

CARDENISTA LAND REFORM IN DURANGO: THE WORK OF CAMPESINOS  
AND CARDENAS IN CREATING MODERN DURANGO

by

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## **DEDICATION**

*To my parents,*

*Abel Lorenzo Nájera López and María Sotera Gallegos Félix de Nájera and to the loving  
memory of Francesca Irene Roberts née Galgano (1921-2013)*

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## **I. Introduction: Continuity and Change between Cardenismo and Old Mexico**

This chapter will form the introduction to a larger work. My objective is to look at what Durango's government newspaper *El Periódico Oficial del Estado de Durango* (The Official Newspaper of the State of Durango) reveals about the last two years of Lázaro Cárdenas' presidency (1934-1940) in Durango with regard to land reform. The chapter covers the last two years because I was able to gather enough material for an essay-length study such as the one that follows. While these years have been little covered for the state of Durango, on the national scale the Cárdenas presidency is far from neglected in the historiography. Indeed, the Cardenista years have stimulated wide interest across other disciplines as well, such as sociology, political science, art history and others.<sup>1</sup>

As Alan Knight has observed, no historian disputes the importance of the Cárdenas administration in modern Mexico's consolidation.<sup>2</sup> Widely covered topics for the Cardenista years include labor policies, education reform, the nationalization of Mexican oil, and agrarian reform. Of these topics, this chapter will focus on agrarian redistribution issues and the *Código Agrario* (Agrarian Code) of 1934. I will place emphasis on the petitions of residents of Durango's hamlets and towns and the legislation

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<sup>1</sup> This year for example, art historian Jennifer Jolly published a book that looks at how Lázaro Cárdenas' patronage of muralists, sculptors of monuments, libraries and theaters transformed the city of Pátzcuaro. See *Creating Pátzcuaro, Creating Mexico: Art, Tourism, and Nation Building under Lázaro Cárdenas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (Feb., 1994): 73. Knight, "Mexico, c. 1930-1946," in *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume VII Latin America since 1930: Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 7.

they cited. The latter will be treated in the second chapter of this work. As far as the political culture of the petitioners, the frequent requests published in the newspaper show that *campesinos* (peasants; subsistence farmers) in Durango came into a closer communion with their local authorities, the state governor, and indeed with their nation's president. This political relationship contrasts with conditions in Durango on the eve of the Mexican Revolution. Thus, the evidence here demonstrates the extensive power the modernizing Mexican state wielded under Cárdenas, even over northern frontier parts like Durango, where scholars have often found Mexico City's power and influence to be on shakier ground.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, one cannot exaggerate the importance of Cárdenas' agrarian reform for the people in Durango.

As Paul Hart has noted, the agrarian reform that Cárdenas implemented in Mexico enabled the single-party government to gain considerable support in rural Mexico and also helped give credit to the goal of unifying all socioeconomic classes into one "revolutionary family," symbolized by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party) and its control of the Mexican government.<sup>4</sup> This increased political power that the one-party state gained, and the fact that the agrarian reform profoundly improved the lives of many peasants in Mexico, helped lay the foundations of the modern Mexican state, which helps explain the wide scholarly coverage of the topic. The issues of the *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Durango*

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<sup>3</sup> For examples of literature that discuss Mexico City's weaker power in northern states and the latter's relative isolation, see Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 15-18. Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 14. Adrian A. Bantjes, *As if Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1998), xvi-xix.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Hart, *Emiliano Zapata: Mexico's Social Revolutionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 278. Hereafter, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* will be referred to as the PRI.

published in the last two years of the Cárdenas presidency are replete with peasant's petitions to the governor of Durango asking for land redistribution. These newspapers also published government decrees and orders regarding land redistribution that were often specific to a given locality. As announced in the headings of this newspaper, any laws and decrees published in an issue were to be automatically legitimated by their appearance in the press.

Besides the current method in vogue in Mexican historiography to see regional history as illuminating national history and vice versa, the reader might ask what could be so revealing about an in-depth study of these years in Durango. A study of the state of Durango during the Cardenista period reveals much of the legacy of Francisco "Pancho" Villa's (1878-1923) role in his home state during the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Additionally, most historical interpretations discuss whether the regime fulfilled or cancelled out the ideals of the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that little work has been done on such a key revolutionary state.<sup>5</sup>

While any deep investigation of Villa's legacy and its relationship to the Cárdenas period is beyond the scope of this essay, this study aims at being a useful starting point for researchers who want to explore the connections between the Villa era in Durango and the Cárdenas era in Durango. Understanding the extent and ways that Cárdenas' agrarian reforms fulfilled and perhaps deviated from Villa's revolutionary legacy in his home state helps us better understand not only the impact that Villa's revolution had on the agrarian status quo in his home state but also serve as a point from which to inquire

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<sup>5</sup> Luis Anaya Merchant, "El Cardenismo en la Revolución Mexicana: conflicto y competencia en una historiografía viva," *Historia Mexicana* 60, no. 2 (Octubre-Diciembre 2010): 1284.

into relations between the Villista past of Durango and its reconstruction by regimes seeking to mold national memory. As Max Parra has noted, the Cardenista government itself generated a niche in national dialogues over Pancho Villa's legacy and his part in the Mexican Revolution. Out of this niche arose novel perspectives and portrayals that marginalized negative views of Villa's actions during the revolutionary decade (these were by no means few) and interpreted Villa in a positive light. In fact, this period would set the stage for placing Villa in the canon of Mexico's national heroes.<sup>6</sup> I posit that further study of the eclectic nature of these newspapers can be used to assess both Cárdenas' alleged populism and the degree of influence Mexico City-based rule had on the economy of the region. In addition to Villa's legacy, this study can shed light on the aftermath of Zapata's revolutionary activities during the 1910s in northern regions. Zapata was the first revolutionary to formally advocate for land reform and redistribution in his *Plan de Ayala* in 1911.<sup>7</sup> Villa would follow this example in 1915.

