

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE LACANDON  
COMMUNITY OF Nahá

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE LACANDON  
COMMUNITY OF NAHÁ

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Authors who have written about the Lacandon Maya over the last thirty years have worked to correct years of inaccurate reporting about the Lacandon's heritage, isolation, and unchanged culture. Early authors viewed the Lacandon within the context of the ethnographic and geographic present and neglected to consider how the conquest and colonization process affected demographics and culture change. Recent works, on the other hand, address the effects of historical processes on culture change. While some similarities exist between the modern Lacandon and those described by past reporters, contemporary authors recognize these not as similarities between the Lacandon and ancient Maya who populated Classic Period sites in the region, but as aspects of continuity between the modern Lacandon and the ethnographic or historic Lacandon. Although the record indicates continuity in some respects, a common element in the course of documented Lacandon

history is gradual cultural change as a result of the Lacandon's interaction with outsiders. Although early authors often minimized these cultural modifications, in recent years such changes have become important to Lacandon scholars attempting to understand the Lacandon's past, present, and future.

Dramatic alterations in Lacandon society coincide with this period of revised interpretations of Lacandon history and culture change. The driving force behind the current cultural changes is the transformation of the Lacandon economy from subsistence agriculture organized by the domestic mode of production to petty commodity production, which incorporates subsistence agriculture and the manufacture of goods for tourists. The rise of entrepreneurial activity in combination with subsistence agriculture and petty commodity production constitutes another mode of production. The transitioning economy has reconfigured several aspects of Lacandon culture over the last twenty-five to thirty years.

In this thesis, I examine past reports on the Lacandon and draw from my own observations and interviews in order to delineate the current process of culture change among the Lacandon. At the same time, I show that certain factors expedite culture change and that economics proves to be a

decisive force in this process. The Lacandon participate in the various modes of production at different degrees of intensity, and as a result, their experiences, relationships, and consumer practices diverge along economic lines. An important component of my study is an investigation of how modes of production dictate social relations and consumer trends. Because the Lacandon household serves as the basic unit of production regardless of economic activity, differences in lifestyle begin at the household level. A woman and her husband, sometimes aided by their children, perform complementary roles in production. Although women and men cooperate in their productive output and I discuss men's economic responsibilities in relation to the various modes of production, as well as consider how their lives have changed, I focus on women's productive roles and changes in their lives in response to their family's investment in a given economic activity.

Some publications in recent years specifically address women's lives (Marion Singer 1999; McGee and Gonzales 1999) or include sections that describe the lives of women (Boremansé 1998; McGee 2002; Slinker 2005), but the greater part of the Lacandon's ethnographic history documents the lives and experiences of men. Anthropologists' failure to

acknowledge women's roles in various activities relates not only to the androcentric nature of anthropology's history but also to the focus of previous research and Lacandon social norms. Several studies conducted with the Lacandon (Bruce 1982; Maler 1903; McGee 1990; Nations 1980; Tozzer 1978 [1907]) concentrate on religion and agriculture, activities associated primarily with Lacandon men whom male anthropologists are able to form socially acceptable relationships. McGee (2002:111) reports that only through prolonged interaction with the Lacandon was he able to develop close communicative relationships with some women who avoided interactions with him earlier in his career. As a woman, I found that women were far more likely to communicate with me than were men. On several occasions, women asked me questions upon request from their husbands who rarely spoke to me directly. Because formal interactions with men proved difficult, I rely on informal observations and conversations with men, interviews with women, and published material in an attempt to access men's lives.

The limited discussion of Lacandon women in the available academic resources forced me to consider the repercussions of excluding men from my research entirely. Women's lives closely correspond to the lives of the men in

their households and not including men in my discussion would limit this work to a one-sided representation of the Lacandon. An accurate presentation of Lacandon women's lives requires an understanding of their relationships and interactions with men. By focusing on economics, I gained access to an area of life in which both women and men participate.

### Methodology

Most Lacandon Maya live in the lowlands of southeastern Chiapas, Mexico in three communities, Lacanhá Chan Sayab, Mensäbäk, and Nahá. However, my interest in the Lacandon arose before I ever traveled to Chiapas or met a Lacandon individual. In the summer of 2004 while on a study abroad trip to the Yucatán as an undergraduate, I enrolled in a Yucatec Maya language course instructed by a Lacandon Maya speaker. While I learned some Yucatec, I also became acquainted with the Lacandon dialect. The following summer, I traveled to Chiapas to the communities of Lacanhá and Nahá, where I continued my language instruction and began interviewing Lacandon women about their marriages and the allocation of labor. My interest in the Lacandon economy and culture change developed after I visited both communities and witnessed the differences between the two.

Lacanhá is located along a road frequently traveled by tourists visiting nearby ruins whereas Nahá and Mensábäk are in a remote area that attracts fewer tourists. I decided to conduct my thesis research in the community of Nahá in the summer of 2006, partially because a fellow graduate student from my university conducted her research in Lacanhá in 2004 but also because of Nahá's location. The importance of this geographical consideration relates to tourism. Although tourism plays an important role in the economy in Nahá and Lacanhá, the Lacandon in Nahá do not yet cater to tourists within their community to the same degree as those in Lacanhá. I am not suggesting that the Lacandon in Nahá oppose tourism in their community or that they rely less on money earned from tourists. Rather, Nahá's remote location limits tourist traffic to those willing or able to seek out transportation and traverse difficult terrain to arrive there. Tourists who make the journey to Nahá encounter limited accommodations and discover that Nahá lacks the artisan shops present in Lacanhá.

Although a few tourists traveled through Nahá in the summer of 2006, in order for the Lacandon in Nahá to make sales to tourists, they generally have to travel to archaeological sites or nearby tourist destinations. As a

result, the economic transformation from subsistence agriculture to a combined approach of agriculture and tourism has been a gradual one in which the Lacandon in Nahá have chosen to participate at varying degrees of intensity.

Ultimately, Nahá proved to be an excellent location to investigate economically driven culture change because several modes of production currently exist in Nahá and the Lacandon combine and invest in their economic ventures in different ways, which produces disparate returns. Because I conducted my research in Nahá, my findings apply primarily to this community. Lacandon communities differ in their economic circumstances, thus what may be true for Nahá may differ in Lacanhá or Mensäbäk.

I conducted fieldwork in Nahá in the summer of 2006 from June until August. I rented my living quarters from two widows, who I also paid to prepare my meals. In addition to observing and interviewing my hosts, I sought out their female family members who I interviewed over the course of the summer. I formally interviewed a total of eight women, although I conducted informal interviews throughout my stay. While I regret not interviewing more people, the reserved nature of the Lacandon poses difficulties when attempting to find informants.

Consequently, I relied on participant observation as another method to gather data. I spent a great deal of time working with the widows to complete various tasks. I also frequently interacted with the widows' in-laws and daughters; one of the daughters served as my primary informant throughout the summer.

### Overview

In Chapter Two, I examine earlier writings about the Lacandon and correct what I believe to be misrepresentations in these accounts. I also offer a discussion of the Lacandon's movement into the lowland region. Next, I combine archaeological, historical, and ethnographic data in order to demonstrate that the Lacandon, despite claims to the contrary, not only have a history of interaction and trade with outsiders, but through these interactions, they encountered foreign materials and concepts, which they incorporated into their daily lives. Additionally, I present an ethnographic history of the Lacandon drawn from the work of several scholars because these works shed light on the cultural norms of the Lacandon in the past, as well as indicate cultural change over time. Although I maintain that various elements of Lacandon culture have changed over time, I also

argue that in the last thirty years a number of factors have accelerated the rate and types of change occurring.

In Chapter Three, I begin by providing a brief overview of Chiapas' economic history with a focus on factors that have affected the Lacandon's way of life. Next, I examine the modes of production that compose the Lacandon economy. While subsistence agriculture dominated the Lacandon's historic economy and continues to play a role, the development of the tourism industry in the early 1980s introduced other modes of production that presented the Lacandon with viable alternatives to farming. Because the ongoing transformation of the Lacandon economy has redefined social relations and produced a number of changes in the cultural realm, I discuss these issues at length. I also address increasing consumerism among the Lacandon and speculate about the long term effects of these new developments.

In Chapter Four, I shift into a more personal mode as I draw from observations and interviews conducted with Lacandon women in the summer of 2006. I present data gathered from interviews with five women of varying ages in order to show how investment in a given economic endeavor influences the division of labor, social relationships, attitudes, lifestyles, appearances, and consumer behavior.

I also examine how education factors into the Lacandon's economic future. Additionally, this chapter illustrates a contrast between the cultural norms of the modern Lacandon and the ethnographic Lacandon discussed in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Five, I conclude by considering the Lacandon's future as younger generations grow up in a community transformed by the economic undertakings of their parents. Several features of Lacandon society once considered commonplace no longer exist or have been replaced or altered to meet the current needs of the people. Given the accelerated pace of economic and cultural change in Lacandon society over the last thirty years, I consider the prospects for the Lacandon's economic and social future. Specifically, I contemplate the social implications associated with the Lacandon's continued reliance on a cash economy. Finally, I consider whether the Lacandon will be able to maintain their relative independence from the larger capitalist society around them or whether they will be absorbed into the Mexican economy over time.

## CHAPTER II

### ASSEMBLING THE PAST: LACANDON HISTORY AND CULTURE CHANGE

Early observers and anthropologists who studied the Lacandon Maya as late as the 1980s insisted that a direct link existed between the extant Lacandon and the ancient Maya who populated the Classic Period sites of Palenque, Bonampak, and Yaxchilan. These authors considered the geographic location (southeastern Chiapas in the *Selva Lacandona* or Lacandon Jungle) (see Figure 1) of the Lacandon within the context of the ethnographic present, and viewed Lacandon cultural life ways, especially religious and ritual activity, as proof of the continuity between the ancient and modern Maya. Bruce and Perera (1982), Duby and Blom (1969), Maler (1898), Sapper (1897), Stephens (1949[1841]), and Tozzer (1978[1907]) portrayed the Lacandon as an isolated forest people, who due in part to their isolation, preserved elements of ancient Maya culture.

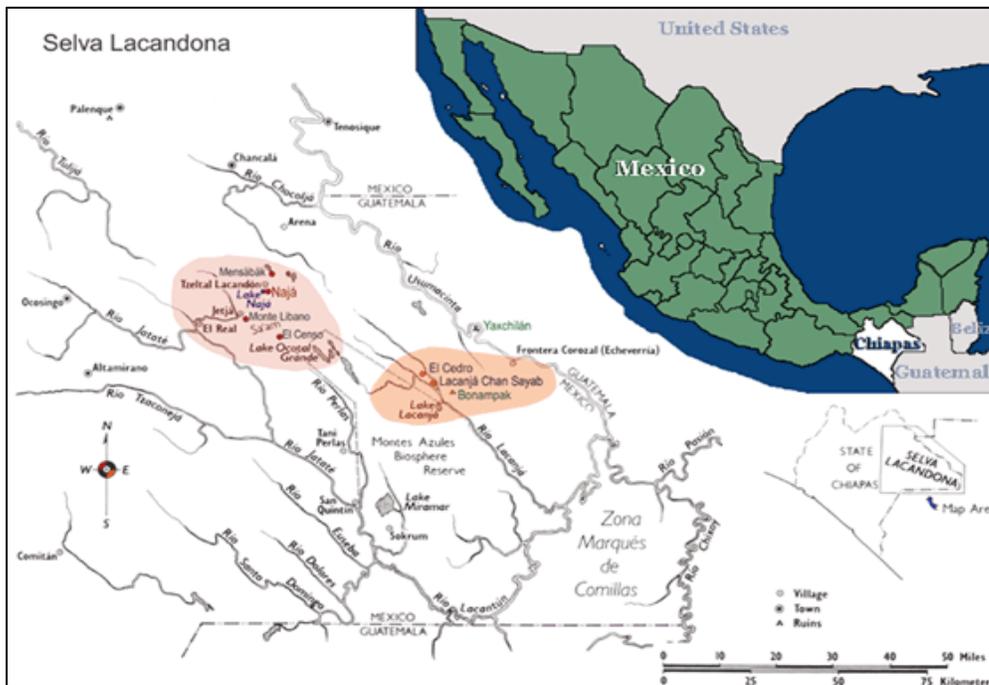


Figure 1. Map of the *Selva Lacandona* in Chiapas. Modern Lacandon communities are in the colored areas and ruins are also illustrated. ([http://www.mpi.nl/DOBES/projects/lacandon/geography\\_map.gif](http://www.mpi.nl/DOBES/projects/lacandon/geography_map.gif)).

Kashanipour identified authors who “share the interpretation that the present-day Lacandon are carriers of essential elements of ancient Maya culture” as “cultural minimalists” and applied the term “historical reductionist” to authors who “maintained that the Lacandon existed in a state of social degeneracy and decay” (2003:22,23).

Kashanipour includes Désiré Charnay, Count Byron de Prorok, Vicente de Caso-Mier, Juan Leonard, and Alfonso Villa Rojas in the historical reductionist category. Jacques and Gergette Soustelle and Frans Blom and Gertrude DUBY-Blom combined the two approaches; both husband and wife teams

perceived of Lacandon religion as a survival but respectively viewed Lacandon culture as on the verge of disappearance or in a state of decay.

The minimalist view and the reductionist perspective of the Lacandon have permeated scholarly literature well into the twentieth century. Whether attempting to salvage remnants of ancient religious practices that linked the Lacandon to the ancient Maya or describing the Lacandon in a state of isolation-induced simplicity and cultural decay, both approaches ignored "the distinct changes that occurred within Lacandon society over the past two centuries" (Kashanipour 2003:30). Recent works on the Lacandon, on the other hand, emphasize a historical approach that considers the dynamic nature of culture change over time (see Kashanipour 2003; McGee 2002; Nations 1979; Palka 2005; Slinker 2005; Thompson 1977). Current scholarship indicates that the Lacandon migrated into the area or coalesced long after the decline of the Classic Period sites in this region. The Yucatec-speaking ancestors of the Lacandon likely migrated to western Guatemala and eastern Chiapas in the eighteenth century as they fled Spanish rule (Boremanse 1998; Farriss 1984; Kashanipour 2003; McGee 2002; Nations 1979; Olson 1991; Palka 2005). Because modern Lacandon communities and cultural climates are products of a variety

of historical factors, informed explanations of them require an investigation of the historical happenstances that produced the current circumstances.

In this chapter, I present an overview of the Lacandon's history and culture as detailed by missionaries, early visitors, explorers, and anthropologists in order to illustrate that the Lacandon, past and present, hardly resemble the static and isolated people described by numerous authors. First, I briefly address a few inaccuracies and discrepancies in early works on the Lacandon that contemporary anthropologists have attempted to correct. I also discuss how and when the ancestors of the Lacandon came to occupy the region where the contemporary Lacandon reside. Second, I discuss archaeological evidence that reflects the Lacandon's contact with other people and their integration of outside materials with locally manufactured items. In the third section, I examine a number of successive works on the Lacandon in order to provide insight into the lives and material culture of the ethnographic Lacandon, as well as to demonstrate subtle changes in Lacandon culture over time. Although authors who focused on Lacandon religion and their state of isolation often minimized or overlooked cultural modifications, they provided detailed accounts of

their experiences that indicate the Lacandon interacted with outsiders extensively, and through their interactions, they acquired new materials and concepts. I provide a historical perspective with a focus on cultural alterations in this chapter because in the next chapter I show that changes that have occurred in Lacandon culture within the last thirty years, while rapid and extensive, are the most recent examples of an ongoing process of adjustment and adaptation. However, although the Lacandon are accustomed to change, alterations in Lacandon culture in the distant past produced fewer broad spectrum changes than those brought about by the recent reconfiguration of the Lacandon's economy.

