially forced mobile peasant Indians to select and define themselves according to a particular and unique spatial identity. That is, even though temporary tenant settlements might be formally unstructured, with fluid boundaries that allowed seasonal Indian migrants to meet the rights and duties of citizenship in their home villages while farming elsewhere, contentious parish priests could create problems in the identification of person with place. It was, in the end, the onerous obligations that were attached to specific locales that made fluidity in the identification of individuals with particular places problematic.

## Conclusion

The resettlement of the Iguala Valley involved a process—the creation of new communities in central New Spain—that has been little studied. Here, where Indian communities dominated the rural landscape at contact, community was often coincident with history, and place was a reflection of time, not structure. This was not the case throughout the Spanish colonies. Along the northern frontier of Mexico, for example, state mechanisms that established community structures were more

fully in place, and the process of migration and the formation of new settlements has been more fully studied (see, e.g., Alonso 1997 and Nugent 1993). Yet, despite the fact that in the central area institutional mechanisms for the creation of new communities were not in place, indigenous community formation (one of several examples of place making) did occur. The Iguala Valley offered a rather unusual terrain on which this process could come about. It was highly attractive: a fertile, expansive plain near a major market center (Taxco) and pierced by a major trade corridor (between the central highlands and the Pacific coast). Thus, it attracted migrants. Perhaps most significantly, given the nature of pre-Hispanic political geography and the vast area dominated by the cabecera of Tepecuacuilco, after the congregaciones and 16th-century epidemics, the Iguala Valley was left virtually bare of settlements. Only a few communities remained in the northern valley (Iguala, Cocula, Tepecuacuilco, Huitzucó, Tlaxmalac, and Mayanalán), as the majority of sujetos were swept up and deposited together in a single cabecera: Tepecuacuilco. Finally, land tenure patterns (the domination of a single vast holding by one or two proprietors little interested in direct involvement in commercial agriculture) were such that they discouraged capitalization of agricultural production and the creation of a rural proletariat. Rather, once most ranchers had been expelled, the most attractive areas were opened up to tenancy, prompting the massive migration of the late colonial period.

In essence, then, Palula and its surrounding villages represent a process of "counter-colonization," characterized by the immigration of indigenous peasants who established their own identities in tenant cuadrillas. Yet, if communities were reconstituted through the process of migration into the Iguala Valley or if Indian peasants who moved into the valley tried to reestablish community structures in new locales, then an important question arises: What constitutes an indigenous community, and what does "survival" mean when a deep historical time frame is viewed from the perspective of the present? Such a perspective of place making in the Iguala Valley reveals that myriad shades of identity existed beyond those places continuously occupied from before contact. Rather, the identification of a place with indigenous society was often the result of formative processes throughout the colonial period and beyond. Thus, Mezcala, which was recognized as an indigenous community throughout the colonial period, was resettled in the early 17th century (just after the congregaciones) by residents of Palula who had previously been forcibly moved to the cabecera of Tepecuacuilco. Tuxpan was also resettled by Indians from other villages; it, too, was officially recognized as an indigenous community by the colonial state, although it was tarnished by a name, Pueblo Nuevo, that indelibly identified it as a discontinuous settlement. Palula was also

colonized by indigenous migrants but was unsuccessful in ever obtaining full recognition as an indigenous community from the colonial state. Nevertheless, its structural and social organization was in essence very similar to that of formally constituted Indian villages. And this facet of community development created a line of tension during the late colonial and early independence periods, when established residents and more recent temporary migrants were divided in their commitment to community (manifested, among other ways, by their willingness to construct a new church).

In contrast to Palula, Maxela and Xalitla, late 18th-century destinations of migrants from the Balsas River valley, maintained an indigenous ethnic identity well into the 20th century. As these two villages attracted more and more migrants, however, they seem to have lost one important aspect of indigenous identity: monolingual communication in Nahuatl. In Xalitla, this occurred in the 1930s, when the opening up of the new paved highway to Acapulco attracted a stream of nonindigenous migrants. Maxela also continued to attract newcomers, although an important formal aspect of indigenous identity was preserved when community members joined together to buy a piece of the hacienda of Palula when it was broken up in 1892.<sup>55</sup> Today, its communal property regime, although of recent origin, is that of a pre-Hispanic indigenous village. Thus, the range of “indigenous” identities of villages such as Maxela, Xalitla, and Palula (all originally formed by Indian migrants from the Balsas River valley), as well as that of Mezcala and Tuxpan, illustrate the ways in which politics and demographics have been interwoven as factors affecting indigenous community formation and demise—place making and place breaking—during the colonial period and beyond.