### **Literature Review on Cardenismo**

While this study is one of few that covers the Cardenista era in Durango, studies on the Cardenista presidency for other regions or Mexico in general are not lacking. The historiography has highlighted the importance of the Cárdenas administration for understanding the consolidation of the Mexican Revolution. As Alan Knight has pointed out, the Cardenista regime's importance for modern Mexico's development has not been

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<sup>6</sup> Max Parra, "The Battle for Pancho Villa during Cardenismo," in *Writing Pancho Villa's Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 120.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Hart, *Emiliano Zapata: Mexico's Social Revolutionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5.

disputed by any scholar.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, scholars of the Mexican Revolution studying the years between 1910 and 1920 have often found it germane to discuss the subsequent Cárdenas administration, even if briefly, as the period when the revolutionary goal of land reform had been completed. For example, in his extensive biography of Villa, Friedrich Katz describes how Villa ordered the taking of the haciendas in the Chihuahua region but made exceptions with some *hacendados* (land owners) such as the rich Zuloaga family who had possibly given him hospitality on at least one occasion. Thus, Katz here evinces that the revolutionary Villa himself did not destroy the hacienda system that was so hated by the revolutionaries though he did weaken it. In this same section, Katz finds it apropos to mention that it would be Cárdenas who would confiscate most of the estates that had managed to survive the turbulent revolutionary decade and thus effectively ended the system.<sup>9</sup>

In another celebrated study of the Mexican Revolution, Alan Knight discusses how the revolutionaries were able to prevail over the agrarian encumbrances that had limited Mexico's growth during the Díaz era without sliding into fascism or chauvinism. From this perspective, Knight gathers that the revolutionaries were more successful than the Kuomintang party of early twentieth-century China who had also unraveled out of an older liberalism, created their own nationalistic and militant ideology, a base of plebeians, and the institutionalization of a strong, centralized, and somewhat corrupt

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Knight explicitly accorded with this view in 1994 when he wrote that no historian disputed that the Cárdenas administration was a key era in modern Mexico's progression, see "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (1994): 1. Pavel Leonardo Navarro Valdez's *El cardenismo en Durango: Historia y política regional 1934-1940* seems to be the only study to date focusing on Durango during the Cárdenas era.

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 448-449.

government. In Knight's view, the difference between the Chinese and Mexican cases was that the Mexican Revolution successfully mobilized the plebeians and this mobilization was brought back every so often, but particularly during the Cárdenas presidency. Thus, Katz emphasizes how the Cárdenas administration fulfilled the Mexican Revolution by ridding Mexico of haciendas and Knight highlights continuity between the Revolution and Cardenismo.<sup>10</sup>

More specifically, though, Knight published what is perhaps the most important English-language historiographical article to date on Cardenismo, titled "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" Here, Knight provided a useful evaluation of the state of studies on Cardenismo up until 1994. Knight's inspection of the literature on Cardenismo found that scholars' contributions could be classified in conformity with the responses they furnished to the following questions regarding the Mexican state: What did it propound? How strong was it? What were the ultimate consequences of its program? Additionally, Knight argues that one must assess the nature of the Cardenista government by evaluating the degree to which it was democratic as opposed to dictatorial. For this evaluation, Knight asserted that scholars must demonstrate the degree to which the federal government determined legislation by giving orders to the states and the extent to which the states determined legislation by placing pressure on the federal government. Knight convincingly proposes that such an investigation of the Mexican revolutionary state will

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<sup>10</sup> Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. 2, *Counter-revolution and Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 516.

allow scholars to assess the amount of power held by the Cardenista regime and its campaign.<sup>11</sup>

As Knight describes it, this is a topic fraught with dispute. The prominent Mexicanist specifically questions whether Cardenismo intended to successfully pursue extreme change in Mexico through his programs. Or in a related question, Knight ponders whether his reforms were demonstrative of more continuity with his immediate revolutionary predecessors or even Porfirio Díaz's regime.<sup>12</sup> In his study, *As If Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardensimo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution*, Adrian Bantjes addresses this last question of continuity versus change. In Bantjes' view, the core of the dispute over the amount of continuity versus change there was between the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary phase lay the question of how Cárdenas' reforms impacted the bourgeoisie in agrarian society. In other words, this author pays attention to the degree to which the course of the Revolution modified Mexico's class framework, a change that, according to Knight, came to a climax under the Cárdenas administration.<sup>13</sup>

Going back to Knight's historiographical article, Knight finds two types of revisionism in the scholarship. The first type leans towards a relaxed Marxist perspective and sees the institutional revolution as a promoter of capitalism. Knight says that from the loss of the plebeian movements of 1910-1915, consecutive administrations have spoken for the bourgeoisie. The other revisionist trend makes the state its focal point and

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<sup>11</sup> Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (February 1994): 73.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (February 1994): 74.