#### Rectifying the Past

In recent publications, the first inaccuracy found in earlier writings that authors attempt to clarify is the incorrect association of Yucatec-speaking Lacandon with the Chol speakers who occupied sites such as Palenque and Yaxchilan and Chol-speaking Lacandon who the Spanish encountered in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Boremanse 1998; Kashanipour 2003; McGee 1990, 2002; Nations 1979; Nations and Nigh 1980; Palka 1998, 2005; Slinker 2005; Thompson 1977). Another factor that these

authors address is the rather loose application of the term Lacandon by the Spanish in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Spaniards "used the term Lacandon to refer to all unpacified and non-Christian people in what is today southeastern Chiapas and northwestern Guatemala, in particular the area bounded by the Usumacinta, Pasión, and Jatate River drainages" (McGee 2002:4). In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, the Spanish forcibly removed the Chol and Choltis "who survived the disease and disruption that followed the Spanish conquest" and relocated them "in Spanish-controlled villages in the jungle's western and southern fringes" (Nations and Nigh 1980:2). Yucatec speakers who moved into the region immediately following the removal of the Chol and Cholti in the late seventeenth century also faced forcible removal at the hands of the Spanish. After depopulating the area, the Spanish left the lowland area, which they considered inhospitable and destitute.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, other Yucatec-speakers slowly drifted from the Petén area and Usumacinta-Pasión river valleys into the eastern Chiapas lowlands previously inhabited by the Chol and other Maya (Boremanse 1998; Farriss 1984; Kashanipour 2003; McGee 2002; Nations 1979, 1980; Palka 1998, 2005; Thompson 1977).

These Yucatec-speakers inherited the Lacandon name, which has been a source of confusion among scholars and students alike. Palka (2005:461) described the area the Yucatec-speaking Lacandon occupied along the modern Chiapas and Guatemala border as a refuge or "free zone" for the Lacandon and other Maya resisting colonial rule. It was likely that within this zone "the Lacandon people and culture were created by the interaction and intermarriage of various lowland refugees" (Palka 2005:73). Colonized Maya (and free Maya as well) filtered into the unconquered zones. Although he focused on another area of Mayan refuge, Jones argued that we must "understand the frontier phenomena as a political, economic, and demographic process" in order to "grasp that the image of the static, isolated places beyond is a cultural construct" (1989:21). An investigation of Lacandon history should begin with these considerations in mind.

#### Archaeological Investigations

Although there have been few excavations of Lacandon sites, studies conducted by Joel Palka in Guatemala and near the Chiapas and Guatemala border provide material evidence that corresponds with the ethnographic and historic record. Known Lacandon archaeological sites

stretch from northeastern Guatemala south and west through the Petén and into the modern Chiapas and Guatemala border area near the Usumacinta, Pasión, and Jatate River drainages (Figure 2). Lacandon sites excavated in the southwest Petén include El Caobal, Matamangos, and El Mangal; potential sites awaiting excavation in the southwestern Petén include Chacrío, Itzán, and San Juan Akul (Figure 3). In the central Petén, the excavated site of La Palmera sits near the ruins of Tikal and another possible site is located near the ruins of Yaxha (Olivares 1997; Palka 2005).

The widespread appearance of Lacandon-type incense burners (god pots) from western Belize to eastern Chiapas led Sir Eric Thompson to claim that "it is stretching credulity to the breaking point to suppose that this type rose independently in the two areas about the same time" (1977:33). While one cannot conclusively claim that the Lacandon made these incense burners, some of the vessels possess characteristics similar enough that the differences in workmanship might reflect regional or temporal variations in manufacture. Past research on Lacandon lithic technology (Clark 1991) and the inclusion of drawings or pictures of lithics in ethnographic reports also proves to be a decisive factor in identifying stone

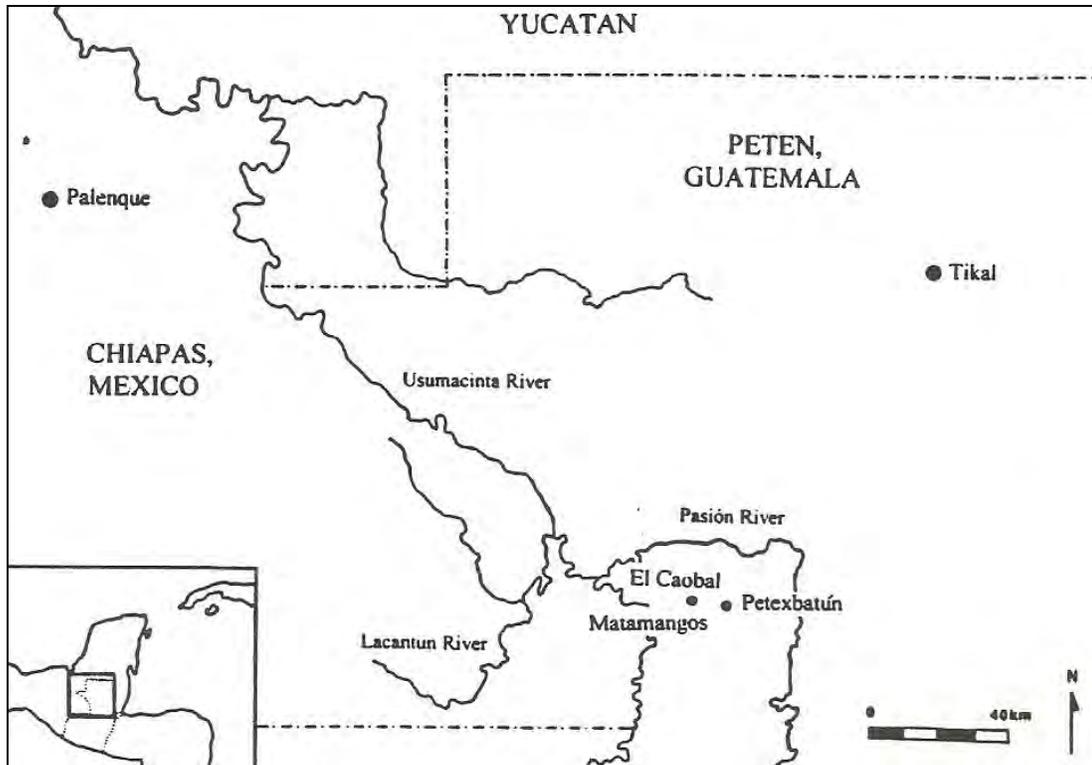


Figure 2. Map of Nineteenth Century Archaeological Sites in Guatemala. Lacandon sites straddled the area along the modern Guatemala and Chiapas border. (Map by J. Palka).

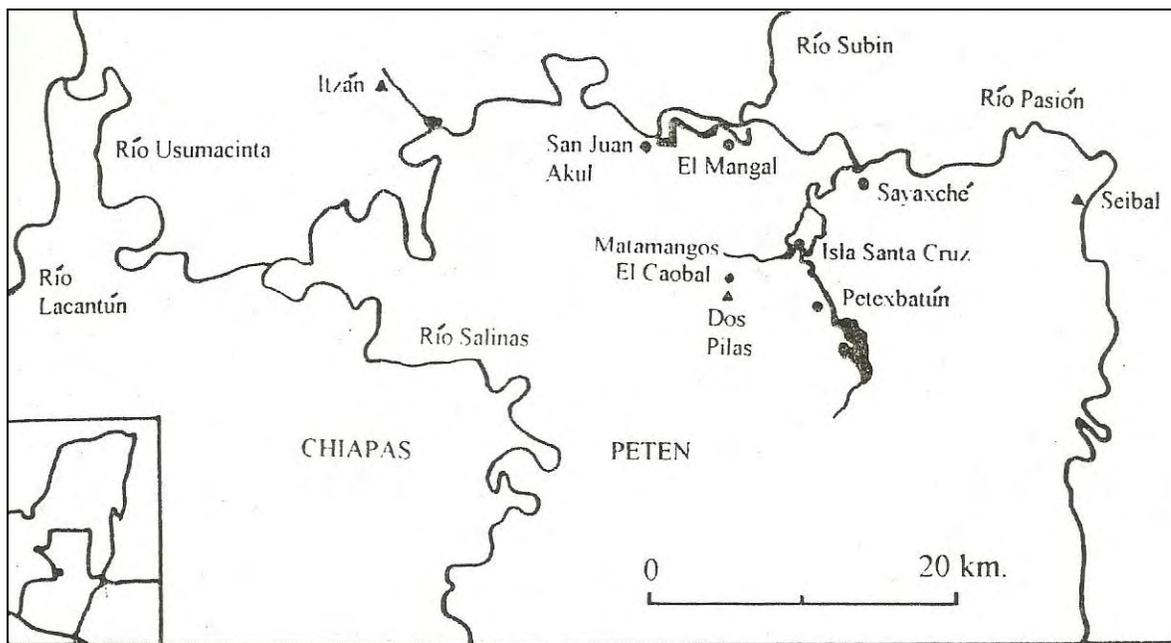


Figure 3. Map of Pasion River Region. Nineteenth century Lacandon sites, modern towns, Maya ruins, and rivers in the Pasion River area. (Map by J. Palka).

tools made by the Lacandon, even across relatively wide geographic ranges. Additionally, the descriptions of settlement patterns, house architecture, agricultural techniques, crops, and material culture assist archaeologists in the task of site reconstruction.

Word of mouth has also provided a valuable research tool in Palka's attempts to locate historic Lacandon sites. While working at the Classic Period site of Dos Pilas, informants conveyed to Palka that they knew the locations of Lacandon sites in the southwestern Petén near the Pasión River region (Palka 2005:124). Similarly, historic accounts of a Lacandon settlement near Tikal and a tentative identification of a Lacandon site in the central Petén in the 1960s led Palka to conduct an investigation in this region (Palka 2005:150). Between 1991 and 1996, members of the Lacandon Archaeology Project surveyed and excavated several historic Lacandon sites (Palka 2005:124). The publications of Joel Palka and Nora López Olivares, which resulted from their work on this project, offer insight into the residential locations and settlement patterns of the historic Lacandon, as well as indicate the degree of interaction between the Lacandon and their neighbors (Olivares 1997; Palka 2005; Palka 1998; Palka 1997; Palka and Houston 1991; Palka and Olivares 1992). Palka (2005)

perhaps offers the best source for archaeological information because he synthesizes information from previous individual and joint publications.

Rather than provide an extensive discussion of historic Lacandon archaeological sites, I present evidence uncovered in excavations conducted in association with the Lacandon Archaeology Project in order to demonstrate that Lacandon culture does not conform to the descriptions of a static and isolated people as presented by past authors. At the site of El Caobal, in addition to encountering diagnostic Lacandon artifacts, archaeologists unearthed complete and broken imported painted ceramics, glass and metal fragments, a metal pot, and whole machetes (Palka 2005:129). The site of Matamangos produced a metal fish harpoon and an axe head, as well as prismatic blades and other artifacts associated with Lacandon sites (Palka 2005:140-141). At El Mangal, the current occupants presented investigators with a machete they found while preparing the land for house construction. Archaeologists later collected sherds from at least two Lacandon god pots at the site (Palka 2005:145-146). In addition to local items, the site of La Palmera contained metal axes and knives, metal pots, glass fragments, glass medicine bottles, worked machete blades, and a metal needle (Palka

2005:156-157). Based on the combination of items of local and foreign manufacture, it seems that the Lacandon who occupied these historic sites not only interacted with outsiders but incorporated a number of foreign objects into their culture.

The archaeological record sheds light on the geographic range and material culture of Lacandon settlements, although it offers little evidence in terms of elucidating the chronological movement of the Lacandon because the sites excavated thus far appear to be contemporaneous with the ethnographic Lacandon in Chiapas. Future archaeological investigations will play a vital role in offering a timeline for the movement of the modern Lacandon's ancestors through Guatemala and into Chiapas. The fact that the historic Lacandon existed in and moved across such a large geographic area, as well as incorporated an incredibly diverse combination of local and foreign goods into their material corpus, clearly contradicts the notion of the Lacandon as an isolated and static people. Palka argues that historic Lacandon culture, as well as people, are products of a cultural "ethnogenesis" that occurred in the Colonial Period following the interaction of numerous lowland Maya groups who moved into the remote jungle area seeking refuge from

the Spanish (Palka 2005:72). It follows that if Lacandon culture as seen ethnographically is a product of this period of cultural exchange and relocation, it must be considered in light of these interactions and this period of transition.

#### Historic and Ethnographic Accounts

While archaeological evidence certainly contributes to our knowledge of Lacandon culture change over time, archival records, explorers' reports, and ethnographies prove invaluable. The history of the Yucatec-speaking Lacandon begins within the previously described free zone encompassing northwestern Guatemala and southeastern Chiapas in the late 1700s. Boremanse (1998:4-5) provided the following description of the first recorded encounters between the Lacandon and men from Palenque. In the summer of 1786, Francisco Rojas, servant to the parish priest of Palenque Manuel Joseph Calderón, encountered Lacandon men who wanted to trade forest products for iron tools. The same year, Santiago de la Cruz, another of Calderón's servants, met a Lacandon man and arranged to meet him again the next month. When de la Cruz returned, Calderón accompanied him and attempted to convert the Lacandon. Instead, an exchange occurred in which the Lacandon

presented Calderón with cacao and he offered them his cane in return. The visit concluded when the men made plans for a visit the next month. When Calderón, his brother-in-law, and his servants arrived to meet the Lacandon the following month, more than twenty men awaited them. They agreed to the creation of a settlement near their cornfields and expressed a willingness to be baptized. Several years later, Calderón formally established San José de Gracia Real eight leagues south of Palenque. While the settlement proved to be an excellent location for the men who exchanged forest products for items from town, language barriers and disinterest prevented the Lacandon from becoming Christians. Although the clergy knew Chol and Spanish, the Yucatecan-speaking Lacandon did not understand either of these languages enough to absorb the Christian teachings. Furthermore, the Lacandon encountered by Calderón continued to practice their polytheistic religion and expressed more interest in fostering trade relationships than converting to Christianity. After Calderón died in 1797, trade between those in Palenque and the forest continued and a few Lacandon remained in the settlement. By 1806, however, the Lacandon had abandoned the settlement.

Boremanse (1998:5-6) investigated the colonial documents in an effort to glean from them ethnographic information about the Lacandon. The Lacandon in San José lived near their *milpas*, in which they planted a variety of edible and utilitarian crops. In addition to farming, they hunted with bows and arrows and fished. The Lacandon lived in huts with thatched roofs and without walls; they slept in hammocks and stored food processing and cooking implements within their homes. In addition to their living quarters, Lacandon settlements had small huts where they stored ritual implements. Lacandon men wore their hair long and dressed in knee-length, coarse cotton tunics. Women wore skirts under their white tunics and wore necklaces made of various items. The Lacandon social hierarchy extended no farther than the male head of the family. A polygynous people, the Lacandon at times practiced sororal polygyny and first cousin marriage.

Priests and explorers confirmed the existence of Lacandon settlements throughout the lowlands by the 1820s. Near the Pasión River in 1814, Father Manuel de la Chica, a Dominican priest from Cobán, Guatemala, congregated thirty Lacandon, who evidently built a church and accepted Catholicism. Lack of government and church support, paired with de la Chica's failing health and his eventual murder

in 1817, prevented the success of the mission (Palka 2005:111-112). Capuchin monks performing missionary work in the Petén region of Guatemala and along the Pasión River in the 1860s and 1870s encountered Lacandon Maya in the mission community of Petexbatún. Along with other Capuchin missionaries, Fray Pedro de Llissa de Munt baptized numerous Lacandon Maya settled near the Pasión, Usumacinta, Lacantún, and Chixoy Rivers in the mid-1860s.

European and American explorers, adventure-seekers, and early ethnographers also began to offer insight into the lives of the Lacandon in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Although early anthropological works on the Lacandon focused rather narrowly on religion, these accounts provide valuable insight into Lacandon culture. While problematic at times, the written accounts of explorers and early ethnographers prove beneficial because the Lacandon continue to occupy some of the locations visited by these men. Other sites were occupied until the mid-twentieth century. Additionally, early reports that describe various aspects of society, such as settlement patterns, material culture, agricultural practices, and division of labor, provide ethnographers and archaeologists with information pertinent to the reconstruction of the past and crucial to our understanding of modern Lacandon

culture. They also supply documentation of the adjustments and changes, as well as continuity, exhibited by the Lacandon after the mid-nineteenth century missionary attempts. Finally, early ethnographic work secured a place on the anthropological map for the study of the Lacandon by future scholars.