## Notes

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*General note on archival sources.* Abbreviations appearing in archival source citations refer to the locations of documents in the various *ramos* (branches) of the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City: BN = Bienes Nacionales; C = Congregaciones; GP = General de Parte; H = Historia; I = Indios; M = Mercedes; RC = Reales Cédulas; RCD = Reales Cédulas Duplicadas; T = Tierras. Additional abbreviations are as follows: exp. = expediente (bound dossier); f = recto; fol. = folio; s.n. = unnumbered; v = verso.

1. The term *pueblo* refers to an indigenous community whose independent political status was recognized by the colonial authorities. As such, it was entitled to a minimal land base, called the “fundo legal,” that measured 600 varas in each of the four cardinal

directions from a central point, such as the community church or plaza. The unit was, therefore, a square (or its areal equivalent) measuring 1,200 by 1,200 varas on each side. After independence, the question of the fundo legal became moot. As a category, “Indian villages” were officially abolished and the grant of the fundo legal disappeared.

2. Some, such as Palula, lost this identity during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Others, such as Maxela and Xalitla to the south, have retained it (at least up to the present generation or the immediately preceding one). However, all such Iguala Valley communities, many of which acquired and then lost an indigenous identity, have a common origin in the tenant *cuadrillas* (tenant settlements) of the late 1700s.

3. The captains of the *cuadrillas* often became the intermediaries between the owner and renters, effectively controlling the admission of new tenants. One interesting point, beyond the scope of the present article, is how 20th-century *ejido* grants (parcels that the postrevolutionary agrarian reform expropriated from large landholders and ceded, ostensibly only in usufruct, to poor peasants) emulated traditional boundaries of *cuadrilla*-centered use that date to the colonial period.

4. See Carmagnani 1972; Greenow 1981; Robinson 1979, 1981, 1990a; and Swann 1979, 1982, 1989, 1990. See also the chapters in the volumes edited by Thomas Calvo and Gustavo López (1988) and David Robinson (1990b). Nancy Farriss’s 1978 article is noteworthy for its clear and innovative theoretical focus. Kevin Gosner (1979), W. George Lovell and William Swezey (1990), and David Robinson and Carolyn McGovern (1980) discuss the implications of migration for the closed corporate peasant community model, as does Farriss. A distinction must be maintained, however, between “residence” and “membership.” A high percentage of migrant residents in an Indian village says nothing about their integration into the community’s structure of rights and duties: Residence is not coincident with community membership, and in-migration does not necessarily imply openness in corporate structure (see the discussion in Cole 1984). Particularly noteworthy in regard to migration studies are the works of Andeanists: Powers 1995, Saignes 1985, Wrightman 1990, and, in particular, Sánchez-Albornoz 1982, 1983a, 1983b. The demographic bent is true even of Michael Swann’s (1989, 1990) excellent studies. A notable exception is R. Douglas Cope’s (1994) exploration of the dominant ideology of race and its redefinition by the urban poor of Mexico City, the quintessential Mecca of rural migrants.

5. The concern of globalization studies with the social production of space, that is, the emergence or construction of identity and locality in the face of an apparent erosion of social and geographical boundaries, has led to much recent anthropological and sociological literature on the subject. See Appadurai 1986, 1990, 1995; Friedman 1988, 1990, 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Lash and Urry 1994; and Roberts 1992; as well as the articles in the volumes edited by Richard Fardon (1995), Mike Featherstone (1990), Featherstone et al. (1995), Edwin Wilmsen and Patrick McAllister (1996), and Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (1996).