<sup>13</sup> Adrian Bantjes, *As if Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholastic Resources Inc., 1998), 138.

may or may not examine class and class relations. Knight states that this focal point could allow us to call this revisionist trend a statist view which at times takes a Marxist shape among some scholars and a non-Marxist shape among others. For example, Knight notes that Arnaldo Córdova, a Marxist scholar, highlights the state's ascending power in his study of relations between the state and Mexico's plebeian classes. In fact, as Knight notes, Córdova takes a defensive position in arguing that he remains within the confines of "Marxist orthodoxy" in response to others' claims that he veers off from it. In Córdova's interpretation, Cardenismo illustrates the triumphant summit of the Mexican Revolution's *política de masas* (politics of the masses), that is, plebeian submission to the powerful revolutionary government. For Knight, this persuasion accords near to political scientist Arturo Anguiano's who published a study on worker politics and the state during the Cardenista era. For Knight, the dissimilitude between Córdova and Anguiano lies with the comparative weight that the state is accorded as well as its ability to act on its own.<sup>14</sup>

In an earlier work published in 1963, Joe C. Ashby accords with Jesús Silva Herzog in that the Cárdenas administration marked the end of the Mexican Revolution. As Ashby notes, Herzog argues that in the new Mexican state that came into being under Cárdenas, "... the trade union became an instrument of power of private industry and for making the state the arbiter of the nation's economy." Ashby argues that the singular amalgam of Cardenista programs, Mexican labor policies, and the reactions of those with property (which was mostly foreigners), had among its consequences the implementation

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<sup>14</sup> Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 74-75. Arnaldo Córdova, *La política de masas del cardenismo*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Mexico, 1976). Arturo Anguiano, *El Estado y la política obrera del cardenismo*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Mexico, 1984).



of agrarian legislation in the Laguna cotton-growing region, the seizure of the National Railways Company from foreign ownership, and also the seizure of Mexican oil from foreigners, which Ashby suggests might be the most spectacular result of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>15</sup>

Pavel Leonardo Navarro Valdez also looks at the Laguna region in a study that, to my knowledge, is the only book-length study that focuses on Cardenista Durango. The author finds that the Laguna experience fostered an explosion of land redistribution in other parts of the same state. Peasants from all over Durango set up their agrarian committees and were helped by rural teachers and agronomists from the Agrarian Department, which entered into a phase of skyrocketing activity.<sup>16</sup> Navarro's book, which takes a comprehensive view of the Cardenista years in Durango, discusses the stumbling blocks that the promoters of Cardenismo faced as they tried to situate themselves within the state, including the opposition towards the governor, Enrique Calderón, backed by Cárdenas. Navarro looks at the work of Cardenismo within the state, including its projects and setbacks, such as socialist education, agrarian reform, and the alliances and conflicts among important social actors such as *campesinos*, workers, and teachers. Navarro also takes an in-depth look at the regional nuances of Cardenismo in Durango. He sees the Cardenista years as a profoundly transformative period for the state. In his view, social movements became more important in Durango during this time, which

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<sup>15</sup> Joe C. Ashby, *Organized Labor and the Mexican Revolution under Lázaro Cárdenas* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), vii-viii. Jesús Silva Herzog, *La Revolución Mexicana en Crisis* (México, 1944), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Pavel Leonardo Navarro Valdez, *El cardenismo en Durango: historia y política regional, 1934-1940* (Durango: Instituto de Cultura de Estado de Durango, 2005), 157.

witnessed the cementing of many customs and institutions that were to play a crucial role during the rest of the century.<sup>17</sup>

Mikael Wolfe's more recent article looks at the construction of the dam site in El Palmito, Durango, near the Nazas River. This project was part of the National Revolutionary Party's Six Year Plan under Cárdenas' presidency. In dialogue with literary critic Beatriz Jaguaribe and anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz, Wolfe suggests that Mexican dams were configured in order to give legitimacy to the president's "cultural modernist ruins," (which Lomnitz links to material manifestations like dams) even if they did not reach completion. Furthermore, Wolfe argues that "company towns" functioned as miniature worlds of the Mexican government's national exertions to spread "technology, labor, and nature in the name of a reified revolution." Wolfe sees the demise of the dam as reflecting the denouement of Cárdenas' postrevolutionary plan to improve society.<sup>18</sup>

Wolfe is not alone in seeing microcosms of postrevolutionary Mexico's development in the Cárdenas administration's activities. In art historian Jennifer Jolly's monograph published last year, Jolly finds another microcosm of modern Mexico in the town of Pátzcuaro in Michoacán. Jolly historicizes Cárdenas' sponsorship of the region's muralists, museums, libraries, schools, and tourism development and argues that Cárdenas' focus made the district into a miniature representation of cultural might in Mexico. Jolly argues that the creation of this cultural site during the Cardenista years

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<sup>17</sup> Pavel Leonardo Navarro Valdez, *El cardenismo en Durango: historia y política regional, 1934-1940* (Durango: Instituto de Cultura de Estado de Durango, 2005), 22.

<sup>18</sup> Mikael Wolfe, "Bringing the Revolution to the Dam Site: How Technology, Labor, and Nature Converged in the Microcosm of a Northern Mexican Company Town, 1936-1946," *Journal of the Southwest* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 1-2. See n. 2 for Lomnitz's comparison.

revealed the beginnings of modern Mexico.<sup>19</sup> That Jolly sees the cultural and artistic work created under Cárdenas as generating the beginning of modern Mexico suggests that the years between 1910 and 1920 did not mark the end of Old Mexico. In other words, revolutionary change had not truly been fulfilled by 1920 or even 1930. It was Cárdenas who would fulfill the Revolution and end Old Mexico.