In the 1840s, John L. Stephens and his party explored the Yucatan and traveled throughout Central America. While in Chiapas, they visited the city of Palenque and camped at the Palenque ruins. Stephens (1969[1841]:287) mentioned the Lacandon only briefly, and he referred to them as Caribs. Stephens discussed the Lacandon presence at San José de Gracia Real, but claimed that after Calderón's death, the "Caribs retired into the wilderness, and not one had appeared in the village since." Interestingly, Stephens mentioned another group, who he referred to as "Candones" or "unbaptized Indians, who live as their fathers did, acknowledging no submission to the Spaniards" (1969[1841]:195). According to Stephens, these people resided in the northeastern section of the Vera Paz district of Guatemala bounded by the mountains to the east and Chiapas to the west. Stephens did not equate the "Caribs" with the "Candones," although he identified both groups as being non-Christian. Stephens also relayed the

story of William Beanham, an Irishman who lived among the Lacandon for a year. Beanham returned to Palenque but was found dead in his hammock soon there after. The men imprisoned for his murder included his Lacandon servant. Unfortunately, Beanham's account was destroyed and his experiences remain a mystery (Nations 1984:29).

The linguist, C. H. Berendt, encountered Lacandon during his explorations along the Pasión River in 1865. Based on McGee's description of Berendt's account, Berendt distinguished between the eastern Lacandon, who he visited near the Pasión, and a western group, who the eastern group feared. Berendt noted that the eastern Lacandon lived in small palm huts "consisting of little more than a roof" and their subsistence activities included farming, hunting, and fishing (1867:425 cited in McGee 2002:12). Although Catholic missionaries evidently had baptized this group of Lacandon, they continued to be polygynous and polytheistic. Shortly after Berendt, John Boddam-Whetham traveled through portions of Mexico and Central America in the 1870s. Boddam-Whetham also visited a Lacandon camp and he learned while in Tenosique that "small parties of Lacandon occasionally came to town to exchange vanilla, cacao, and tobacco for salt, cotton, and firearms" (Boddam-Whetham 1877:22 cited in McGee 2002:12).

In the 1880s, government surveyors realized that camps of Yucatec-speaking Lacandon straddled the proposed Guatemala and Mexico border (Hellmuth 1970:78 cited in Nations 1979:99). Around the same time, Alfred P. Maudslay, an Englishman traveling in the area, came across two Lacandon communities, one near the mouth of the Lacantun River and another near the ruins of Yaxchilan (McGee 2002:12). Désiré Charnay, a Frenchman who traveled throughout Mexico and Central America, met Maudslay upon his arrival at Yaxchilan, which Charnay named Lorillard in honor of a man who helped to fund his expedition (Charnay 1887:436). Although Charnay concerned himself primarily with descriptions of the ruins, inside what archaeologists now identify as Temple 33 and in other buildings Charnay found several god pots, or small, crude bowls decorated with faces and used by the Lacandon to burn offerings of copal incense. The day after his arrival at Yaxchilan, Charnay encountered and photographed a Lacandon "chief," his two wives, and four men (presumably Lacandon as well) who accompanied the Lacandon visitors.

Based on his observations, Lacandon men and women wore the same type of clothing, "a kind of loose white tunic reaching to the ankles, made of coarse calico prepared by the women" (Charnay 1887:456). Red dots decorated the

tunics of the "chief" and his wives. Both men and women kept their hair long and women adorned their hair with feathers. Charnay also mentioned the necklaces worn by the Lacandon, which he described as "an enormous collar of berries, beads, bone, and coins" (1887:456). As is evident from Charnay's photograph, the "chief" and his two wives wore a number of necklaces. Although the Lacandon refused to trade their tunics or necklaces for European goods, their bows and arrows served as a medium of exchange.

According to his report, the Lacandon relied on stone tools to clear and cultivate their land and they likened him to a god when he presented them with steel hatchets, knives, and swords. Lacandon subsistence practices involved hunting, fishing, and agriculture; the Lacandon *milpas*, according to Charnay's informants, were "better cultivated than those of the whites" (1887: 458). The Lacandon possessed an abundance of tobacco, cotton, maize, and fruit. Charnay failed to learn the details of their religious practices, but he learned that the Lacandon carried out rituals in the temples of the ruins prior to their discovery by "whites." In his closing, Charnay remarked that the Lacandon "are far from being as savage as is supposed," and added that their "cruelty is the result of their hospitality and confidence having been grossly

abused by the monteros" (Mexican workers in lumber camps) (1887:458).

Karl Sapper, a German ethnographer, visited Lacandon settlements at Lake Izan in 1891 and Pethá (Nahá) in 1894. Sapper estimated that the Lacandon population included no more than two to three hundred dispersed people (Sapper 1897:259). Sapper also insisted that the Lacandon spoke a Yucatecan and not Cholan dialect of Maya. He expressed disappointment that the Lacandon possessed steel tools because he hoped to gain insight into the agricultural practices of the ancient Maya through observations of the Lacandon. His report made clear that the Lacandon owned metal implements, although they continued to hunt with bows and arrows flaked by horn chisels. Sapper claimed the Lacandon subsisted primarily by hunting and fishing; he viewed their agricultural endeavors as contingent upon finding locations in the forest cleared by windfalls (1897:261). Sapper described the clothing and physical appearance of the Lacandon in a manner consistent with Charnay. However, he remarked that the Lacandon men at Lake Izan cut their hair rather short (1897:263). Sapper provided a description of the interior of a god house, although his guides shared this information because the Lacandon denied him entry into the structure. Sapper noted

that the Lacandon refused (in broken Spanish) to discuss their religion with him, but he mentioned that they prepared *balche*, a ritual alcoholic beverage, and painted themselves for feasts and pilgrimages.

Although interested in discovering ancient ruins along the Usumacinta, Teobert Maler provided a detailed description of his observations at Pethá (Nahá) in 1898. Before he and his party encountered any Lacandon, they stumbled into a *milpa*, at the end of which was the house compound of a man they later discovered had died. Intrigued by the abandoned settlement, Maler searched the contents of the dwellings at length. He described the structures as "made entirely of poles roofed over with palm leaves" (Maler 1902:27). The compound included two primary dwellings surrounded by huts for cooking and sleeping, a god house, and shelters for domestic animals. The huts for living and cooking contained clay cooking pots, scattered utensils, gourd and clay bowls for drinking or storing food and miscellaneous items, and hanging net baskets; tobacco hung from the rafters of some of the dwellings. Maler noted that the largest hut held the ritual implements used in Lacandon religious ceremonies. The next day as Maler and his guides explored the perimeter of the lake, they happened upon rock paintings. A Lacandon man and his family

approached Maler the following day when he returned to trace the images he had previously seen. The Lacandon man identified himself as Chan K'in. Through his interactions with men in the *monterías* (temporary lumber camps), Chan K'in had learned some Spanish (Maler 1902:32).

Chan K'in showed Maler and his men the location of a house compound that belonged to a man called Māx (Maler 1902:38). The name Māx or Ma'ax corresponds with the spider monkey *onen*, an animal name associated with patrilineal descent that was shared by Chan K'in Viejo, who McGee worked with extensively in the 1980s and 1990s (McGee 2002:9). The occupied house compound was similar to the abandoned compound in terms of dwelling types and the number of dwellings. Maler (1902:35) described the clothing of the Lacandon men as a long, coarse cotton garment that reaches the calves; women wore a skirt under the cotton upper garment and hung a "thick bunch of necklaces or rather strings of seeds" around their necks. Men and women both wore their hair long, and women fastened bird breasts and feathers at the end of their braid. Maler briefly commented on a woman weaving with a wooden implement and women cooking but he focused his attention on bow and arrow making, a male occupation. He briefly described the knapping process of the flint arrowheads and noted that the

Lacandon made glass arrowheads from broken bottles (1902:37). Additionally, Maler observed that the men alone conducted religious rituals. Upon his departure, several Lacandon accompanied Maler to purchase various goods from the *montería*.

Alfred Tozzer first visited Nahá in 1903 and again in 1904. In his 1907 book, the bulk of which dealt with Lacandon religion and ritual practices, Tozzer provided an ethnographic comparison of the Lacandon and the Maya in the Yucatan, which included a discussion of geography, house architecture, clothing, family dynamics, and material culture. Because many of Tozzer's observations corresponded quite closely with those of Charnay, Sapper, and Maler, they do not need reiteration. More importantly, like those before him, Tozzer verified that the Lacandon had undergone some amount of culture change over time, although he attempted to minimize the changes. Tozzer (1978[1907]:33) stated "the greater part of the country occupied by this people is under grant by the government to companies formed for the exploitation of mahogany" and the Lacandon visited the nearby *monterías* when in need of salt. Through these interactions, the Lacandon learned some Spanish and the Mexicans learned some Maya. When men who worked for the *monterías* traveled through Lacandon camps, they brought

glass beads, which the women desired for their necklaces. Tozzer also mentioned that Lacandon men typically owned two *xikuls* (cotton tunics), one of hand-woven cotton and another of Mexican manufactured cloth. In making arrowheads for their arrows, the Lacandon knap the flint with either steel or bone (Tozzer 1978[1907]:60). From these few examples provided by Tozzer, little doubt exists that the Lacandon interacted with outsiders and integrated those items that benefited them into their daily lives.

After Tozzer departed in 1904, few visitors reported on the Lacandon until the 1930s. The French ethnographer, Jacques Soustelle, visited three Lacandon compounds in the early 1930s. Unfortunately, he wrote his reports in French, which prevented the inclusion of his work here. According to McGee, Soustelle discussed the Lacandon's polygynous marriage practices, subsistence and agricultural techniques, house construction, gender roles, religion, and their interaction with outsiders. Soustelle encountered Lacandon who interacted with Tzeltal Maya and with *monteros*; Northern and Southern Lacandon interacted with one another as well (Soustelle 1933:179 cited in McGee 2002:22). Soustelle's distinction between a northern and southern group preceded Duby and Blom's designation of the Lacandon's three settlement areas, within which either

northern or southern groups resided. David Amram also articulated differences between the Southern and Northern Lacandon. Amram pointed out disparities in location, dress, house architecture, physical appearance, and religion; he additionally speculated that the northern and southern groups had interacted with different groups of outsiders at varying degrees of intensity (Amram 1937:34-35).

Duby and Blom estimated that in the 1960s around 200 Lacandon "remain and are steadily decreasing," due in large part to disease brought in by the *monteros* (Duby and Blom 1969:277). Changes in material culture also accompanied the arrival of *monteros*. During World War II, *chicleros* (workers who extracted gum from the *chicozapote* tree) sprawled out in the jungle and brought with them a new wave of disease and an assortment of material goods. Among these goods, the authors listed "knives, ammunition, shotguns, flashlights . . . breads, rice, sugar, fats," steel needles, plastic combs, cotton cloth, and corn mills as items the Lacandon readily incorporated into their lives (Duby and Blom 1969:279). Duby and Blom grouped the Lacandon into three settlements areas, the Northern group, and the Cedro-Lacanhá and Jatate groups in the south. Whereas the Northern group includes the modern communities of Mensábäk and Nahá and the Cedro-Lacanhá group

corresponds with the community of Lacanhá, most of the Jatate group relocated to the area around Lacanhá in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Duby and Blom 1969:276) in response to outsiders encroaching on their land (Kashanipour 2003:144).

Duby and Blom identified several differences between the northern and southern group. Men from the northern group wore calf-length tunics and northern women wore the tunic over colorful skirts, whereas men and women in the southern group both wore ankle-length tunics. Additionally, men and women in the southern group kept their hair long and flowing; while in the northern group, women braided their hair and decorated it with bird feathers after marriage (Duby and Blom 1969:286-287). Based on their photographs, northern men wore shoulder length hair with bangs cut. The house type of the southern and northern groups differed in that the northern group bound sticks together to make walls on their palm-thatched houses and the southern group extended the thatch to the ground on three sides, which eliminated the need for walls. The southern inhabitants slept in hammocks but the northern group slept on platform beds and only used hammocks to relax during the day.

Didier Boremanse (1998) provided an extensive comparison of the northern and southern groups compiled from intermittent research that spanned between 1971 and 1990. Aware of the Lacandon's historical movements and interactions, Boremanse clearly acknowledges alterations to Lacandon culture in the northern and southern groups. Although he claimed to perceive of changes in Lacandon culture as an ongoing process, he referred to this process as "cultural disintegration" brought on by ecological destruction, changing settlement patterns, construction projects, interactions with the Mexican government and society, and the younger Lacandon's desire to be a part of the modern world (Boremanse 1998:12). Despite his subjective association of cultural change with degradation, Boremanse's work repeatedly disputes the image of the isolated and unchanged Lacandon.

R. Jon McGee's research with the Northern Lacandon began in 1980 and continues to the present. In his 2002 book, McGee drew on his twenty years of research with the Lacandon in order to challenge the notion of the "traditional" Lacandon. McGee outlined the history of the Lacandon and by doing so, he accounted for the changing nature of Lacandon culture. His examination of the Lacandon's transition from subsistence agriculture to a

mixed economy of agriculture and tourism conveys the accelerated rate of change within the last thirty years, which inspired my current research. McGee identified alterations in many aspects of Lacandon culture, although I focus primarily on changes in material culture and social relations.

While depictions of the Lacandon as an isolated and unchanging people are fictitious, the ethnographic record does indicate a certain amount of cultural continuity. However, in the last thirty to thirty-five years, Lacandon culture has undergone rapid change. Current estimates indicate that the Lacandon population has grown to between six and seven hundred individuals (McGee 2002; Palka 2005). The creation of the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve in 1978, the subsequent relocation of the Lacandon into defined communities, the movement of other Maya and non-Maya groups in and out of the forest, protestant missionary activity, road building projects, tourism, and the introduction of electricity have impacted Lacandon life and material culture in a variety of ways. Although in the next chapter I address the extent of culture change in Nahá as people shift their economic energies from subsistence agriculture to an approach combining agriculture and tourism, the point I hope to convey here is that recent

alterations in Lacandon culture, although pronounced, reflect an ongoing process of adaptation and adjustment to changing circumstances. While cultural modifications demonstrate the Lacandon's history of interactions with outsiders, the extensive nature of recent changes appears to be redefining Lacandon culture at an accelerated rate.

### Conclusions

Archaeological and ethnographic evidence illustrate that various aspects of Lacandon culture, lithic technology, clothing types, and ritual implements, for example, persisted through time. At the time these accounts were compiled and as reports also show, within this period the Lacandon acquired disease, machetes and steel axes, various types of glassware, metal cookware, manufactured fabrics, learned Spanish, and moved across a large geographic area. Discussions of Lacandon culture, then, must consider those aspects of Lacandon culture that are foreign, as well as those that seem rooted in tradition. What we know of the Lacandon relies on historic, ethnographic, and archaeological records; and these documents indicate that the Lacandon have hardly lived unchanged lives, sequestered in the forest, and free from outside influence. To the contrary, the Lacandon have been

in contact with a variety of people and integrated those items and traits that they believed to be beneficial to them, and rejected others that they viewed as unnecessary or harmful. In the past, the Lacandon encountered outsiders in various ways and through these interactions they secured provisions and other items unavailable in the forest.

Today, the Lacandon travel to popular tourist destinations to sell their commodities and they spend their earnings on appliances and electronics. Both circumstances demonstrate the Lacandon's involvement in a world outside of the forest.

Portrayals of an isolated jungle people clinging to an ancient lifestyle not only minimize the interactions and cultural changes that the Lacandon have experienced in the last several hundred years but they fail to address the historical circumstances that shaped Lacandon culture entirely. While the purely descriptive accounts of early ethnographers offer a snapshot into the lives of the Lacandon at a moment in time, they offer little in terms of a realistic portrayal of the dynamic nature of past and present Lacandon culture. However, embedded within these works and visible from archaeological findings are clues that evince Lacandon culture change. As will be seen in the next chapter, dramatic cultural changes, such as those

spurred by the recent shift in modes of production, are not only less difficult to identify but impossible to overlook.