6. These settlements included urban barrios and neighborhoods as well as a wide range of rural settlements and structures (of *pegujaleros*, *aparceros*, *arrendatarios*, *peones acasillados*, etc.—all terms that refer to slightly different types of rental or sharecropping arrangements). Place making was also affected by the political status afforded new settlements in changing state structures. In this sense, a particularly important watershed was independence, which led to significant changes in the rights of indigenous villages and migrant *cuadrillas*. The post-1915 agrarian reform constituted a second clear break in the nature of these two types of settlements, which in the Iguala Valley often became

*comunidades agrarias* (agrarian communities with communal landholdings, at times comprising several actual villages but recognized as single legal administrative units after the agrarian reform) and ejidos, respectively.

7. For a discussion of this key concept in Williams's writing, see Eldridge and Eldridge 1994, particularly chapters 6 and 7, and O'Connor 1989:83–85 and *passim*. Williams discusses this concept in *Politics and Letters* (1979:156–165).

8. For an existential or phenomenological interpretation of place, see Pickles 1985 and Relph 1976, 1985. The validity of ontogenetic considerations, based on the child's increasing awareness and incorporation of the environment, is suggested by Yi-Fu Tuan (1974: ch. 5, 1977: ch. 3; note de Certeau's observation that "to practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood" [1984:110] and his comments that follow). At a different, indeed opposite, extreme, place itself may become an active subject in the process of social reproduction. Keith Basso (1990a, 1990b, 1996) discusses landscape as a guardian of social mores; Amos Rapoport (1972) explores how aboriginal land preserves the historical memory of Dreamtime events. For landscape as the product, not precursor, of culture, see Schama 1995; for a definitive study of the idea of "nature" in Western thought, see Glacken 1967.

9. On the two-republic system, see Mörner 1970; on nucleation and rationality, see Crouch et al. 1982; on the right of free movement, see Zavala 1948. One characteristic of colonial exploitation was an administration of identity that required clear demarcations of space and society. Priests, *corregidores* (chief Spanish judicial and administrative officers in the provincial administrative unit referred to as a "corregimiento"), and *alcaldes mayores* (officers similar in function to the *corregidores*), indigenous *oficiales de república* (village officials), and miners (among other colonial entrepreneurs) all depended to varying degrees on resources (sacramental fees, tribute, *repartimiento* [forced wage-labor draft issued by viceregal authorities in favor of Spanish entrepreneurs], and community obligations) that demanded a precise social and spatial definition of colonized subjects. In the case of mid-19th-century migration from the Balsas River basin to the southern Iguala Valley, it is clear that the question of community allegiance came up as a result of a jurisdictional dispute between two priests for the right to charge for sacraments (see section below under heading "Consummated Community and a Fractured Society").

10. One of the contributions of de Certeau's approach, useful in considering the disruptive effects of migration on state designs and procedures for social engineering, is his focus on the implications of very ordinary activities (e.g., cooking, walking, and reading) for social discipline and order.

11. The terms *flight*, *drift*, and *dispersal* are those used by Farris (1978). For general perspectives on the "new regional geography," see Gilbert 1988 and Pudup 1988. For an overview of locality studies, written by its adherents, see "New Perspectives on the Locality Debate," a special issue of *Environment and Planning A* (1991). The assertion of Doreen Massey and her colleagues of the particularity of place reopened issues of an unfortunate long-standing debate on the "anarchy of regional empiricism." This is Peter Haggett's (1965:182) phrase, in apparent reference to the nomothetic versus idiographic debate in geographical theory and methodology between Richard Hartshorne and Fred Shaeffer (see Entrikin and Brunn 1989; Gilbert 1988).

12. This trend is recognized even by spatial geographers; see Wolpert 1964. For a discussion of the role of mathematical models and scientific metaphors of rationality in both neoclassical and

Marxist economic geography, see the work of Trevor Barnes (e.g., 1992, 1996). Stuart Holland (1976:10–11) notes that August Lösch is perhaps most clear on this when Lösch states that "capitulation to reality is as useful as the advice of those who on principle contradict no-one—a contemptible attitude that is satisfied to accept one's era rather than serving it. No! The real duty of the economist is not to explain our sorry reality, but to improve it." But after citing him, Holland criticizes Lösch for employing "mathematics not to test reality in an econometric sense, but to sophisticate the regularity and symmetry conditions of the theoretical model" (1976:11).