The contributions by Wolfe and Jolly are useful for articulating ideas about Mexico's modernization and how it functioned in getting ordinary Mexican to see themselves as belonging to a national community. The historicizing of when sentiments of modern nationalism came about in Mexico is of consequence. Anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz, mentioned above, has argued that national sentiment varied in kind with the demise of the Spanish colonial period in 1821, while historian María Elena Martínez has suggested that it might not have even manifested itself then. Lomnitz also notes that Mexican poet Octavio Paz believed that most Mexicans did not have a sense of national sentiment in his 1950 book *El laberinto de la soledad*.<sup>20</sup> Paz's assertion, however, might not have been based on much evidence. The gazettes of the Cárdenas era that are examined in this study suggest otherwise. Campesinos in Durango who petitioned their state governor for land often referenced the Revolution and it was clear that the peasants themselves (many of whom were partially literate or illiterate) had adopted a revolutionary (read "national") discourse when they petitioned their governor for land

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<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Jolly, *Creating Pátzcuaro, Creating Mexico: Art, Tourism, and Nation Building under Lázaro Cárdenas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018), 1-2. Although both Jolly and Wolfe see their focal points as microcosms, Jolly does not cite Wolfe so there is no direct influence apparent from Wolfe to Jolly's work.

<sup>20</sup> Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xiv. María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 14.

during the Cárdenas era. Thus, the works mentioned here demonstrate that new technology, new cultural and artistic production, and revolutionary discourse in petitions for land in Durango were all markers of the fulfillment of the Revolution and a modern Mexico that was clearly emerging in the Cárdenas era.

Jolly's focus on Michoacán is a significant contribution to the literature for its focus on the murals created during the Cárdenas era. Comparatively speaking, this art had been little studied before. Nevertheless, as a state, Michoacán has been amply studied before by scholars of Cardenismo.<sup>21</sup> This has unfortunately not been the case for Villa's home state of Durango and Navarro's work on Durango is a welcome step to shedding light on the state during Cárdenas' presidency. However, other parts of the Mexican North have received greater and earlier scholarly attention in the Cardenista years. For example, in his important monograph, mentioned above in reference to Knight's work, Adrian Bantjes makes a case study of Sonora and examines the influence that Cardenismo had at the local level and contrariwise, the influence of local processes on Cardenismo. He argues that Cardenismo held multiple meanings. Moreover, Cardenismo was not a uniform system but a field in which various political currents confronted one another explosively. His premise is that by analyzing the many voices of Cardenismo, one can arrive at a better understanding of the customs and the utopian thought in Mexico after the Revolution.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995) and also Christopher R. Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos: Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Bantjes, *As if Jesus Walked on Earth*, xiv-xv.

Bantjes findings are useful for re-analyzing extant historiographical interpretations of both the Mexican Revolution and Cardenismo as well as for delineating the figures of a significant phase in the history of Sonora.<sup>23</sup> His final assessment on Cardenismo is that, in concrete terms, Cárdenas' political project mostly failed. Bantjes argues that the most lasting heritage it bequeathed to modern Mexico is the Cardenista lore of a formless utopian idealism that continues to find appeal into late twentieth-century Mexico.<sup>24</sup> Bantjes's assessment implies that Cardenismo extended beyond Cárdenas' six-year term and that perhaps Cárdenas still has responsibility for what subsequent administrations have or have not done with his legacy. To my way of thinking, such a view risks accruing responsibility to Cárdenas for actions that were not his. My study shows that together, Durango's campesinos and Cárdenas changed the balance of power and land wealth in the second half of the 1930s. Cárdenas successfully distributed land to Mexico's campesinos. The failure that Bantjes is perhaps referring to is that of subsequent presidents and their administrations. In the case of land reform, it would be President Carlos Salinas de Gortari who ended it in 1992. In a reversal of Cárdenas' legacy, Salinas privatized the land and divided the *ejidos* into plots that could be purchased and incorporated into larger areas of privately-owned land. Like the Díaz regime, Salinas even allowed for this newly privatized land to go into the hands of foreigners.<sup>25</sup> Salinas thus effectively ended what had been an excellent project that had benefitted Mexico's masses since Cárdenas had launched it during his presidency.

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<sup>23</sup> Bantjes, *As if Jesus Walked on Earth*, 213.

<sup>24</sup> Bantjes, *As if Jesus Walked on Earth*, 225.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Hart, *Emiliano Zapata: Mexico's Social Revolutionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 278-279.

Important works for Mexico in general during the Cardenista period have also been published within other disciplines. For example, Nora Hamilton, a sociologist who has analyzed Mexico's Cardenista years, contends that the overcoming of the bloc in Mexican politics then held by his predecessor Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), and the succeeding accomplishments of the Cárdenas regime with the partnership of organized workers and peasants had a proclivity toward clouding the diametric aspects of this partnership. In Hamilton's view, workers, peasants, and the government performed their functions as though their objectives were the same as those of the state. For Hamilton, the organization of the two blocs had the aim of organizing the industrial or urban workers within the establishments of capitalism.<sup>26</sup> In another study of Cardenismo, Mexican sociologist Octavio Ianni analyzes the Mexican state according to how it appeared and showed itself in the politics of the Cardenista regime. Ianni examines the way in which the practices and ideology of that government expressed the movements and contours of state power, as seen as a political and economic reality.<sup>27</sup>

In a similar point of analysis, Marjorie Becker argued that it is correct to see Cárdenas as the one who designed Mexico's modern state but that he nevertheless showed himself to be unable to quiet western Mexico. Becker sees Cárdenas as being just as inept as Plutarco Elías Calles at comprehending the essence of the case. In Becker's view, Cárdenas did not see *campesinos* as peers with their own political conceptions. Therefore, he tried to implement a "cultural revolution" to establish a "statist ideology."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 142.