## CHAPTER III

### ECONOMIC CHANGE AND LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES IN NAHÁ

Nahá is in a forest reserve in a remote area of southeastern Chiapas, but the Lacandon who live there are hardly isolated from the global economy. Archaeological evidence gathered during the Lacandon Archaeological Project and ethnohistoric data substantiate claims that the historic Lacandon, despite claims to the contrary, had "contact with outsiders [that] was quite common, extensive, and of long duration" (Palka 2005:183). Although familiar with economic interactions outside of their communities, this historically agricultural society is experiencing an economic transformation resulting from expanding tourism and increased participation in moneymaking endeavors. The current economic climate of Nahá incorporates a mixed economy of agriculture and tourism. Some families focus their efforts on agricultural production, some rely more on tourism, and others combine both techniques. There are also those who invest in entrepreneurial enterprises in addition

to planting *milpas* (swidden corn gardens) and making goods to sell to tourists. The transitioning economy and the various modes of production active in Nahá are producing changes in the social arena, which directly affect the lives, attitudes, and consumption practices of the Lacandon. In this chapter, I will first provide a brief overview of the Lacandon's economic history in order to put in perspective the factors that have contributed to changes in the Lacandon's economic strategies. Then I will examine the past and present modes of production in Nahá and describe the accompanying social relationships. Central to my investigation of the various modes of production in Nahá is the question of whether they are coexisting or whether these modes, in fact, represent multiple livelihood strategies in which the Lacandon diversify their economic energies in order to both meet their needs and earn a profit.

### Economic History

Economic differences in the highlands and lowlands of Chiapas, largely a result of dissimilar geography, natural resources, and political policy, make it difficult to discuss the economic history of Chiapas as a uniform entity. However, national and state-led initiatives have

shaped the current economic climate in Nahá, thus necessitating an understanding of how policies in one region affect the other. The intent of the following discussion is to clarify the historical processes and policies that have affected the lives and economic strategies of the Lacandon in Nahá.

According to McGee (2002:73-74), the abolition of the *hacienda* system (debt peonage system in which Maya laborers produced food for their own subsistence, for the overseers, and for sale) after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921) produced few changes for the Lacandon in the lowlands, who never formally entered into the system. Lacandon men generally hunted and planted *milpa*; women processed and prepared produce from the *milpa*, in addition to performing domestic duties (McGee 2002:33-34). In the highlands, the pre-Revolution *hacienda* system absorbed the most fertile land and removed men from their homes, leading to a seasonal pattern of male migration (Rosenbaum 1993:24-27). After the Revolution, highland Maya men continued to migrate from the highlands to find available employment. This pattern was amplified after the Federal agrarian land reform acts in the 1930s failed to allocate sufficient *ejidos* (communal lands) to allow for productive subsistence farming without a supplemental income.

Land reform and the implementation of the *ejido* system affected the lives of those in western and eastern Chiapas. Rosenbaum (1993:27,121) asserts, for example, that because of misguided land appropriations and because of demographic pressures on limited *ejido* lands, Chamula men had to either supplement their *milpa* production with wage labor or migrate in search of low-paying employment at former plantations and newly established cattle ranches, while women remained in the highlands. Tzeltal and Tzotzil Maya from the highlands, and Chol Maya from the area around Palenque, flooded into the Lacandon jungle after the government encouraged these groups to migrate there to cultivate corn and other crops for subsistence and to sell, and to raise cattle, primarily to sell (McGee 2002:74).

The movement of various Maya groups into the Lacandon jungle depleted the agricultural land and forced the immigrant populations deeper into the interior of the forest (Collier 1994:44). Government encouragement of migration and the provision of subsidies and credits for cattle farming caused the cattle industry to erupt in the 1950s and to grow steadily throughout the second half of the twentieth century (McGee 2002:75-76). The deforestation that accompanied overgrazed pastures and intensive agriculture as practiced in the highlands destroyed the

fertility of the soil and required people to continue clearing new lands in the forest. As the population of immigrants increased, the once dispersed Lacandon family groups began to congregate in larger communities (McGee 2002:76).

Following the 1968 designation of the land the Lacandon occupied as a preserve, the *Zona Lacandona*, government-sponsored logging operations began contracting with local communities for logging rights, which temporarily brought money into the communities in exchange for timber, as well established clinics and company stores (McGee 2002:78). A corollary to the logging operations was the construction of roads, one of which led directly to the community of Nahá. Highland Maya, as well as immigrants from Mexican states around the country, moved into eastern Chiapas to colonize the *Selva Lacandona* (Collier 1994:44). Unlike the Lacandon, who received some financial benefits from the logging operations, non-Lacandon immigrant populations and peasants within the *Selva Lacandona* failed to profit because they were not the legal inhabitants of the land, and thus had no rights. Similarly, the designation of part of the *Zona Lacandona* as the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve in 1978 forced the relocation of Tzeltal and Chol Maya colonizers living within the reserve

to new communities outside of the reserve, whereas Lacandon families from communities outside of the reserve "were convinced to resettle in the existing communities of Lacanha, Mensäbäk, and Nahá" (McGee 2002:79).

In the 1970s, under Presidents Echeverría and López Portillo, federal funds flowed into Chiapas for hydroelectric, construction, and road development projects. The development of oil fields in the neighboring state of Tabasco also introduced capital into Chiapas' economy (McGee 2002:77). Highland communities temporarily benefited from newly established federally funded programs, like the Socioeconomic Development Program for the Highlands of Chiapas. In addition to receiving government funding for agricultural projects, men in the highlands seized the opportunity to earn wages in construction and in the oil fields. However, following the collapse of the oil industry in 1981, Maya working in the oil fields, faced with unemployment, returned to the highlands to farm (McGee 2002:79). Funding for development programs also ceased, which further strained those living in or returning to highland communities.

The fluctuating economy affected the Lacandon in other ways. Unlike their highland neighbors, the Lacandon continued to rely on subsistence agriculture rather than

depend on government sponsored programs or find waged labor. To the benefit of the Lacandon, the devaluation of the peso resulting from the oil industry's collapse encouraged Mexico's tourist industry. Affordable airfare and advantageous exchange rates prompted tourists from the United States and Europe to travel to Mexico. As Chiapas became more popular as a tourist destination, the Lacandon's geographic position enabled them to take advantage of the developing industry. The tourist industry in nearby Palenque and San Cristobal continues to influence the economic activities of the Lacandon, but as with other economic endeavors, the degree to which individuals participate varies.

#### Lacandon Economic Strategies

##### *The Domestic Mode of Production and Subsistence Agriculture*

Sahlins (1972:78-99) views the household as a petite economy, which is elaborated upon in systems where extended kin networks are present. A sex-based division of labor predominates and marriages establish "a generalized group constituted to produce the local conception of livelihood" (1972:79). In the domestic mode of production, production is for livelihood or use value. It is production with consideration for exchange and household consumption but

not geared toward a surplus or profit. Additional features of the domestic mode of production include household access to productive resources on shared or allotted land, a tendency to pool some goods and services, and the exhibition of a dispersed settlement pattern.

The domestic mode of production outlined by Sahlins best describes the subsistence farming economy and accompanying social relations of the Lacandon prior to their investment in the tourist industry. Discussions of Lacandon economic activity and the associated division of labor often begin with an explanation of *milpa* agriculture (Boremanse 1998; Duby and Blom 1969; Maler 1902; McGee 1990, 2002; Tozzer 1978[1907]). Planting *milpas* and utilizing jungle resources provide Lacandon families with the means to produce and reproduce their livelihood with little dependence on a monetary income. Although many Lacandon no longer depend only on subsistence agriculture to meet their needs, *milpa* farming served as the Lacandon's primary mode of production until relatively recently and continues to influence social dynamics. In the past Lacandon family groups lived in dispersed jungle settlements often surrounded by their *milpas*; now most reside within communities in the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve. Although the expansion of neighboring communities

and the selective clearing of hardwoods by loggers infringes upon land belonging to the Lacandon, the availability of arable land gives Lacandon families direct access to productive resources.

In general, *milpa* agriculture at all stages of production utilizes a sexual division of labor, although extenuating circumstances such as being a widow sometimes alter this division of labor. Typically, a man and his wife or wives, sometimes aided by their children, provision and maintain the household by performing gender-specific tasks. McGee (2002:56) describes how men and women's "separate but interdependent and complementary" roles in producing the *milpa* and processing its bounty define Lacandon gender roles.

Lacandon gender roles have traditionally been defined by the production and processing of food, principally corn. Lacandon men were defined by their ability to make *milpa*. Correspondingly, Lacandon women were defined by the processing of food produced in their husband's, father's, or son's *milpa*. Thus, the tasks a woman performed were delineated by the productive activities and ages of the men in her life. Similarly, the work of widows is directed by the absence of men in their lives. [McGee 2002:56]

Men prepare land for use as a *milpa* by clearing an area, burning the underbrush before the rainy season begins, and then planting seed relatively soon after

burning. Corn, the primary crop in a *milpa*, is only one of a number of crops that the Lacandon cultivate. Several varieties of squash, beans, tomatoes, onions, root crops, fruit trees, and other vegetables, in addition to cash crops, such as tobacco, provide the Lacandon with sustenance and at times, a medium of exchange. However, crop variety in Lacandon *milpas*, as documented by Nigh and Nations (1980) and later by McGee (2002) appears to be on the decline.

The climate and productivity of the region support a year round agricultural cycle, with some stages more intense than others. *Milpa* farming is by no means a simple livelihood and requires detailed environmental knowledge. However, the amount of work needed to maintain the *milpa* does not necessitate full-time daily labor, men may spend time fishing, hunting, chopping firewood, or engaging in other economic or social endeavors. Teobert Maler (1903) and Alfred Tozzer (1978 [1907]), early researchers who traveled to Nahá, briefly noted men's excursions to other communities or lumber camps to trade for or purchase salt and fabric, as well as men's production of bow and arrow sets to trade or sell. In the social realm, Lacandon men devoted a portion of each day to religious pursuits prior to the abandonment of their polytheistic religion in the

1990s (McGee 2002:54). The male head of household attempted to ensure the health of his family and the productivity of his milpa through daily ritual activity. Lacandon men conducted some religious ceremonies in which they sequestered themselves in their god houses for extended periods. Based on the account of Bruce and Perera (1982), and corroborated by McGee and González (1999), in the past men found ample time to conduct daylong *balche* rituals (a ceremony involving the brewing and consumption of a mildly alcoholic beverage), which the Lacandon believed enabled them to communicate with the gods.

Lacandon women with farming husbands spend the majority of the day processing and preparing produce from the milpa, particularly corn. Women process corn in several stages in order to make corn tortillas, a staple of Lacandon meals. After a period of drying the corn, women shuck and shell the corn. Next, women soak the corn and then boil it for several hours. Once the corn kernels are cooked and cooled, women grind the corn and shape the corn meal into large balls of dough. Corn intended for use on the same day is ground a second time, shaped, kneaded, patted out, and cooked if the tortillas are for immediate consumption; dough for later in the day foregoes the last three steps and is set aside. If intended for the next day,

the dough is stored in a bowl, lightly covered, and reserved for future use.

Additional tasks women perform on a daily basis include preparing beans and other foods to accompany the tortillas, caring for children, tending chickens, doing laundry, and completing various household duties. Women also assist their husbands with certain activities at various stages of milpa production. Women in monogamous and polygynous marriages each plant small kitchen gardens, which supply produce for their own children in addition to what their husbands provide for household consumption. Additionally, women produce utilitarian items out of materials from *milpas* and the forest. These items intended for daily use include gourd bowls, net bags, hanging net baskets, and in the past, clothing made from spun cotton. Although not active participants in the religious ceremonies that occurred in previous years, women prepared food for ritual use by their husbands (Boremanse 1998:40; McGee 2002:55). Unfortunately, past investigators neglected to address ways beyond ritual food preparation that women adjusted their daily lives and workloads during their husbands' ceremonial absences.

Widowed women, such as those described in the following chapter and by McGee (2002:56-57), perform

women's work as described above, and if possible, solicit the labor of unmarried sons and sons-in-laws to perform labor typically associated with men's work. However, free male labor, even familial labor, is limited; thus widowed women do a great deal of work in the production and processing of food. Another task that I often observed one widow perform was childcare. Although one of the widows interviewed had adult children only, another had three children between the ages of 16 and 20. Her youngest child, a male, lives at home, depends on his mother to cook for him, and provides only minimal assistance to his mother. Two of his older sisters have young children who the widow frequently baby-sits. This time away from their children provides the young mothers with an opportunity to complete domestic chores or help their husbands in the milpa.

The complementary roles of Lacandon women and men in agricultural production promote a rather egalitarian economic and social system characterized by reciprocity. The goal of production is to satisfy the needs of the household, although reciprocal exchange commonly occurs between households of extended families. Descriptions of the Lacandon's interactions with outsiders suggest that when the Lacandon did trade or sell items they produced, they did so not to earn a profit but to obtain items

unavailable in the forest. In their productivity and in their composition, the Lacandon family unit closely corresponds to the petite economy described by Sahlins (1972:78).

The marriage practices of the Lacandon also factored into a household's economy. Polygynous marriages, embarked upon by industrious men, provide men and their wives with an abundance of children who have their own roles in an agricultural family. Delaying the marriages of sons lengthened the amount of time a son worked for his father. Furthermore, the practice of bride service brought young men's labor into a family because a young man interested in marrying a man's daughter performed manual labor for her father in exchange for the approval of the marriage.

Polygyny, in particular, is a benefit in a society with this mode of production. Having more than one childbearing wife and multiple children provides a labor pool, as well as a draw for labor. Men benefit from having multiple wives of various ages for several reasons. As a man ages, the younger wives shoulder the workload previously performed by him. A younger wife also possesses childbearing capabilities after her elder co-wives exceed childbearing age, which provides a man with children, or a work force, into old age. Women also benefit from

polygynous marriage arrangements. Given the many tasks that women perform on a daily basis, including chores of an aging husband, women with co-wives have assistance with childcare and the option of alternating chores, such as cooking, so that one wife cooks one day and another prepares food the next day.

*Petty Commodity Production: Agriculture and Tourism*

The above description of Lacandon men and women's work in a system dependent primarily on agriculture provides insight into the mode and relations of production that have dominated economic history in Nahá. However, the last thirty years have ushered in economic change as the developing tourism industry found a market in Chiapas. The Mayan archaeological sites of Palenque, Yaxchilan, and Bonampak, and the highland town of San Cristobal, are only a few of the tourist attractions in Chiapas. Hoping to find customers in the city of Palenque, employees of travel companies that offer trip packages stand outside of their businesses and call out the destinations they visit to tourists walking down the streets. Currently, Nahá is not a location advertised by the majority of the businesses in Palenque, although a few offer rather expensive trips there. However, a *combí* (bus that carries up to fifteen passengers) provides service to Nahá twice a day for forty

pesos (four dollars) and some tourists in the summer of 2006 utilized this method of transportation. More importantly, the *combí* serves as the Lacandon's transportation to Palenque and San Cristobal, where the Lacandon sell their products to tourists.

McGee (2002) recalls watching the construction of the road connecting Nahá to Palenque and other communities in the summer of 1980. He wrote that at the time, he "had no way of knowing that it would establish a dividing line between traditional subsistence-oriented living and today's commercial enterprises" (2002:87). As I have noted, before the construction of the road the Lacandon interacted with individuals outside of their community when trading in the lumber camps and in other communities. However, the rugged geography and lack of transportation limited the volume of goods transported to what a person was able to carry (McGee 2002:87). The construction of the road paired with the increase in transportation provided the Lacandon with direct access to surrounding towns and villages. Excursions in the past allowed only for barter and limited sales with the goal of securing needed provisions. Access to tourists in Palenque and San Cristobal, on the other hand, amounted to moneymaking opportunities. The amount of goods carried, and the profit margin, increased with the presence of

tourists and the ease of accessibility provided by the road's construction. Combined, these factors have prompted a shift in the mode of production, and consequently, the relations of production, in Nahá.