13. Massey 1973 offers a critique of traditional locational geography, and Massey 1991 discusses the importance of spatial considerations in countering Harvey's more universal Marxist analysis (see also Massey 1984). David Livingstone refers to this new regionalism as "historical-geographical materialism" (1992:331).

14. The similarity of certain Marxist and modernizing discourses has often been noted. The class consciousness of the former and the rational actions of the latter are both based on detachment from loyalties to place, ethnicity, and gender; and proletarianization functions as the radical equivalent of changes in Parsonian pattern variables.

15. Palula had 119 married couples, 134 men over 14 years old, and 172 women over 12 (García Pimentel 1897).

16. The case is mentioned in AGN-C/168, dated 1604. Peter Gerhard (1972:438, n. 9) cites a manuscript, which I have not had the opportunity to consult, in the Bancroft Library ("Plano geográfico de una parte de la América septentrional . . . Santos Alonso Guerra") that shows the three principal points at which branches of the royal highway crossed the Balsas River: Mezcala, Totolcintla, and Talcozauhtitlan. The Mezcala crossing quickly became the principal route between Mexico City and Acapulco.

17. For this land grant, see AGN-I 30/251, dated 1689.

18. For this reason, when the many indigenous communities and small hamlets in the Balsas River valley were congregated, the majority were moved to San Francisco Ozomatlán, a sujeto of Oapan, and not to the cabecera; see AGN-C exp. 179, dated 1604.

19. The interpretation of landscape as "refuge" and "prospect" is taken from Jay Appleton (1975, 1990). He applies the terms in a quite different sense, but the metaphor is apt for the ideal poles of attraction that entice migrants.

20. See AGN-C/168, dated 1604, which also states that this number will change "according to the season and the necessities of transport."

21. The quotes around "survive" indicate the problematic nature of this concept in colonial historiography. Although there is little documentation on Mezcala for the greater part of the colonial period, in the late 18th century it is mentioned as "a small Indian hamlet" (*población corta de yndios*). By that time, it had its own vicarage and two Indian *alcaldes*; see AGN-H 578b/fols. 154f–162v, dated 1794; see also the list of villages in AGN-T 3601/8, dated 1780.

22. For slightly earlier evidence of out-migration from Oapan (although the precise destinations are not mentioned), see AGN-I 24/163, dated 1667.

23. See AGN-I 30/251, dated 1689. The actual language of the document states that Iguala was "ancillary (*dependiente*) to the litigation that those of Tepecuacuilco have undertaken with don Alonso de Rivera."

24. See quote in section under heading "Early Struggles for Place: Land Rights and Regional Structures of Authority" from AGN-I 28/262, dated 1686. In AGN-I 30/179, dated 1689, Ayala repeats the charge of damages caused by the fact that the naturales

of Oapan “were taking advantage that those of Tepequacuilco [seek] to establish the aforementioned settlement [at Palula].”

25. Sources on Tuxpan include AGN-T 3518, s.n., in letter from Garay V. to Juan Nicolás, dated September 6, 1719; AGN-T 3514/2, fols. 244f–245f, deposition, dated November 23, 1716, by the “gobernador, alcaldes, común y naturales del pueblo nuevo nombrado San Andrés Tuspa”; AGN-RCD 20/524, fols. 312f–v, for population figures from the Iguala Valley in a list that runs from 1644 to 1692. Tuxpan only appears in 1656, although it was clearly inhabited after that date. A reference to a gobernador of Tuxpan is found in AGN-I 38/176, dated 1713.

26. For an example of the connection between new settlements and safe highways, see Nader 1990:86.

27. The writ of protection was apparently not to their rights to settle in Palula, as the Indians claimed, but to maintain the status quo of their settlement in the interim that the dispute was resolved. It was signed by the viceroy conde de Paredes (1680–86).