<sup>27</sup> Octavio Ianni, *El estado capitalista en la época de Cárdenas* (México D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1977), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Marjorie Becker, "Black and White and Color: Cardenismo and the Search for a Campesino Ideology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, no. 3 (Jul., 1987):454.

Scholars like Becker, who examine the cultural changes that occurred during the Cárdenas period, have also found ample reason to investigate the Indian past. During the Cardenista era, the administration made considerable efforts to communicate with indigenous people, address their concerns, and integrate their past into Mexico's historical and national consciousness. For example, Alexander S. Dawson argues that the *Primer Congreso Regional Indígena* (First Regional Indigenous Congress) in 1936 exemplified a bigger reality in which activists tried to recast Mexican nationalism and the place of indigenous peoples within the Mexican nation. According to Dawson, these activists sought to build upon the Mexican revolutionary spirit and had hopes that a more democratic Mexico was on the horizon. According to Dawson's findings, these activists wanted to mold Mexico into a culturally renewed nation with an educated citizenry and political and economic parity. To do this, these activists looked to an accumulating corpus of scientific learning about the racial and sociocultural attributes of civilization.<sup>29</sup>

More recently, historians like Tore C. Olsson have taken a transnational approach. In his cutting-edge work, Olsson has argued that Cárdenas' agrarian reform and the 'New Deal' that United States president Franklin Roosevelt issued during his presidency in the 1930s were projects that were often in dialogue with each other. Furthermore, Olsson argues that, due to this conversation, the two projects did have consequential influences on each other. Olsson's look at the Cardenista era highlights the ways that the Mexican and United States agrarian reforms of the 1930s interwove with each other.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Alexander S. Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2004), xiii-xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Tore C. Olsson, "Sharecroppers and *Campesinos*: The American South, Mexico, and the Transnational Politics of Land Reform in the Radical 1930s," *Journal of Southern History* 81, no. 3 (2015): 608-609.

This case study of agrarian reform in Durango will present petitioners as historical actors in Cardenista Mexico. It will show that they were as much the initiators of agrarian reform as the Cárdenas regime. To begin, the second chapter of this work will look at the articles of the Agrarian Code of 1934 that were most frequently cited in cases where peasants petitioned for in Cardenista Durango. In studying these articles, this chapter will give a sense of the goals of the Code and its connection to the Mexican Revolution. This section will provide context for the petitions that will follow in the subsequent chapters. The third chapter will focus on cases that were successful, that is, cases in which the state and national governments answered campesino's petitions favorably and endowed them with land. The fourth chapter examines episodes when the state and national governments rejected campesinos' petitions, in other words, claimants did not get the land allotments they wanted. However, my research shows that, in such cases, the government still tried to justify its decision to the campesinos in terms of the law. The study demonstrates that campesinos both exercised agency in acquiring what they wanted from their petitions to their state governor and that the government. At the very least, they maintained a revolutionary discourse that articulated the thought that they were working for the benefit of Mexico's agrarian people, one of the cornerstones of Mexico's revolutionary thought.



## II. A Post-Porfirian Legal Framework

This chapter seeks to elucidate the legal framework within which *campesinos* operated when they requested land endowments during Lázaro Cárdenas' administration. Among its main findings is that, although Cárdenas is often reputed with implementing the land reform goals of the 1910 Revolution, he did not make many alterations to existing agrarian legislation. Instead, Cárdenas enforced the *Código Agrario de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos* or *Agrarian Code of the United Mexican States* (henceforth AC) of 1934. This Code continued to furnish the legislative footing for the *campesinos* who petitioned for land all the way to the end of Cárdenas' presidency in 1940.<sup>31</sup> Law-makers crafted this *Código Agrario* with a novel sort of collective *ejido* in mind, one that peasants were to possess and use communally. In this new expression of the ejido, the landholdings could not be divided up into smaller plots. Besides that, the workers would form a new countrified proletariat that would not feed into agricultural capitalism. This new articulation of the ejido caused elements of the business sector to worry that the new ejido was a sign that Mexico was heading toward communism.

In August 1937, Cárdenas enhanced the law by furnishing a strong legal bedrock for the collective *ejidos*. In this enhancement of the law, the Cárdenas administration stipulated that the *ejido* would be collectively taken only if they were *ejidos* that needed to be industrialized to be able to produce commodities for market sale since these kinds of *ejidos* needed more capital than individual *ejidatarios* could furnish.<sup>32</sup> However, the

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<sup>31</sup> Código Agrario de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos of 1934.

<sup>32</sup> Albert L. Michaels, "The Crisis of Cardenismo," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 2, no. 1 (May, 1970): 61-62.

legal substance on which Cárdenas' huge national land reform was based was still primarily the *Código Agrario*, published under his predecessor Abelardo L. Rodríguez in the city of Durango in 1934.<sup>33</sup> This chapter focuses on what campesinos in Mexico were entitled to do under this *Código Agrario*. Nevertheless, a brief genealogical sketch of the *ejido* and Mexicans' attempts to resolve the land issues that plagued Mexican society is in order.