The domestic mode of production, pronounced among Lacandon subsistence farmers, does not account for the changing productive strategies and social relations in Nahá currently. The Lacandon's continued investment in tourism has altered the domestic mode of production and over time has transformed households into small-scale commodity producers. Binford and Cook (1991:68-69) offer a "generic concept of petty commodity production" that includes four elements: "the regular and exclusive production of products for market exchange;" the enterprise is small in scale in that the "means of production are controlled by direct producers and labor is nonwaged;" a mutual independence of production units exists; and the "purpose or result of production may be simple reproduction but never to the exclusion of capital accumulation or profit." Petty commodity production in these terms indicates the presence of six preconditions: the production of an object external to the producer, which embodies the producer's labor, "the making of a product for other use," a gendered division of

labor, reciprocal exchange, market exchange, and general-purpose money (1991:69).

The Lacandon deviate from petty commodity producers as outlined above because they do not produce exclusively for market exchange; they continue to plant *milpas* for their own consumption and they generally operate within an informal market. However, the definition of peasant-artisan petty commodity producers provided by Binford and Cook accurately describes those Lacandon families who grow crops for household consumption (and sometimes for exchange) and sell non-agricultural products for a profit. Despite their lack of exclusive production for the market, when conceived of as peasant-artisans who "sell their crops or products in markets for cash," the Lacandon meet the requirements of petty commodity producers as outlined by Binford and Cook (1991:70). The domestic family unit, substantially smaller in petty commodity producing households than in farming households, has direct access to the forces of production and family members compose the labor force. A sexual division of labor continues to dictate men and women's work, although Lacandon men and women share the responsibility of producing the various goods sold to tourists. Unlike subsistence agriculture, which enables family groups to meet their needs and perhaps enter into

reciprocal exchange relationships, the sale of craft items to tourists provides the sellers with money that "can be exchanged on the market for those goods which they need but do not produce" (Binford and Cook 1991:70). The Lacandon who regularly earn money from tourism, however, do not limit their purchases to products of necessity. Purchases of luxury items, uncommon among Lacandon subsistence farmers in the past, are now commonplace in Lacandon peasant-artisan households.

Many families in Nahá continue to combine agriculture with the production of goods for tourists. Based on data from interviews that I conducted with six married women and two widows in the summer of 2006, all of the informants' husbands (and the widows) had *milpas* under cultivation. Additionally, each of the women and their husbands produced an assortment of goods for the tourist market. When tourist traffic escalates in the summer months, men, sometimes accompanied by their wives, travel to Palenque or San Cristobal to sell bow and arrow sets, clay animal figurines, imitation god pots, jewelry, net bags, and hanging net baskets. According to those planning to travel to San Cristobal or Palenque in the summer of 2006, the money earned in the summer months would provide the bulk of the income for the coming year.

If a man travels to sell to tourists, his wife usually assists him in making bows and arrows; makes jewelry, such as bracelets, necklaces, and earrings, as well as craft items, including net bags and hanging net baskets; sometimes manages the finances of the household; and incorporates store bought foods into the diet (McGee 2002:104). The incorporation of tortilla mixes like *Maseca* and other store bought products into the diet reduces preparation and cooking time, which provides women with an opportunity to tend to other tasks like laundry, childcare, and craft production. Often, the older family members who remain in Nahá and farm, and couples who prefer not to leave Nahá, make craft items to sell to visitors to Nahá or send them with a family member traveling to Palenque (McGee 2002:99-100). McGee found that while the oldest Lacandon men and women focus primarily on *milpa* production, many others adjust their subsistence strategies to local conditions and base their decisions on potential payoffs. When ecological, economic, and political conditions favored tourism related activities, men and women focused on these. When agricultural activities provided a better payoff, Lacandon switched their subsistence strategies to favor farming. For example, in 1997, government subsidies for corn production enabled men to hire Tzeltal workers to grow

corn, while the Lacandon concentrated on craft production for tourists. In 1999, on the other hand, forest fires in Chiapas, as well as political upheaval, negatively affected tourism. In response, the men turned to *milpas* and supplemented their income through local wage earning opportunities (McGee 2002:96-97).

According to McGee, younger people likely to participate in the tourist market remain in Nahá and make *milpa* when it is profitable, but venture to Palenque to sell arts and crafts when the tourist market is active (2002:98-99). However, the fact that most families I interviewed in 2006 had a combined economy dependent on agriculture and tourism suggests that while agriculture supplies the Lacandon with many of the necessities to meet their subsistence needs, tourism provides a monetary income that enables them to actively participate in the consumer market. Importantly, the Lacandon's economic strategizing no longer seems to be an either or situation. Rather, combining farming with commodity production appears to be a regular enterprise that families participate in at different degrees of intensity depending on their needs and wants. Household supplies, store-bought food items, clothes, diapers, and toiletries are common purchases. However, televisions, DVD players, CD players,

refrigerators, electric stoves, and washing machines are items women have in their homes or planned to purchase in the near future with money earned from tourists.

Dramatic alterations in the social realm are occurring alongside the continued monetization and increased consumerism of the Lacandon community of Nahá. The disparities between those who purchase material possessions for entertainment and those who forego extravagant purchases in favor of utilitarian items are an inevitable consequence of different degrees of involvement in the tourism market. The potential for inequalities because of participation or non-participation in moneymaking endeavors exists in Nahá in two ways. First, people who depend primarily on subsistence agriculture lack the means to purchase luxury items and other amenities associated with wage earning and increasingly, associated with status. Second, among Lacandon households who combine agricultural and commodity production instead of subsistence farming, the possibility exists for inequalities to develop because some families earn greater returns from sales than other families. Money earned in excess of family requirements for utilitarian purposes presents an opportunity to make extravagant purchases that distinguish households from one another.

Ultimately, the influx of capital and consumer goods undercuts the reciprocity that characterized Lacandon economic exchanges in the past. Whereas people routinely exchange produce for eggs and assist family members in *milpa* cultivation, goods purchased with money cannot be freely exchanged. McGee (2002:115) speculates that "differential access to consumer goods, and the lack of sharing of these items between households may ultimately provide the basis for the stratification of Lacandon society." When families produce goods to sell to tourists, the income they earn presents opportunities for them to rely less on reciprocal exchange relations with family or other community members. They acquire items they desire with money, thus demonstrating their economic viability and independence. As will be discussed in the next chapter, these women's appearances and interest in material possessions, such as appliances and western clothing, distinguishes them from their mothers and other women whose husbands predominantly farm. Furthermore, young men now gain access to prestige through possession of material goods acquired from money earned from tourists, whereas prestige traditionally accompanied the ability to cultivate a bountiful *milpa* and take multiple wives (McGee 2002:116).

The Lacandon's transition to commodity production produced changes in pre-marital practices and has encouraged the shift from polygynous to monogamous marriages. The decline of the practice of polygyny, as well as the regularity of men paying bride price rather than working for their bride, coincides with an increased level of participation in the tourist market. Several young men in Nahá said that they prefer the option to make payments with money rather than labor. As a result, fathers cannot depend on the labor of their future sons-in-law as they did in the past. The decrease in family size among petty commodity producers indicates that in a household dependent to some extent on cash earnings, a large family becomes less desirable and more difficult to provision. Three women I interviewed, and several of their friends, received birth control from the government-sponsored free clinic. These women insisted that a small family with fewer children was easier to maintain and afford. They also rejected the idea of their husbands taking additional wives, citing financial difficulties and jealousy as reasons for their opposition.

Because both women and men within households participate in the production process, a pronounced decline in women's status has not accompanied the shift from production for use to production for use and exchange. Who

maintains the household finances varies from family to family, but all of my informants concurred that money earned from sales to tourists provides for the entire family even if their husbands traveled alone and made the direct sales. However, before they return to Nahá, some Lacandon men spend a portion of their earnings on alcohol, which women generally do not consume and which fails to benefit the family unit. Alcohol consumption is an undesirable outcome of the Lacandon's generation of money through commodity production. Although Lacandon men ritually consumed *balche* in the past, some men now drink the more potent store-bought alcohol purchased outside of Nahá. Unlike *balche* rituals, which occurred under the banner of religious practices, drinking for the sake of drunkenness seems to be a new phenomenon that coincides with the Lacandon's increased participation in tourism. Although the women I spoke with frowned upon drunkenness, they tolerate the practice as long as their husbands continue to assist with the provisioning of the family and do not become violent. None of the women I interviewed said that their husbands' alcohol consumption prevented the family from acquiring material possessions they desired, but they all recognized the potential for violence and marital strife as a consequence of excessive drinking.

*Entrepreneurial Endeavors*

Another group of industrious individuals exists amidst the subsistence farmers and people who make crafts to sell to tourists. Entrepreneurs are individuals who have moved into other realms of economic activity. Several individuals have opened walk-up window stores in the front rooms of their homes. Storeowners, with the help of their families, provide the residents of Nahá with a direct link to the global economy. With their earnings, they have acquired material possessions symbolic of their investment in a lucrative enterprise. Based on my observations, the only individuals who owned vehicles in the summer of 2006 also owned and operated stores. Not coincidentally, the owners of stores were neither the youngest nor the oldest men working in the community.

A storeowner I spoke with in the summer of 2006, also a friend and early informant to McGee, began earning an income by selling bow and arrow sets in the early eighties as a teenager. A little more than twenty years later, he arguably is the most financially successful individual in Nahá. In addition to a several room home with a walk-up store in the front that has a copy machine and satellite telephone for public use, he has constructed an adjoining three-room cinder block building with plastered walls. His

youngest son occupies one of the rooms but the other two, which are connected, serve as accommodations for tourists and other visitors. Visitors pay two hundred and fifty pesos (\$25.00) per person for lodging a night and an additional fifty pesos (\$5.00) per person for each meal. Although occupied only on occasion during the summer of 2006, the potential for profit certainly exists.

Currently, five privately owned stores and one government subsidized store operate in Nahá. The government store (CONASUPO) sells items at fixed prices, whereas the privately owned stores offer competitive prices for most goods. Typically, the private storeowners charged a little more for their goods. Unlike the CONASUPO, which receives regular deliveries of goods, private storeowners travel to Palenque to purchase a portion of their inventories and may recover some of this expense by pricing their stock slightly higher than the CONASUPO. One man from Nahá, who owns a truck, traveled to Palenque with two of his sons on the *combí* to purchase items for his store; other men drive their own vehicles. All stores generally sell Coca Cola or Pepsi products, *Sabritos* and/or Frito Lay chips, canned tuna, canned vegetables, and toiletries, although the quantity and variety of items in stock varies by store. The government store offers the most extensive selection and

houses one of the three satellite telephones in the community; however, it has somewhat irregular operating hours. The privately owned stores offer customers more consistent hours of operation, with most typically opening by eight in the morning and closing, depending on the store, between eight and eleven in the evening.

The entrepreneurial men of Nahá do not limit themselves to any one economic endeavor. Entrepreneurial men still may have *milpas* in production, although they may not always work them themselves, opting instead to hire laborers. Additionally, these men may participate in the tourist industry by making and selling their crafts in their own stores, selling them to storeowners in Palenque or San Cristobal, or sending them with family members to sell directly to tourists. Storeowners, similar to petty commodity producers, combine economic strategies in order to provide for their families; they also attempt to earn the greatest returns by diversifying their economic energies. The strategies entrepreneurs employ generally dictate the extent and type of labor expected of the family, but the important point is that, with few exceptions, the immediate family still serves as the labor force.

Similar to families involved in the other modes of production discussed, entrepreneurs and the members of their families perform complementary roles. The wife of an entrepreneur performs domestic duties similar to those of other women in Nahá. They, too, care for children, raise and tend chickens, wash clothes, and prepare food for the family. Unlike other women in Nahá, however, entrepreneur's wives possess or have the means to purchase amenities capable of lessening the burden of their daily tasks. For example, one storeowner's wife owns a washing machine, a microwave, an electric stove, a refrigerator, a blender, an electric corn grinder, and two sewing machines. Because appliances such as these enable women to perform several tasks simultaneously and efficiently, they have an opportunity to complete other chores, visit relatives, or work the store windows. The woman who owns two sewing machines makes clothes that she sells to others in the community. Although I am unsure if she keeps her earnings for herself or she shares them with her husband, she reinvests a portion of the money in purchasing new fabrics. Several women contracted her over the course of the summer to make various articles of clothing for them or their children. Prior to my departure, this woman set up a booth

to sell some of her clothing; she later expressed interest in having a clothing store.

As before mentioned, most women in Nahá spend a great deal of time processing and preparing food for their families. Although the incorporation of store bought foods like *Maseca* into the diet alleviates time constraints associated with the processing of corn, some women make fresh tortillas instead, preferring the flavor to that of the mix. However, by using electric corn grinders and propane or electric stoves, women save time that processing corn, and making and tending their fires consumes. Dry beans, canned meats and vegetables, and Cup of Noodle soups are a few of the popular store bought items that women in Nahá incorporate into their families' diets.

Entrepreneur's families possess material goods beyond the financial grasp of most families in Nahá. Every house I visited in Nahá, regardless of the owner's occupation, has a television, radio, and some store bought kitchen implements. However, entrepreneurs' homes have refrigerators, stoves, sometimes more than one television, DVD and CD players, kitchen appliances, and furniture seldom seen in other homes. Furthermore, by supplying the community with a constant flow of goods, entrepreneurs perpetuate consumerism in Nahá. If prestige increasingly

accompanies material wealth, an intensification of social stratification in Nahá appears inevitable as differential access to wealth increases. Entrepreneurs, followed by families combining agriculture and tourism, are in the best position to gain prestige in this transitioning society.

An interesting element of entrepreneurial life involves the parents' future expectations for their children. Educating children, not always considered an important aspect of child development in the past, has become more commonplace in Nahá regardless of economic livelihood. Whereas all of the interviewees who combined agriculture with tourism sent or planned to send their children to school, not all entrepreneurs encourage their children to attend school. One store-owning family has several school-aged children who do not attend school but instead work at the store and assist their parents with making crafts. Another entrepreneurial family sends all four of their children to school, the three oldest live and attend schools in Palenque and the youngest will eventually continue his schooling there as well. Although no generalizations can be made, for at least one entrepreneurial family the prospect of their children helping support the family business is more appealing than the possibilities that education presents. The importance

of education appears to be on the rise among some families and inconsequential for others. How education factors into the economic and social future of Nahá remains to be seen, but access to education certainly will provide employment opportunities for the next generation of Lacandon beyond those available in Nahá.

### Conclusion

The Lacandon have not abandoned subsistence agriculture and the gendered division of labor associated with that lifestyle. However, the extent to which a given household invests in other economic endeavors, specifically tourism and entrepreneurial activities, largely determines the role of agriculture and the family's productive activities in that household. The Lacandon recognize that different economic prospects enable them to depend on agriculture in varying degrees. McGee (2002) observed that the Lacandon's flexibility in the past enabled them to capitalize on the prosperous tourist industry when conditions favored this enterprise but they relied on agriculture when tourism offered fewer rewards. I agree that the Lacandon demonstrate flexibility in the ways in which they approach favorable economic conditions. However, the reality of the current condition indicates that profit

lies not only in flexibility but also in a diversification of economic endeavors.

All of my informants' families plant *milpas*, as well as make crafts to sell to tourists. Several families, including one interviewee's family, combine these two techniques with entrepreneurial ventures. Because the Lacandon demonstrate both flexibility and diversity in their economic undertakings, one must hesitate to confine Lacandon farmers, commodity producers, or entrepreneurs to one or another of a series of distinct modes of production. Rather, the Lacandon over time have changed their productive strategies without abandoning milpa farming altogether. They have incorporated and altered agricultural practices and the social relationships associated with that lifestyle into their current economic undertakings, whether commodity production or entrepreneurial endeavors. If the Lacandon do, in fact, operate under one mode of production, this mode might be best described as a multiple livelihood strategy as outlined by Halperin. Halperin (1994) applied the concept of multiple livelihood strategies to extended family groups in rural Kentucky that combine their economic strategies in order to provision related households without completely capitulating to capitalist industry. The premise remains the same for Nahá, although increasingly,

individual households depend less on extended family and community for financial cooperation because the nuclear family composes the production unit. With the initial goal of provisioning the household met through subsistence agriculture and minimal trade, the Lacandon's moneymaking strategies enable them to purchase store-bought foods and other goods they desire in their homes.