28. Testimony taken in Palula on January 7, 1729; see AGN-T 3518/2, dated 1729, 33 unnumbered folios at end of document.

29. William Taylor recognizes the composiciones of the 1640s as a benchmark in the rural history of southern New Spain and states that “these composiciones confirmed title to many pieces of land that had been acquired informally by estates without written title. From this point on, the history of the hacienda seems to be one of uninterrupted growth” (1972:6–7).

30. Generalized composiciones in New Spain had occurred in 1591, 1612, 1631, and 1645 and would reoccur in 1743 and 1777.

31. For example, in 1757 residents of Ameyaltepec, a barrio of Oapan, requested that they be given pueblo status. An investigation was carried out, and as a result of the favorable opinion Ameyaltepec’s chapel was consecrated, although a gobernador was not elected (AGN-T 3213/1, dated 1757).

32. Eric Van Young refers to the “transcendental importance of the symbolic resonances of these physical remains” (1996:149, n. 32). For an account of the deliberate destruction of churches in the sujetos of Contlalco, Acaquila, Mexcaltepec, and Aguacatlan when they were congregated in their cabecera of Taxco el Viejo, see AGN-T 2754/3, dated 1603. An inventory was taken of each church and the ornaments transferred to the cabecera.

33. For a discussion of the significance of a church bell in establishing a community’s presence, see the case of Tateposco in Van Young 1996:148, n. 31.

34. Until recently, such an arrangement could still be observed in indigenous villages of the Balsas River valley whose churches did not yet have towers.

35. By the time of the complaint, the bell had been recovered and returned by some soldiers on their way to Acapulco. They caught the mulatto who had stolen it and remitted him to a Mexico City jail. The litigants from Palula imply that the mulatto was in Ayala’s service.

36. This was not simply altruistic conduct, although, undoubtedly, de la Borda’s character and interest in resolving the problems of grain supply to the mines and city played a significant role in his actions. But, in general, an abundance of land and a low population density in the Iguala Valley maintained a downward pressure on land rents, and it was leasing of the tools of production—plows and teams of oxen—that provided the best return on capital investment.

37. See Wood 1990 for a summary treatment of colonial legislation on the amount of land to which Indian villages were entitled. García Martínez 1990 provides an excellent overview of the creation of 18th-century “Indian” pueblos by migrant *castas* (ethnically mixed residents of the colony) and others who had no

historical ties to places that were newly assigned pueblo status. He is one of the few historians who has paid attention to this process.

38. The remaining data and citations in this paragraph are from the same document.

39. Chilpancingo was about sixty kilometers due south, Ajuchitlán about one hundred kilometers due west, and San Marcos (if the San Marcos referred to is S. M. Oacacingo) twenty kilometers to the southeast.

40. Bernardo García Martínez (1990) notes in regard to late colonial pueblo formation that the Spanish state might have promoted the creation of new pueblos made up of both castas and indios as a convenient means of acquiring control over an important segment of the population and ensuring their appearance as tributaries.

41. These late colonial petitions for *pueblo de indios* status are in need of study, as García Martínez (1990) notes. They are, in effect, the structural and ahistorical 18th-century variant of *títulos primordiales* from the previous century, whereby historical rights to place were alleged, often through “origin myths” (see Gruzinski 1993: ch. 3; Lockhart 1991b).

42. The difference between the right to remain in Palula, as exemplified by the successful petition of Ameyaltepec and San Marcos migrants (AGN-I 71/13, dated 1798), and the right of Palula to the 600 varas “*por razón de pueblo*” (in virtue of being a pueblo; AGN-M 83/fols. 19v–21f, dated 1794; AGN-I 69/331, dated 1794; and AGN-T 1264/5, dated 1795) should be kept clear. The first right, that of Indians’ freedom of movement, was generally recognized by the colonial state if tribute obligations were met. The second right, that of individuals with no historical right to settlement being granted pueblo status, was much less common.

43. Note that, in the interrogatorio of 1794, the witnesses were to be asked both whether the Palula church had all the paraments necessary for administering the sacraments and if it had a vicar. The church, or chapel, was probably still not repaired at that time, and the vicar probably resided in Mezcala (Mezcala is stated to be a vicarage in AGN-H 578b/fols. 154f–162v, dated 1794).