The roots of the *ejido* are a composite of land arrangements indigenous to Pre-Hispanic Mexico and medieval Spain. Thus, literary scholar Max Parra and sociologist Nora Hamilton are partially in error when they imply that the *ejido* in modern Mexico derived solely from pre-Hispanic land arrangements.<sup>34</sup> When Spaniards arrived and began establishing governing structures in sixteenth-century Mexico, the Crown issued legislation called the *fundo legal* or legal foundation. A 1567 decree furnished the legislative framework on which a village could legally exist. The *fundo legal* granted towns communal lands called *ejidos*. Town residents used these lands to hunt as well as for agriculture, grazing, water, and firewood. Together, both the *fundo legal* and the *ejido* furnished the bedrock on which the *municipio libre* (free municipality), the core of rural

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<sup>33</sup> See "Declaraciones del Señor General Abelardo L. Rodríguez, Presidente de la República, Al Margen del Código Agrario," in *Código Agrario*, 1934.

<sup>34</sup> Max Parra, "The Battle for Pancho Villa During Cardenismo, 1935-1940," in *Writing Pancho Villa's Revolution* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), 121. Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 68. In a note on the same page, Hamilton acknowledges the Spanish origin of the word *ejido* and describes its meaning in the Spanish context, but does not fuse the Spanish origin into the Mexican case of *ejidos*, which Hamilton defines as "a form of land tenure based on the traditional communal holdings of the pre-Hispanic Indian villages."

Mexico, rested. With the self-governing power and communal resources held as *ejidos*, towns enjoyed a degree of political and economic autonomy.<sup>35</sup>

A few months after the independence movement from Spain began, at the end of 1810, the parish priest and Mexican Independence movement leader Miguel Hidalgo decreed that Indian lands that had been rented to others be returned to the Indians and forbade the rent of these lands for the exclusive use of the property-holders. Three years later, in November 1813, José María Morelos y Pavón, who succeeded Hidalgo in leading the insurrection against Spain after Hidalgo's execution in 1811, made an important announcement on the agrarian issue with the decision to set limits on haciendas, establishing that these landed estates should not have surfaces of labor greater than two leagues. Nevertheless, the agrarian ideals of Hidalgo and Morelos were not successful, for concentration of property continued to be the norm in the newly independent Mexican nation, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Despite dispossession and encroachments on communal lands, many pueblos throughout the national period held on to lands held in common since the colonial period. As the nineteenth century unraveled, though, Mexican Liberals looked north of the border to the United States (and beyond, to Europe) and found a worthy economic model to imitate. For these thinkers, the United States model was the key to economic success for its inhabitants. Mexican liberals embraced laissez-faire economic ideology and saw private property as the ideal way to modernize Mexican society, and perhaps even lift Mexico's plebeians socially and economically. Thus, Mexican liberals sought to end the

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Hart, *Emiliano Zapata: Mexico's Social Revolutionary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11-12.

practice of holding land in common that hearkened back to sixteenth-century Mexico. According to their analysis of the society they inherited from the recent colonial past, the practice of possessing land communally was the foremost barrier to modernizing Mexico and making progress. Their aims were to bring about industry and commerce in Mexico, for the traditional livelihood of agrarian peoples seemed incompatible with the nineteenth-century capitalism that Liberals had in mind for the new republic.<sup>36</sup>

As Florencia Mallon explains in her analysis of the strands of Liberalism extant in nineteenth-century Puebla, liberals in the western portion of the state, who for the most part owned land and engaged in commerce, equated Liberalism with the open market. In other words, they saw liberalism as a system that afforded them the prerogative to invest and amass capital without being hindered by colonial customs and institutions like the Indian Republic or the Catholic Church. For eastern and central Puebla, Mallon identifies another strand of liberal thought in which Liberalism entailed citizenship status for all. This aspiration meant that all native-born and naturalized inhabitants of Mexico would be able to freely wield property rights, have equal admission to the resources and yield of the land, and enjoy the prerogative of electing representatives.<sup>37</sup>

This onset of democratizing discourse in Mexico was part of a larger Latin American trend during the “long nineteenth century,” which historians situate roughly between 1780 and 1930. As Mallon puts it, in this era of “democratic revolution,” Latin

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Hart, *Bitter Harvest: The Social Transformation of Morelos, Mexico, and the Origins of the Zapatista Revolution, 1840-1910* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 44-45.

<sup>37</sup> Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 23-25.

American societies “experienced and struggled” with the invention of the nation-state and emergent capitalism.<sup>38</sup>

After the Reform period of 1857 to 1861, and with a basis in the Law of *Terrenos Baldíos* (unused, uncultivated lands) of 1863, the *ejidos* as well as communities could be disentailed, especially in the case of *ejidos* in the cities. Surveying companies were even provided with the means of determining boundaries.<sup>39</sup> For this period, it is interesting to note that Emperor of Mexico Maximilian of Habsburg, who ruled the short-lived Second Mexican Empire from 1864 to 1867, had similar, if not more liberal ideas than Benito Juárez. Maximilian had the intention of propelling an agrarian reform based on the establishment of small individual properties and a grant to towns of land to labor on, for human settlement and for common use (as *ejidos*). With that intention he emitted (without it ever having been applied), two singular and seemingly contradictory orders: the law over community lands and distribution, which established that said lands would be fractionated and would become the property of usufructs; and the Agrarian Law of the Empire, which conceded legal founding and *ejidos* to the towns that lacked them.<sup>40</sup>

During Porfirio Díaz’s presidency (1876-1911), wealthy Mexicans and capitalist foreigners increasingly dispossessed communal towns of their lands and *hacienda* (estate) workers faced a wage decline. Under Díaz’s dictatorship, Mexican elites subscribed to nineteenth-century Liberalism and “modernization” processes that had already become

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<sup>38</sup>Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>39</sup> Jesús Carlos Morett Sánchez, *Reforma Agraria: del Latifundio al Neoliberalismo* (México, D.F.: Plaza y Valdés, 2003), 42.