The expansion of the Lacandon's economic range of activities and the variable participation in lucrative economic ventures continues to produce dramatic lifestyle changes that are difficult to overlook. Reciprocity and a gendered division of family labor were characteristic of egalitarian Lacandon society, and although not absent today, signs of stratification and a diversification of family labor appear on the rise. As people increasingly accept ownership of material items as an indicator of wealth and status, their desire to earn a monetary income escalates and the prestige of those who possess more intensifies. As discussed earlier, prestige once accompanied the ability to produce a bountiful *milpa* and support multiple wives secured through bride service. Currently, many Lacandon supplement *milpa* production with store bought foods, monogamy is the dominant marital pattern, and men pay, rather than work, for their bride.

These changes in Lacandon society are occurring alongside, if not resulting from, the transformation and diversification of the economy.

Through their long history of production and trade, the Lacandon consistently produced goods for themselves and traded for items related to their subsistence techniques and practices. Goods once used primarily for utilitarian purposes have been transformed in recent years into crafts for the tourist industry. Some of these practical items, such as hanging net baskets, gourd bowls, and wooden serving utensils still prove useful but are not necessarily present in the kitchens of Lacandon women. Instead, plastic and Tupperware products and metal flatware appeal to women in the community. Women express a great deal of interest in purchasing items that could alleviate some of their workload, but also desire electronics and entertainment accessories.

The transitioning economy in Nahá provides a fascinating example of how alterations to the mode of production stimulate changes in numerous aspects of the social arena. Because the daily lives of men and women diverge along economic lines, men and women invested more in one economic enterprise experience different realities than their counterparts in other productive lifestyles.

Although men and women continue to perform roles that complement the labor of their spouses, individuals in Nahá are facing several economic pathways, all of which produce different outcomes and affect one's expectations for the future. It is impossible to predict exactly how the reliance on commercial items will reconfigure Lacandon society, but the Lacandon's continued investment in profitable enterprises likely will draw them into the dominant capitalist economy as they increasingly rely on and grow accustomed to a cash income.

The younger generations in Nahá have grown up in a village with televisions, Coca Cola, and tourism. When I asked a teenaged boy why he refused to provide his widowed mother with more assistance, he responded that the pay was insufficient. He preferred to help his older brother, who paid him for his work daily. Young mothers not only encourage their husbands to earn money to buy things for the family and the home, they expect that their husbands want to own these items as well. Young married couples eagerly make bow and arrow sets, jewelry, and other crafts to sell to tourists, anticipating the financial rewards long before tourist season begins. Financial incentive and materialism appear to be guiding the economic decisions of the youngest working generation in Nahá. Understanding the

multiple cultural changes accompanying the Lacandon's continued economic transformation will require future investigations that address the Lacandon's integration of multiple livelihood strategies, the extent of participation in a given economic activity, the related goals of production, and the accompanying social relations.

## CHAPTER IV

### WOMEN'S LIVES IN A CLIMATE OF ECONOMIC CHANGE

In the previous two chapters, I argued that the Lacandon have a long history of interaction and exchange with outsiders. However, until recently the Lacandon continued to rely on subsistence farming as their primary mode of production. With the growth of the tourist industry in Chiapas in the last thirty years, the Lacandon have diversified their economic pursuits. The current Lacandon economy can be understood as a mode of production consisting of multiple livelihood strategies, which people generally combine in different ways. I discussed the different aspects of this mode of production in the last chapter. I also examined the relationship between livelihood strategies and social relations. Another topic I addressed was the correlation between economic activity and consumerism. My observations and interviews I conducted in Nahá in the summer of 2006 shed light on differences in women's lives resulting from differential participation in

economic activities, as well as elucidate the current consumer trends in this community.

In this chapter, I will present four abbreviated case studies based on material from formal and informal interviews, as well as observations, in order to illustrate the effects of the transitioning economy on Koh Maria, Koh Paniagua, Chan Nuk, Chäx Nuk, Maria, and their families. The women discussed in this chapter are members of Chan K'in Viejo's extended family group. Before his death in 1996, Chan K'in Viejo welcomed a number of Lacandon scholars into his home and shared with them details about his life and the religious practices of the Lacandon. R. Jon McGee conducted extensive research with Chan K'in Viejo and his family, and as his student, I received permission to stay in the house compound of Chan K'in Viejo's surviving wives in order to collect the data presented in my thesis. I first present a case study of Chan K'in Viejo's third and fourth wives, Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua. Next, I discuss Chan Nuk, the second to last daughter of Chan K'in Viejo and Koh Paniagua. The third case study I present is Chäx Nuk, Chan K'in Viejo and Koh Paniagua's last daughter. In the final case study, I detail the life of Maria, the wife of K'in, who is the youngest son of Chan K'in Viejo and Koh Maria. While I believe the experiences

of other women in Nahá of comparable ages and economic livelihoods likely parallel those of the women highlighted in this chapter, my intention is to show how economic changes have affected the lives of the women portrayed in these case studies.

#### Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua

Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua, the third and fourth wives and surviving widows of Chan K'in Viejo, acted as my hosts while in Nahá and the time I spent with them and their words offered a fascinating glimpse into the lives of adult women and widows. After her father's death when she was about 6 years old, Chan K'in Viejo brought Koh Paniagua into his home. Koh Maria raised her and taught her the duties of women. While married to Chan K'in Viejo, Koh Maria gave birth to ten children; one daughter died while pregnant, and the others are now all adults. Koh Paniagua also gave birth to ten children; two are deceased while the youngest still resides with her. Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua live together, work together, and maintain a close, sisterly relationship. Unlike some residents of Nahá, the Kohs are monolingual speakers of Lacandon. They know very little Spanish, as neither of them attended school or had reason to interact in Spanish with frequency. Over the

course of the summer, I spent a great deal of time with the Kohs. I sometimes simply observed or talked with them, and at other times, I helped them perform household chores, such as shelling corn and beans or collecting eggs. As widows, Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua lead lives somewhat different from married women because they perform tasks typically performed by women, as well as those carried out by men. Working in the *milpa* alongside the Kohs proved to be an incredibly demanding task, but one that demonstrated the extent of their workload in the absence of a husband.

During the month of June, I awoke early almost every morning to head to the *milpa* with the Kohs around sunrise. Leaving this early ensured that we completed a good deal of weeding before the sun reached overhead. Of course, using a machete to weed *milpas* along steep and uneven hillsides presented a physically demanding challenge that required constant bending and squatting. As the Kohs diligently worked around me, they identified edible and commercial crops and instructed me as to what to cut or leave standing. Before leaving the *milpa*, the Kohs collected and chopped firewood for the kitchen stove. The swidden agricultural practices of the Lacandon include burning portions of land prior to planting; the charred wood that remains serves as firewood. Each of the women carried a

cumbersome load of partially charred wood down a steep and often slippery path to the kitchen, refusing to allow me to help for the first couple of weeks. The first time Koh Maria allowed me to carry her load down from the *milpa*, I experienced a feeling of accomplishment and acceptance, briefly interrupted by fear as I maneuvered my way down the hill.

Upon returning from the *milpa*, either Koh Maria or Koh Paniagua stoked the fire and prepared breakfast for a fellow graduate student, an undergraduate assistant, and me. We paid the Kohs to prepare meals for us twice a day, in addition to what we paid them for lodging for the summer. The women alternated cooking for us each day, which enabled the woman not cooking to perform other necessary household tasks and ensured that they each received half of the earnings at the end of the summer. While one woman cooked breakfast, the other generally started other chores, such as tending the chickens, which the women kept separately. Each woman also had her own stove, which may have served a more practical purpose when the women each had children to cook for or when preparing food for a number of people. However, both women regularly used Koh Maria's stove, as did Chan Nuk, one of Koh Paniagua's

youngest and recently married daughters who had not yet built a kitchen area.

After cooking our morning meal of eggs, black beans, and corn tortillas, processing and grinding corn for the next day or two consumed their mornings. Depending on the stage of processing, whether they are shelling, soaking, boiling, grinding, or patting out tortillas, the women completed other tasks concurrently. While shelling, grinding, and making tortillas allow little opportunity for the completion of other chores, soaking and boiling corn kernels do not require supervision, thus the women are able to perform a variety of household duties (see Figure 4). These duties include but are not limited to washing laundry or dishes, feeding chickens, collecting eggs, and burning trash. The Kohs used the evening hours to make necklaces or net bags and baskets to sell to the occasional visitors to Nahá or to send with their sons or sons-in-law to sell in Palenque and San Cristobal. Only on rare occasion, such as when Koh Paniagua was sick or Koh Maria had a backache, did either woman relax for any length of time during the day.

Despite their workloads, Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua executed most tasks without complaint and had pleasant and amicable demeanors that made my time with them enjoyable. Before and after dinner, I often visited with the women in

the kitchen, as did members of their family who stopped by frequently for early evening visits. Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua's house served as a hub for social interaction (see Figure 5). Koh Maria's youngest son, K'in and his family, and her eldest daughter, Nuk, and Koh Paniagua's adult children and grandchildren often stopped by to visit.



Figure 4. Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua. The Kohs performed a variety of tasks throughout the day. Here, the women are removing black beans from the pods.



Figure 5. The Kohs' House and Kitchen. Family members often visited with the Kohs in the kitchen in the early evening.

The kitchen area resembles the dwellings described in historic accounts. Although a tin roof, a sink, some modern cookware, and electricity distinguishes the kitchen from structures described in the past, small vertically placed sticks create the outer walls. Unlike newer homes I visited, both the kitchen and living quarters of their home had packed dirt floors. A long rectangular table with metal corn grinders on two ends divides the kitchen into a cooking area and dining or sitting area. The women washed dishes in a small bathroom sized sink, although gourds and hanging net baskets also held food items and did not require washing. A hammock, small tables around the room, and one large mahogany table provided space for several

people to eat or visit in various parts of the large room. During dinner, the Kohs sometimes sat at a small table near the stoves on the opposite side of the room from us to eat their dinner or to visit with family members. As the summer progressed, and communication with the Kohs became easier, they often sat near us and talked with me about the day or told stories.

The kitchen had doors on three sides and the living quarters had them on all four sides; facing doors on the kitchen and living area enabled the family free movement between the two structures. Dutch doors, rather than windows, allowed fresh air and light into the open rooms, and prevented animal intrusions. The Kohs and Koh Paniagua's sixteen-year-old son, Daniel, sleep in the house; the Kohs' beds line one wall and Daniel's bed rests against the opposite wall. On a table visible from all of their beds is a television, CD player, a stack of DVDs belonging to Daniel, and a DVD player that Daniel and one of his brothers who lived nearby shared. In late July, Chan Nuk and Chan K'in, Koh Paniagua's daughter and son-in-law, gave the Kohs a refrigerator, which they put near the television to save space in the kitchen. Prior to receiving this gift, the women named a refrigerator as the only appliance or electronic item they wanted to purchase. Koh

Maria and Koh Paniagua spent a substantial amount of time working in the *milpa* and processing the produce from their *milpas* and rarely consumed store-bought food. Although the Kohs made necklaces, net bags and baskets for tourists, and they also grew tobacco to roll into potent cigars to sell, unlike other people I interviewed in Nahá, the Kohs said they did not want to buy anything but they wanted to make sure they had enough food. However, because some of the items they have in their house belong to Daniel, if he takes them when he moves, they may attempt to replace them.

Rather than spending money to purchase modern, store bought clothing, Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua bought fabric to make hip length white cotton tops, which they wore over colorful cotton skirts. They both wore jelly sandals (colorful sandals made of a plastic net-like design) whether working in the house or in the *milpa*. Both women braided their hair with colorful yarn down the center of their backs and fastened brightly colored bird breasts and feathers to the end of their braids. They also wore numerous beaded necklaces and earrings, regardless of activity. The only time I saw the women with their hair down and without any jewelry was immediately before and after a shower. After showering, each woman quickly resumed wearing her necklaces and earrings and re-braided her hair.

The clothing, jewelry, and hairstyle worn by Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua differ little from ethnographic descriptions of Lacandon women. Although women make seed necklaces for tourists and wore them in the past, the Kohs wore plastic bead necklaces rather than seed necklaces. House keys hung from a few of their necklaces. Additionally, the Kohs always wore jellies (sandals), whereas past descriptions refer to women being barefoot. While Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua's appearance closely parallel images of Lacandon women in the past aside from these discrepancies, they no longer typify how most Lacandon women look today.

The household economy of Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua aligns most closely with the domestic mode of production described in the previous chapter. In the absence of a husband, the Kohs form the domestic production unit and perform tasks typically carried out by men and women. The Kohs jointly work their *milpas* and they share the produce after harvesting. Similarly, while each woman keeps and cares for her own chickens, if Koh Maria needs eggs and her chickens have not laid any, for example, Koh Paniagua provides them, knowing that Koh Maria will reciprocate the favor. In terms of production, although they craft some items for tourists, the majority of their work serves to provision the household with necessities and not luxuries.

Although the Kohs are respected members of the community, their economic livelihood fails to produce the material returns associated with petty commodity production and entrepreneurial investments. As material wealth increasingly determines status in the Lacandon's gradually stratifying society, those who depend predominantly on subsistence agriculture will occupy the lower end of the developing class system.

Chan Nuk

The second to last daughter of Chan K'in Viejo and his fourth wife, Koh Paniagua, Chan Nuk served as my primary informant during the summer of 2006. Chan Nuk proved to be an invaluable informant throughout the summer; she not only readily answered all of my questions but she also possessed the patience to explain repeatedly those things I struggled to understand. A day after my arrival in Nahá, I interviewed Chan Nuk for the first time. In the summer of 2006, Chan Nuk was twenty years old, had been married to nineteen-year-old Chan K'in (Obregon) for a little more than a year, and had a six-month-old baby girl, Nuk. During our first interview, Chan Nuk explained to me that she and her husband were living in the house of Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua until Chan K'in finished construction on their

house. At the time, the house had been framed and roofed with tin but lacked a cement foundation, mahogany outer walls, and doorways.

Perhaps because of the ongoing construction of their own house, when I initially asked Chan Nuk what Chan K'in did for work she responded that he builds houses (see Figures 6 and 7). Later, she expanded upon her first statement and included planting and tending a *milpa* and making bows and arrows for tourists as other duties Chan K'in performs. In addition to washing clothes, making tortillas, cooking, sweeping, and caring for their baby, Chan Nuk helps Chan K'in work in the *milpa*, puts together arrows, and makes necklaces and figurines for tourists.



Figure 6. Chan K'in and Chan Nuk's House. The couple began construction on their home in May of 2006.



Figure 7. Chan K'in and Chan Nuk's Completed Home. Construction of the house was finished in late July of 2006.

Chan Nuk and Chan K'in both performed tasks generally associated with the opposite sex. For example, I often watched Chan K'in wash the family's laundry and take care of the baby, although Chan Nuk specifically identified these chores as her work and the work of women. Although making *milpa* is a duty typically associated with men, in our first interview Chan Nuk said she often worked in the *milpa* alongside her husband.

Chan Nuk told me that in August, she and Chan K'in travel to Palenque and San Cristobal together to sell their goods to tourists. The money earned from these

transactions, as well as smaller scale sale of *milpa* products, constitutes Chan Nuk and her husband's annual income. Chan Nuk said that although Chan K'in handles the money earned from these transactions, he, unlike some men who drink away the money they earn, spends the money on items for the baby and their new home. Chan Nuk and Chan K'in hoped to purchase several electronic devices and appliances for their new home. Television was at the top of their list, followed by a CD player, DVD player, movies, a fan, a refrigerator, and a washer and dryer. After the completion of their house, the couple purchased a mattress, refrigerator, and a large CD/tape player/stereo with detachable speakers. The couple often bought store-bought foods, such as Cup o' Noodle Soup, pasta, processed meats, yogurt, and various snacks to supplement the staples of black beans and corn tortillas. However, until they build a separate kitchen facility, Chan Nuk will process and cook food grown or purchased by Chan K'in in her mother's kitchen.