44. By 1800, and probably commencing several decades earlier, Palula had a capitán de cuadrilla (AGN-I 71/13, dated 1798). His duties undoubtedly included administering the details of land assignment and the business of rent collection. By the late 19th century, most of the other cuadrillas also had their capitanes.

45. For an excellent diachronic approach to regional formation, see Paasi 1986.

46. This metaphor was used by Alan Warde (1985) to refer to Massey’s writing on spatial processes.

47. These families would have included those in the cuadrillas south of Palula (Coacoyula, Las Mesas, Maxela, Potrero, Guajitlal, Contlalco, Carrisal, Xalitla, Xochicuetlan, Real de Limón, and Atzcala) and perhaps a few to the north (Sabana Grande, Sasamulco, Zapotitlan, and Tecuescontitlan); see Figure 1.

48. This growth probably reflected a dramatic yet temporary mass exodus from Ahuelicán, a beleaguered village at the northern extreme of the Balsas River basin, which remains indigenous today despite heavy out-migration during the colonial period (see Amith in press: ch. 6).

49. The same rigorous bond was also sought between person and ethnicity. See Cope 1994 for a discussion of the disjunction between the “coherence” of elite ethnic categorizations and the challenge of plebeian responses.

50. See, for example, Dehouve 1990. This process is still in need of research.

51. AGN-BN 929/55, dated 1807, mentions the vicar’s residence in Mezcala, and AGN-BN 769/17, dated 1836, mentions an 1819 agreement between the parish priest of Oapan and the vicar of

Palula. The vicarage may have been moved from Mezcala as a result of the War of Independence.

52. See particularly the vicar's letter dated April 26, 1836 (AGN-BN 769/17, dated 1836, fols. 7f–8v).

53. Besides the four settlements named in the text (Potrero, Maxela, Xalitla, and Las Mesas), which are easily correlated to modern villages, there are two additional *cuadrillas* whose location has not been determined: Capziris (probably for Capires) and Copaltepecoitic (which had migrants from San Juan Tetelcingo and was probably located near the Balsas River close to Mezcala).

54. Ameyaltepec is the only village in the Balsas River basin that still buries its dead in the church courtyard. I have not been able to locate Potrero, although it was apparently located near Maxela and Las Mesas. Las Mesas disappeared during the late 19th or early 20th century. Maxela residents maintained close ties to Ameyaltepec (the modern name of Ameyaltepec appearing after the mid-19th century) and brought offerings to the church during major religious festivals through to the early 20th century. Relations between Ameyaltepec and Xalitla soured between 1915 and 1925 when both attempted to gain control of the land parcel named Xalitla, which then belonged to Miguel Montúfar. Xalitla was awarded the *ejido*, but while it was being processed, Montúfar illegally sold the land, no longer his, to Ameyaltepec. The following year, when peasants from both villages tried to farm the land, a skirmish broke out and two Ameyaltepequeños were killed. Ameyaltepequeños refer to Maxela as an ex-ranch of their village. They also interpret the toponym "Maxela" as derived from the Nahuatl root *maxal*, referring to "bifurcation" or "splitting," and give this as evidence of the origin of Maxela as an offshoot of Ameyaltepec. The history of relations between Ameyaltepec and Xalitla is not clearly remembered. Nevertheless, old Xalitla residents sometimes refer to Ameyaltepec as "Calpan," literally "on the houses," a term often used in newer settlements to refer to home or original villages.

55. Lorenzo Gómez of Maxela bought the property surrounding the village in 1892. Later, in the 1920s, when offered the chance, the community inserted this property within the regime of *bienes comunales* (communal property), a type of property that is almost always associated with indigenous villages that have property rights dating to the colonial period. Residents of Ameyaltepec also bought land communally, selecting José García to acquire a parcel of the ex-hacienda of Palula named Ameyaltepec. With the agrarian reform, however, they refused to place this land within either a communal or a private property regime; as a result it was expropriated from José García's son and given to the village as an *ejido*. There was no effective switch in ownership, however, as the property rights of the descendants of those who had acquired the land through García were respected. It is now officially an *ejido*, although within the community it is administered like private property.

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