<sup>40</sup> Morett Sánchez, *Reforma Agraria*, 43-44.

fashionable among entrepreneurs in other parts of the world. These changes derived from many of the measures taken by liberal politicians earlier in the nineteenth century. These liberals had taken strong actions toward privatizing land, a measure that profoundly touched the lives of most peasants. In 1854, liberals had begun *La Reforma*, a legal shift toward incorporating Mexico's countryside into capitalism, and started a shift towards free trade and the privatization of property all over Mexico. In effect, these nineteenth-century liberals disassembled legal protections that the Spanish Crown had made for indigenous communities in the sixteenth century. By the time the Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910 and ended Díaz's dictatorial presidency, more than ninety-five percent of communal towns had been dispossessed of at least part of their *ejido* lands. Land concentration in the hands of the few had dramatically increased during the Díaz regime.<sup>41</sup>

As Pedro Salmerón Sanginés has noted in his case-study of Cuencamé, Durango, land concentration and conflicts with landholders were nothing new in the town. Nevertheless, the modernization process under Díaz made it worse. These long-existing conflicts over land would make the region a focal point of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, while Durango remained one of the most sparsely populated regions in Mexico, the population pressure was three or four times what it had been in the late colonial period. A census in 1790 counted 122,386 people, while one estimate for Durango's population during the Cardenista era puts it at around 450,000 inhabitants.<sup>43</sup> In

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<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Katz, "Labor Conditions on Haciendas in Porfirian Mexico: Some Trends and Tendencies," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, no. 1 (Feb., 1974): 1.

<sup>42</sup> Pedro Salmerón Sanginés, "Lucha agraria y revolución en el oriente de Durango (1900-1929)," *Historia Mexicana* 56, no. 1 (Jul.-Sep., 2006): 118.

<sup>43</sup> For the 1790 census, see Oakah L. Jones, Jr.'s study *Nueva Vizcaya: Heartland of the Spanish Frontier* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 56. For population estimate in Cardenista era,

southwestern Durango, U.S. foreigners allowed in by Díaz owned seventy percent of the territory. Additionally, only a few Mexicans and Americans owned a great deal of territory in northern and western Chihuahua.<sup>44</sup>

The distribution of land to impoverished subsistence farmers was a primary motivating factor in the Mexican Revolution that took place between 1910 and 1920.<sup>45</sup> Revolutionary leaders began issuing agrarian reform legislation in the years of the battle-plagued decade of the 1910s.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, during the Revolution, Mexican leaders issued a series of agrarian reforms to address the pressing issue of land concentration. The first reform, issued in 1915, pledged to furnish land for all who lacked it. That same year, Venustiano Carranza issued a decree to bring about the *Comisión Local Agraria* (Local Agrarian Commission) for each state, along with executive committees named *Comités Particulares Ejecutivos* or Executive Particular Committees for each jurisdiction. On May 24, 1915, Durango's revolutionary Francisco "Pancho" Villa issued his *Ley General Agraria* (General Agrarian Law) in the city of León, Guanajuato. The first article of this law asserted that the prosperity and peace of the Mexican Republic and the continued existence of large territorial properties were incompatible. The law stipulated that, within

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see José de la Cruz Pacheco Rojas's study *Durango: historia breve*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010), 128.

<sup>44</sup> John Mason Hart, "Social Unrest, Nationalism, and American Capital in the Mexican Countryside, 1876-1920," in *Rural revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics*, ed. Daniel Nugent (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 72.

<sup>45</sup> This is the usual dating of the Revolution which ends in 1920 when Venustiano Carranza was overthrown. However, some scholars have extended the revolutionary years to 1940 when Lázaro Cárdenas ended his six-year term. I gather from the scholarly literature that the twenty-year extension from the common date to 1940 is attributable to an understanding that each presidency from 1920 to 1940 was still carrying out the Revolution through land reform, the nationalization of Mexican resources like oil (1938), the secularization of schools and other criteria. Thus, while civil war effectively ended by 1920, the Revolution was still yet uncompleted as some scholars frame it temporally. See Mark Wasserman, *Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, Mexico 1910-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Brandenburg, "Revolutionary Achievements in Economic Life," in *Is the Mexican Revolution Dead?*, ed. Stanley R. Ross, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1975), 228.

the first three months of the issue of the law, state governments should determine the maximum surface area of land that may be possessed by a single owner within its respective territories. Moreover, no one could keep possessing or acquiring lands in excess of the limit, with the only exception being the one allocated in article 18.<sup>47</sup> This article allowed the federal government to make exceptions for agricultural companies that would help develop a given region to acquire land exceeding the limits set by the first article. In addition to being companies whose work help develop a region, the article stipulated that the companies be Mexican and that the land and water they acquired be subsequently used within a time frame of six years for residential development.<sup>48</sup>

Upon becoming president in 1920, revolutionary general Álvaro Obregón also pressed for land reform while fighting Francisco “Pancho” Villa. This was not the first time that Obregón advocated for land reform. In fact, he had furnished money and conveyance for agrarian reformers in Sonora back in 1916, when he was Secretary of War. Obregón had skillfully painted himself as an advocate for agrarian reform during some of the main military battles of the Mexican Revolution and his base came to expect this advocacy from him. Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, he lent support to the drafters of article 27 at the Constitutional Convention a year later.<sup>49</sup>

The 1917 Constitution postulated land reform as a foremost element of the Mexican Revolution. In that year, the Mexican government set about on a moderate

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<sup>47</sup> Margarita Menegus Bornemann, *El agrarismo de la Revolución Mexicana* (Madrid: Cultura Hispánica, 1990), 70-71.