Neither Chan Nuk nor Chan K'in dressed in "traditional" Lacandon attire. Unlike Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua, Chan Nuk never braided her hair, adorned it with feathers, or wore an abundance of necklaces in my presence. She wore make-up only on a few occasions. Typically, Chan

Nuk wore her hair in a tight bun. Like many other young women in Nahá, her clothing usually consisted of a blouse or shirt with a long skirt and sandals. Rather than wear hip length white cotton tops over colorful cotton skirts common among older women, Chan Nuk wore store bought clothes with a variety of prints and made of various natural and synthetic materials. More often than not, Chan K'in donned a t-shirt, rolled up-khakis or long shorts, and clear sandals (jellies). When he worked in his *milpa*, Chan K'in typically wore long pants, a t-shirt or long-sleeved cotton button-down, and rubber boots. Chan K'in kept his hair short and only wore a *xikul* when interacting with tourists in Palenque or San Cristobal. Chan Nuk and Chan K'in traveled to Palenque on two occasions during my stay, once to shop and another time to visit a relative. On these excursions to the city, she wore a blouse, jeans, and closed-toe shoes. Similarly, Chan K'in departed from his regular attire on these trips when he wore cargo shorts, a polo-type shirt, and socks with tennis shoes.

Chan Nuk informed me that her father prevented her and her sisters from attending school. However, she learned Spanish from her brothers who attended school and she often spoke a mixture of Spanish and Lacandon in our conversations. Chan K'in attended school for two years,

where he learned to speak and read Spanish. On one occasion, I entered the kitchen area of the Kohs' house and found Chan K'in and Chan Nuk lounging together in the hammock while he read to her from a Mexican history textbook. When I asked Chan Nuk whether Nuk would attend school once she was old enough, she replied with an emphatic yes. Chan Nuk added that Nuk could learn Spanish and Lacandon at school and once she outgrew the local school, they would pay for her to attend school in Ocosingo or Palenque.

Chan Nuk and Chan K'in present a unique case study because of their relatively recent marriage and relocation into their own home. While the couple appeared settled in their new home by the time I departed in August, they continued to utilize the kitchen facilities and laundry area at the Kohs' house. To my amazement, the couple gave their newly purchased refrigerator to the Kohs weeks after they purchased it. I inquired into what prompted this generous gift and Chan Nuk dodged the question by responding that they would buy another refrigerator later and continue to use that one until then. She also reminded me that she and Chan K'in had lived in the Kohs' home for over a year but she did not directly say whether the refrigerator amounted to a payment for their extended stay.

Although Chan K'in performed two months of bride service before Koh Paniagua relieved him of his pre-marital duties, the couple's continued residence and reliance upon facilities at Koh Paniagua and Koh Maria's house after their marriage may have prompted the couple to give such an expensive gift.

The economic livelihood of Chan Nuk and Chan K'in corresponds with the description of petty commodity production offered in the previous chapter. Chan Nuk and Chan K'in adhere to a sexual division of labor in some of their undertakings, although they both produce the craft items they sell to tourists. As peasant-artisans, Chan Nuk and Chan K'in combine agricultural production for use and exchange with the sale of goods to tourists for profit. Unlike the goal of the domestic mode of production, the outcome of petty commodity production extends beyond provisioning of the household and allows for the purchase of luxury items. As a result, petty commodity producers are able to distinguish themselves from subsistence farmers and other less successful commodity producers, thus advancing their economic position.

The couple's economic activities, appearance, and consumer desires parallel a way of life typical among young Lacandon couples in Nahá. However, because Chan Nuk and

Chan K'in were recently married and did not live in their own home until the end of my stay last summer, I present another study below of Chan Nuk's sister, Chäx Nuk. The similarities in their lives are evident but because Chäx Nuk and Arturo have been married and lived alone for a few years, they have had time to produce and acquire goods as a household for a longer period. While Chan Nuk and Chan K'in are certainly petty commodity producers as well, Chäx Nuk and Arturo's lifestyle demonstrates the effects of a longer investment in petty commodity production.

#### Chäx Nuk

Chäx Nuk, Chan Nuk's younger sister and the last daughter of Chan K'in Viejo and Koh Paniagua, was nineteen years old in the summer of 2006. When she was fifteen years old, she married her husband, Arturo, who was twenty-one in 2006. The couple has two children, 3-year-old Omar and 2-year-old Juliana. Chäx Nuk and Arturo have been married for a few years and although Chäx Nuk spent several hours a day with the Kohs at their house, she utilized their kitchen and laundry facilities with less frequency than Chan Nuk because she has a kitchen area and laundry sink next to her home. Chäx Nuk and her children typically spent time at her mother's house during the day while Arturo worked and then

returned to her house to cook dinner when he arrived home in the early evening.

When I asked Chäx Nuk about work, she included making necklaces, helping Arturo put bows and arrows together, sweeping, making tortillas, washing clothes, and taking care of the children as jobs she performed. She identified Arturo's work as building houses, making bows and arrows, making a milpa, and occasionally washing clothes. Arturo also served as a community president and community volunteer, which Chäx Nuk neglected to mention when we discussed Arturo's work. On the other hand, she may conceive of these tasks as something other than work. Nevertheless, I observed Arturo in leadership positions on two occasions, during the mid-summer Mexican presidential elections and at the school graduation ceremony. On election day, Arturo sat between two other men at a table and oversaw the ballot casting process for the entire day. At the graduation ceremony, he and a few other men sat at a central table and watched the festivities prior to Arturo's presentation of certificates to the young graduates. Arturo spent a lot of time away from home, which required Chäx Nuk to provide childcare and perform most domestic tasks without his assistance. Both Chan Nuk and Chäx Nuk

solicited Koh Paniagua's help with childcare when they needed to complete chores in the absence of their husbands.

Arturo generally travels to Palenque and San Cristobal to sell bow and arrow sets and necklaces to tourists while Chäx Nuk remains in Nahá with the children. Arturo handles the money earned from sales to tourists and the construction of houses, which provides his and Chäx Nuk's money for the year. Chäx Nuk and Arturo reside up the hill from the Kohs in a house made of cinder blocks with a tin roof and cement floor that extends beyond the front of the house to create a porch area. Their house has glass windows covered with wrought iron bars, an uncommon feature in Nahá given that most houses have drop-down wooden windows. A light fixture with a ceiling fan hangs overhead in the living area of the house. In terms of electronic appliances and accessories, the couple owns a television, a DVD player, and four movies. Chäx Nuk expressed interest in purchasing more movies and at some point, a washer and dryer, but claimed that otherwise they have everything they need. Although Arturo has a *milpa*, like Chan Nuk and Chan K'in, the family regularly purchased store-bought foods, such as cereal, milk, soup, canned goods, snacks, and sodas.

With a few exceptions, the attire of Chäx Nuk and Arturo varied little from that of Chan Nuk and Chan K'in. Chäx Nuk typically wore colorful dresses or a skirt with a blouse and open-toe sandals. She wore her hair in a ponytail and did not decorate it with feathers nor did she wear necklaces. Arturo kept his hair short and sometimes wore long shorts or rolled-up pants with a button down shirt or t-shirt; at other times, he wore a *xikul* over pants or only a *xikul*. Like most men in Nahá, Arturo wore clear jelly sandals. Chäx Nuk and Arturo's children also wore gender-specific clothing, such as shorts and t-shirts for Omar and dresses or skirts and blouses for Juliana. Although I did observe some school-aged children wearing *xikuls*, typically over pants, in two months I saw Omar in a *xikul* only once, which happened to coincide with a day Chäx Nuk washed the family's laundry.

When I inquired about the children's birthdates, Chäx Nuk pointed me to Arturo, who knew the exact dates of their births, whereas she only knew the birth month and current age. This occasion provided one of my only opportunities to speak with Arturo, as he avoided me throughout the summer and spoke to me only in Spanish. Although Chäx Nuk and Arturo never attended school, they both know Spanish. They intend to send Omar and Juliana to school when they are

older and hope they will learn to read and write in Lacandon and Spanish. Interestingly, Omar became more talkative over the course of the summer, and while he generally spoke in Lacandon, he occasionally used Spanish words as well.

### Maria

Maria, a Tzeltal Maya, is the daughter-in-law of Koh Maria and wife of her youngest son, K'in. K'in and Maria married in 1983 when Maria was fourteen years old. After K'in performed bride service for Maria's father in the nearby community of Lacandon, Maria moved with K'in to Nahá. Maria and K'in have four children, Miguel (22), Adriana (19), Yesenia (17), and Chan K'in William (12), but only Chan K'in William lives with them. The other three attend school in Palenque and share an apartment, visiting Nahá on some weekends and holidays.

Because K'in and Maria participate in a variety of economic undertakings, they perform a number of tasks unlike or in addition to those described by the Kohs, Chan Nuk, and Chãx Nuk. Maria included working in the *milpa* as work performed by her husband but K'in told me that he preferred to hire others to work his *milpa* for him. K'in's entrepreneurial endeavors began in his teenage years in the

early 1980s, when he made bows and arrows to send with his brothers to sell in Palenque. Now the owner of a store in Nahá, many of K'in's activities relate to the operation of his business. In addition to working at the store, K'in frequently travels to Palenque and Villahermosa to purchase merchandise to stock the store. After Nahá was designated a protected area by La Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP) in 1998, CONANP funded the construction of three cabanas, two bathroom and shower stalls, a kitchen, and dining area. While I initially thought K'in owned these facilities, Maria informed me that K'in manages and maintains the buildings and grounds, which provides him with another source of income. Maria did not disclose the amount he earns in wages for this work. K'in recently constructed an apartment next to his and Maria's house and store, which tourists and visitors to Nahá can rent for twenty-five dollars a night. Because their house complex is located next to the road that approaches from the communities of Jardín and Monte Libano, visitors arriving from this direction often stop at K'in and Maria's store to inquire about accommodations and meals, and arranged their stay without looking any further (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. K'in and Maria's Store. Visitors to Nahá often stop first at K'in and Maria's store, located in front of their home.

Maria, like other women in the community, handles the bulk of the housework and domestic duties, although modern appliances like an electric stove and washing machine reduce the time spent on cooking preparations and hand washing clothes. She also earns an income as a seamstress. Over the course of the summer, several women hired Maria to make outfits for themselves or their children and she makes and sells xikuls to tourists. On one occasion, Maria set up a table in front of the community assembly building to sell clothing she had made. She mentioned that in the future, she hopes to open a small clothing store in Nahá. In

addition to clothing, Maria makes seed necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and other items to sell to tourists or visitors to Nahá. Maria also cooks meals for guests staying in the cabanas and their rented apartment for sixty pesos (six dollars US) per person, per meal. K'in and Maria often depend on Chan K'in William, and his sisters and brother when they are in Nahá, to work at the store, which enables them to complete other tasks without closing the store.

K'in and Maria's home and possessions indicate the success of their combined entrepreneurial undertakings. The couple lives in a rather large compound that includes their house and the adjacent rental apartment, which also contains Chan K'in William's room. A covered garage borders a small building, which serves as an occasional meeting area for members of the evangelical congregation to which K'in and Maria belong. Behind the main house, there is an outdoor bathroom with two flushing toilets and two showers. The house, apartment, and restrooms all have concrete slab floors, which dramatically reduce insect activity. Between the house and restrooms, there is a large sink and laundry area, including a small washing machine.

Inside their home, K'in and Maria have several electronic devices and kitchen appliances, including a large television, an entertainment system with detached box

speakers, a DVD player, movies, a microwave, two refrigerators (one for private use another for the store), two sewing machines, a gas and electric stove, and a blender. Chan K'in William had a stereo and television in his room, but his television recently stopped working. Chan K'in William also has a mountain bike and in July, he received a cellular phone with a camera feature and pre-downloaded games, although the village lies outside of service range. The family owns a newer model Ford extended cab pick-up truck, a rare possession in Nahá and based on my observations, one had only by a few storeowners. Despite their income and ability to purchase store-bought food items, Maria typically prepares fresh vegetables, eggs, corn tortillas, rice, fish, and chicken for her family's meals. The family also raises a couple of rabbits at a time, which I believed to be pets until K'in remarked on their good flavor.

Maria dresses in modern fashions and wears her hair up in a ponytail or pulled back. She often wore dresses or skirts that reached to her calves with medium to long sleeved button-down cotton blouses. She wore both closed-toe flats and sandals but she did not wear jellies similar to those worn by the Kohs. Unlike most people in Nahá, Maria wore a watch everyday. On special occasions, such as

Chan K'in William's graduation, she applied make-up. K'in generally dressed in a *xikul* (knee-length cotton tunic worn by Lacandon men) and clear jelly sandals while in Nahá but changed into pants, short sleeve shirts, and tennis shoes when he traveled to other towns or the city. K'in kept his hair short, whereas some men his age cut their bangs short but leave the sides and back below the shoulders. All four of their children wore modern clothing similar to styles worn by teenagers and young adults in the United States.

K'in and Maria place a great deal of importance on their children's education. Although K'in never attended school, Maria went to school for five years. She speaks Spanish, Tzeltal, and Lacandon fluently, whereas K'in speaks Lacandon but converses in Spanish with less fluency. As mentioned above, Chan K'in William's older brother and sisters live and attend school in Palenque. Chan K'in William graduated from primary school in Nahá in July of 2006, will attend school in Esperanza for the next three years, and then move to Palenque for high school (see Figure 9). Maria emphasized the importance of education before marriage, saying the children need to finish school and think about their future before they consider marriage.



Figure 9. Chan K'in William after Graduation. Chan K'in William's sister, Adriana, Chan K'in William, Maria, and K'in celebrated his graduation in July.

Maria said Miguel would not return to Nahá when he completes school, because he will earn more money outside of the community. However, within the last year, Miguel completed school, got married, and returned to Nahá, where he now works for the forestry agency (R. Jon McGee, personal communication 2007). Maria's daughters will probably return to Nahá after they finish school as well, but ultimately she will let them decide where they wish to live.

Maria asserted on several occasions that although she and K'in own a variety of material items, their lives are not that different from other people in the community. She further claimed that despite how people live and earn money, most people's lives and experiences are the same. Family and sharing have not lost their importance. According to Maria, if Koh Maria needed something, they would provide it to her and vice versa. Although the Kohs insist that unlike some of his brothers, K'in consistently helps them when they need assistance, a result of K'in and Maria's economic success is that they earn enough money that they likely do not need to rely on family members for exchange relationships.

Maria feared that I intended to present her family as rich and unkind. While the family showed me nothing but kindness and generosity, their investment in a mode of production that combines agriculture, petty commodity production, and entrepreneurial enterprises has produced clear differences in their lifestyle and attitude. These differences directly relate to K'in and Maria's diversification and flexibility in a climate of economic change. While petty commodity production enables families to acquire store bought goods and some luxuries, K'in and Maria have earned greater returns through their combined

entrepreneurial approach, thus enabling them to attain a level of financial gain, material wealth, and status unparalleled by petty commodity producers.

Maria seemed aware that her family's economic security and possession of desirable goods presented the potential for others to take advantage of them. Not only does the family possess a safe to store their money but they are secretive in planning their trips out of the community in order to avoid giving free rides to others. For example, before I departed from Nahá I asked Maria and K'in if they had plans to travel to Palenque on the date I intended to leave. Maria confided in me that they were traveling through Palenque on that day and would give me a ride, but instructed me not to tell others because they might ask for a ride. While this is only one example, it demonstrates K'in and Maria's changing relationship with community members due to their investment in several lucrative enterprises. Ultimately, they are not like everyone else; they have things other people want and they do not always want to share what they have worked to acquire.

#### Conclusion: Implications of Economic Change

The lives and activities of the women I interviewed directly correspond to the economic pursuits of their

husbands, or their own needs in the absence of a husband. For example, the Kohs' lives differ from the life of married women with husbands who primarily farm and from the lives of women whose husbands earn a large part of the family's income from tourists or other endeavors. The Kohs perform the arduous work of women and men, and depend on the produce of their *milpas*, not store-bought foods, to subsist. On the other hand, some women combine *milpa* products with manufactured foods purchased with money earned from sales to tourists when they prepare meals. Although women continue to be the ones who cook, what they cook and how they cook it directly relates to their economic livelihood.

Disparities in material wealth also accompany differential participation in economic ventures. While entrepreneurs like K'in and Maria possess an abundance of electronics and appliances, young married couples invested in mixed economic pursuits also purchase or expressed a desire to acquire consumer goods. Farming families and women like the Kohs often have televisions or radios but lack the means to buy many items owned by entrepreneurs or families earning an income from tourists. Additionally, younger women, whether married or single, differ from older women like the Kohs in their appearance. Women now wear

store-bought dresses, long skirts, and blouses made of various materials rather than the white cotton tops and knee-length skirts worn daily by the Kohs (see Figure 10). Few women in Nahá continue to braid their hair and decorate it with feathers or wear an abundance of necklaces. The actual appearance of many Lacandon women (and men) today proves to be a substantial deviation from the images of the Lacandon presented in past ethnographic reports and from those depictions carefully and misleadingly chosen for the internet by individuals attempting to perpetuate the romanticized images of the unchanging Lacandon.



Figure 10. Three Generations of Lacandon. The appearances of Chăx Nuk, Chan Nuk, and Chăx Nuk's daughter, Juliana, differ from those of the Kohs and older Lacandon women.

The transitioning economy has also produced changes in the social realm. Although Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua treat one another as sisters, at one time they acted as co-wives to Chan K'in Viejo. As I discussed in the previous chapter, younger married women reject the practice of polygynous marriages for a variety of reasons. While one woman viewed polygyny as non-Christian, most women rejected the practice because they did not want to share their husband with another woman, nor did they want to share money earned from tourists with another woman and her children. Koh Maria and Koh Paniagua each had ten children, whereas women today expressed a preference for fewer children. An abundance of children in a farming family provides a family labor pool and a medium for future negotiated marital arrangements, whereas in a family dependent on a cash economy, numerous children translates into more mouths to feed on a somewhat unpredictable budget. Additionally, as the Lacandon continue to view education as a valuable asset, the cost of educating their children outside of the community will present financial obstacles for families with a number of children.

Of the Kohs' children who had an opportunity to go to school, only male members of the family had their father's permission to attend school. Despite this, many of their

children and in-laws speak Spanish and deem it necessary that their children receive an education. Maria, for example, insists that all of her children finish school in order to secure good jobs in the future. Although Miguel returned to Nahá and secured a job there, at the time of our interview Maria thought that he would find employment outside of Nahá where the potential to earn more money exists. On the other hand, Maria believes her daughters may return to Nahá and perhaps become teachers, but she will let them decide their future paths. Interestingly, young women like Chan Nuk and Chäx Nuk insisted that their children would attend school to learn to read and write in Spanish and Lacandon, although they mentioned nothing about the importance of other school subjects or future employment opportunities. Of course, Chan Nuk and Chäx Nuk have young children and Maria's children are older and closer to finishing school. Although differences exist in how people perceive of education and the possibilities it presents, most people I spoke with viewed education as an important part of their children's development.

Education will play an important role in the future of Nahá. If education continues to grow in importance, those who continue their schooling in other communities may also have to look outside of Nahá for employment opportunities.

An alternative is the creation of jobs in Nahá in order to accommodate a growing population of educated individuals. Both situations foretell the changing cultural climate in Nahá. If education provides opportunities for the Lacandon to find waged labor, whether in or outside of Nahá, participation in this new mode of production will impact Lacandon society as some individuals find or create jobs in Nahá and others leave Nahá in search of employment.

An emphasis on education, a changing economy, and the related social and material alterations will continue to affect Lacandon society and stratification over time. Variable participation in economic ventures has already produced a number of visible changes in Lacandon society and the trend toward increased consumerism clearly has accompanied those changes. As Lacandon children grow up in homes with some modern appliances, they become accustomed to lifestyles different from those of their farming grandparents. It seems probable that a child who lives in a home with a tin roof, cement floors, a television, and DVD player will strive to reproduce that lifestyle, or elaborate upon that standard of living. It is far more difficult to imagine that children growing up under the current circumstances would opt for a more humble home with fewer possessions. Predicting what life will be like in

Nahá in the future is a challenging task. The only certainty is that change is underway and occurring at a rapid pace. As a result, future investigations of the Lacandon should attempt not to minimize those changes but to document them as they provide valuable insight into how the ongoing economic transformation will affect Lacandon society over time.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In this thesis, I have presented culture change among the Lacandon as an ongoing process that has been documented, sometimes inadvertently, throughout their recorded history. The Lacandon interacted with missionaries, *monteros*, and other outsiders who introduced new materials and concepts into their lives. Although these contacts did affect Lacandon society and promote gradual change, it was not until the Lacandon diversified their economic pursuits in the mid-twentieth century that a more radical reconfiguration of Lacandon culture began. The growth of the tourist industry in Chiapas presented the Lacandon with an alternative to subsistence farming and their continued investment in this alternate mode of production has accelerated the rate of culture change over the last thirty years.

In ethnographic reports written before the transformation of the Lacandon economy, several

characteristics of Lacandon society commonly appear. Perhaps commented on more than any other characteristic of Lacandon society was the Lacandon's practice of a polytheistic religion, which was the responsibility of the male heads of household. Discussions of the Lacandon economy centered on subsistence farming, and authors typically mentioned that hunting and fishing supplemented agricultural production. A sexual division of labor directed the work activities of men and women. When authors discussed economic exchanges between Lacandon and non-Lacandon, they maintained that Lacandon men sought after goods that enabled them to provision the family with necessities unavailable in the forest, like salt and metal tools. The Lacandon's practice of polygynous marriages also received the attention of a number of scholars. Authors generally noted that men performed bride service for a period determined by their future fathers-in-law before a marriage.

Descriptions of the Lacandon's appearance also varied little over the last two hundred years. Northern Lacandon men wore *xikuls* that reached to their calves and wore their hair long with short bangs. The women wore skirts under a hip length *xikul*-like garment, fastened feathers or bird breasts to their braided hair, and decorated themselves

with several necklaces. Depictions of house architecture changed little over time as the Lacandon lived in and practiced their religious rituals in structures with palm-thatched roofs and dirt packed floors for the greater part of their ethnographic history. The Lacandon lived in dispersed groups composed of members of an extended family, sometimes surrounded by their *milpas*.

The transitioning Lacandon economy has led to the replacement or transformation of many aspects of Lacandon society that scholars once considered commonplace. Rather than operate under an economy based on subsistence agriculture guided by the domestic mode of production, the Lacandon now employ multiple livelihood strategies in which they combine subsistence agriculture and petty commodity production, sometimes in association with entrepreneurial investments. A sexual division of labor continues to direct the work of women and men, although who performs the tasks and the type of work performed in addition to agriculture-related tasks fluctuates depending on the household's participation in other economic endeavors. Whereas subsistence agriculture and trading relationships in the past served to provision the household with necessities, and still do to some extent, money earned from petty commodity production and entrepreneurship enable Lacandon

families to purchase items in excess of their subsistence needs. Store bought foods, kitchen appliances, electronics, and entertainment accessories are popular items in the Lacandon homes that I visited.

Premarital practices and the family unit have also undergone change. Monetary payments have taken the place of bride service, whereas previously men planted *milpas* and constructed houses in exchange for their wives. Most marriages today are monogamous rather than polygynous. Lacandon women that I spoke with voiced opposition to polygynous marriage because they do not want to share their husbands with other women, nor do they want to share the profits of their economic investments with other women and their children. Family size also appears to be on the decline. For example, Koh Maria gave birth to ten children. Koh Maria's children, however, had an average of 4.3 children each, with her oldest son fathering seven and her youngest daughter giving birth to three. Koh Paniagua also had ten children and thus far, none of Koh Paniagua's children have had more than two children. The availability of birth control certainly plays a role in the decline of family size, as do changes in the Lacandon's economic mindset regarding the number of children they have. As I discussed in Chapter 3, numerous children in farming

families proved to be an economic asset, whereas several children in a petty commodity producing family present a financial obstacle.

Although many older men and women continue to dress and wear their hair in a manner similar to that described in the past, the appearance of the younger generations of Lacandon departs substantially from the images presented in past ethnographic reports. Young men often cut their hair and wear pants or long shorts with t-shirts, although some wear *xikuls* over pants. However, men of all ages wear *xikuls* when they travel to sell their crafts to tourists. Young women put their hair in a bun or ponytail and wear colorful dresses or skirts with blouses. Unlike their grandmothers and mothers, women no longer wear an abundance of necklaces nor do they attach feathers bundles to their hair.

The newer houses lack the thatched roofs and earthen floors common in houses and ritual spaces in the past. Instead, homes have tin roofs and cement floors. Cinder blocks or mahogany planks create the outer walls previously constructed of sticks bound together vertically. Most Lacandon no longer practice a polytheistic religion and in many cases, churches now replace god houses. While the women that I interviewed and their families attend church,

others do not attend church nor do they worship in god houses.

Although other factors may have contributed to alterations in Lacandon society, the different economic livelihoods of subsistence farmers, petty commodity producers, and entrepreneurs encouraged the broad changes in Lacandon culture visible today. In the previous chapter, I presented and analyzed case studies that exemplify three modes of production in Lacandon society, subsistence agriculture, petty commodity production, and entrepreneurship. In earlier times, subsistence agriculture guided the economic pursuits of Lacandon families. Because of this, people's economic experiences and lives differed little. The development of the tourism industry presented the Lacandon with a new economic opportunity, petty commodity production. The entrepreneurs currently in Nahá acquired the means to create their businesses as young men beginning in the early 1980s. The now middle-aged storeowners were among the first wave of Lacandon to regularly travel to popular tourist destinations to sell the goods they and their families produced. Like the current petty commodity producers, their sales provided them with the financial ability to construct new and stylistically different homes and to purchase store-bought

goods and luxury items. Eventually, some of these petty commodity producers opened small stores, which pushed them into the entrepreneurial realm. Others continued farming and making goods for tourists on a small scale but never became entrepreneurs. Although petty commodity producers have not obtained the financial wealth of entrepreneurs, the economic livelihoods and material gain of petty commodity producers differentiates them from subsistence farmers. Petty commodity producers' combined strategy of farming and production for tourists produces monetary returns unavailable through farming alone.

The three modes of production that comprise the Lacandon economy, in fact, are aspects of a larger mode of production, which Halperin (1994) termed multiple livelihood strategies. Halperin argued that multi-generational families in Kentucky combined a number of economic strategies and pooled their resources in order to provision their households, which enabled them to meet their needs, as well as resist full capitulation to the capitalist economy. Similarly, Lacandon nuclear families employ multiple livelihood strategies, such as farming and petty commodity production, not only to provision their households but also to earn a profit. However, not all households combine these strategies in the same way or for

the same purposes. Those who are subsistence farmers may produce some goods for tourists in order to acquire necessities but they provision their homes through farming. While petty commodity producers generally farm to provision their households, they use their earnings not for necessities but for non-essential material purchases. Entrepreneurs combine farming and petty commodity production with store ownership. As a result, entrepreneurs meet their provisioning needs in the same way as petty commodity producers but are able to make more lavish purchases than petty commodity production alone supports.

An important question to consider is how these differing economic lifestyles will affect the Lacandon's future. Because not everyone participates in moneymaking endeavors to the same extent, some people earn more than others. A great deal of variability exists in people's perception of financial security and in the ways they choose to achieve it. What one family or household deems necessary and desirable may not correspond with another family's expectations. Although the Kohs stated that they need little in terms of material wealth as long as they have food to eat, Chan Nuk and Chäx Nuk expressed a desire for and possessed material goods in excess of what they need to maintain their households. Maria and K'in's

economic lifestyle enables them to provision their household but also has allowed them to buy all of the items that Chan Nuk and Chäx Nuk hope to buy and more.

The differences between the lives and attitudes of the Kohs and their children illustrate that families have different economic goals. Furthermore, these disparities demonstrate how differential participation and success in economic endeavors produce distinct variations in standards of living. The cumulative result of differences in lifestyle and in capacity, willingness, and opportunity to earn money has produced financial inequalities between households. This may be the beginning of stratification in Lacandon society. As the trend toward stratification continues, an important consideration is whether the current economic climate offers the possibility of upward mobility.

Families invested in entrepreneurial endeavors, particularly stores, benefit from and depend on the earnings of petty commodity producers who patronize their businesses. Petty commodity producers, in turn, depend on the tourists who purchase their crafts. As long as the profits from sales to tourists satisfy petty commodity producers' needs and desires and they remain in Nahá, Nahá's entrepreneurs will likely continue to prosper.

However, if petty commodity production fails to produce the desired returns, will the artisans and entrepreneurs who have grown accustomed to luxury purchases return to farming or seek out other employment opportunities in or outside of Nahá? While I do not know the answer, the question is important since it pits social class against community solidarity. To the extent that petty commodity producers and entrepreneurs are willing to leave their community to pursue economic opportunity, they are favoring the pursuit of social advancement and increased stratification over community solidarity, and perhaps, Lacandon identity.

Tourism clearly dictates the ebb and flow of the current Lacandon economy but it is an industry that is particularly vulnerable to international politics, currency fluctuation, and market trends. Consequently, any major changes in that industry will affect Lacandon society as a whole. However, barring any immediate alterations to the tourist-based economy, little opportunity for upward mobility exists in Nahá's current economic hierarchy. The oldest generation in Nahá, subsistence farmers who depend little on tourism, generally expressed no desire to change their lifestyle in order to acquire more money and material items, and thus have chosen not to advance their economic position. Petty commodity producers do want to earn money

and purchase luxury items but are limited by patterns of seasonal tourist activity. While petty commodity producers can distinguish themselves from subsistence farmers, they have not achieved the level of financial security of entrepreneurs. Because the several stores already in Nahá meet the needs of the community, petty commodity producers would likely have to create another type of business in order to move into the entrepreneurial realm successfully. Entrepreneurs, although they are few in numbers, comprise the upper class in the Lacandon's economic hierarchy. However, their dependence on the business of tourists and middle class petty commodity producers, and the presence of local competition, acts as a control on their economic gain.

Because the current configuration of the Lacandon economy offers little room for upward mobility but at the same time promotes the pursuit of material gain among petty commodity producers and entrepreneurs, I question whether the Lacandon will be able to resist a full entrance into Mexico's capitalist economy in the future. Despite centuries of interaction and exchange relationships with outsiders, the transformation of the Lacandon economy within the last thirty years from subsistence agriculture to a mode of production incorporating multiple livelihood

strategies has increasingly drawn the Lacandon into the global economy. Although some Lacandon have attempted to minimize their involvement in the larger economy, others' investments in tourism and entrepreneurial ventures have effectively brought the global economy to the Lacandon. Changes in social relations, consumer behavior, appearances, and marital practices are only a few of the consequences associated with the recent economic transformation.

In terms of their future and the prospects for their children, the Lacandon's recognition of the value of education and their changing perception of what constitutes material wealth and financial security indicates their desire to keep pace with those they believe are in a more desirable economic position. Petty commodity producers I interacted with indicated a desire to propel themselves and their children into an economic lifestyle similar to that experienced by entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs I interviewed expressed satisfaction with their lives, but they anticipate that education will present employment possibilities for their children unavailable in Nahá.

Indeed, few employment opportunities exist in Nahá, but will access to education prompt the younger generations to seek employment in the mainstream economy or will young

Lacandon men and women with educations introduce new economic opportunities to Nahá? What opportunities will await the children of those who do not promote education? Surely, continued access to a level of education beyond what is currently available in Nahá will present new economic pathways, whether in or outside of Nahá, for future generations of Lacandon. However, what is less certain is how the Lacandon will approach those prospective economic opportunities and what effects they will have on Lacandon society.

As the Lacandon continue to modernize their lives and seek more secure positions within the global economy, they will initiate a new pattern of culture change in Lacandon society. The current economic transformation directed by working age Lacandon has produced broad-spectrum changes in every aspect of Lacandon culture. Similarly, the financial and social future of the Lacandon in Nahá will hinge on the economic direction forged by the next generation.

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