<sup>48</sup> Article 18, *Ley General Agraria expedida por Francisco Villa*, 1915.

<sup>49</sup> Linda B. Hall, “Álvaro Obregón and the Politics of Mexican Land Reform, 1920-1924,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 60, no. 2 (May, 1980): 213-214. Helga Baitenmann, “Popular Participation in State Formation: Land Reform in Revolutionary Mexico,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 43, no. 1 (February 2011): 15.



policy of land distribution for the benefit of revolutionary veterans who had no property. This land reform furnished one of the bricks for the construction of the *magna carta* proclaimed in February 1917. At the time, it was the sole constitution in the globe that protected the welfare of campesinos and workers.<sup>50</sup> Article 27, which dealt with issues of landholding, topped all of the other articles in the eyes of the *agraristas* (advocates of agrarian reform). The article aimed at evaluating and mending Mexico's peasant dissatisfaction.<sup>51</sup>

The government established a *Comisión Local Agraria* (Local Agrarian Commission) that year in Durango, the focal region of analysis for the next chapters. The legislation in the early 1920s allowed for communal utilization of haciendas generating crops that campesinos could not raise on their own. In 1922, the state government passed an agrarian law in Durango that allowed the preservation of up to 5,000 hectares of land for agriculture, 10,000 hectares of land for pasture, and 20,000 hectares of forest land under the condition that properties would be divided up. However, many of the old landholders were able to fictitiously divide up their lands and arrange for much of their holdings to be placed in the hands of family members.<sup>52</sup>

According to Alan Knight, the classic hacienda that produced for domestic commerce confronted two enemies during the Revolution. The first enemy came from enterprising caudillos who promoted and cultivated a type of vigorous, capitalist agriculture. The second enemy was the campesino *agrarista* that strove to gain or

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<sup>50</sup> Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 206.

<sup>51</sup> Tore C. Olsson, "Parallel Agrarian Societies: The US South and Mexico, 1870s-1920s," in *Agrarian Crossings: The US South and Mexico, 1870s-1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017): 29.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

recuperate land and get rid of the hacienda system's hold over land and labor.<sup>53</sup> In other words, caudillos and campesino *agraristas* were already taking unorthodox and revolutionary steps years before Cárdenas became president.<sup>54</sup> Thus, when Cárdenas became president, he effectively destroyed the *hacienda* system and brought to a reality the redistribution of land to the commoners of the still largely agrarian Mexico of the 1930s. Nevertheless, he set out to fulfill the ideals of the Mexican Revolution by working with the campesinos so that they could reap the benefits of Mexico's land and not have to be in an economic system where wealthy *hacendados* and foreigners could extract most of the wealth that they produced by their labor.<sup>55</sup>

The new government, from the moment of Cárdenas's rupture with his predecessor Plutarco Elías Calles (who had helped Cárdenas win the presidency), centered its attention on the agrarian question. Starting in 1915, when land distribution began, until 1935, the year in which Cárdenas started his policies, the annual average *ejido* endowments reached the figure of 400,000 hectares.<sup>56</sup> Agrarian reform was to maintain itself in the line drawn by Obregón. Mexican campesinos expected to have access to their own independent piece of land, while indigenous peasant communities expected the restitution of the endowment of lands necessary to sustain their members. Countryside workers, the old peons of the haciendas, expected the protection of the law

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<sup>53</sup> Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. 2, *Counter-revolution and reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 515.

<sup>54</sup> Alan Knight, "Cárdenas and Echeverría: Two "Populist" Presidents Compared," in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, ed. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L. O. Muñoz (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010), 27.

<sup>55</sup> Frank Brandenburg, "Revolutionary Achievements in Economic Life," in *Is the Mexican Revolution Dead?*, ed. Stanley R. Ross, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1975), 228.

<sup>56</sup> Gustavo de Anda, *El cardenismo: desviación totalitaria de la Revolución Mexicana* (México D.F.: Editor, 1974), 89.

as laborers of the land and the increase of income for those who worked in large-scale commercial agriculture. Here, one is to have in mind great centers of agricultural production that had already been modernized and industrialized such as the cotton-producing Laguna region of northeastern Durango and southwestern Coahuila and the henequen zone of Yucatán. These sites had realized agrarian reform early on by suppressing the primitive production methods of the old latifundio. Mexican politicians and engineers came to see these sites as models of what the future of industrialized Mexican agriculture should be.<sup>57</sup>

Despite all these local and national efforts at agrarian reform, the legal framework in Durango up until Cárdenas' presidency that sought to fulfill the Mexican Revolution's ideals of land reform easily allowed loopholes for old *hacendados* to thwart the dissemination of agricultural plots to the local campesinos. As a result, the paragon of Porfirian haciendas continued into the 1930s, with transformations of arrangement and proprietors but without structural transformations. Under Cárdenas' presidency from 1934 to 1940, campesinos were endowed with over twenty million hectares of land.<sup>58</sup> Cárdenas' land reform came to a climax at the mid-point of his six-year term, between 1936-37, and then slowly fell back. He also proposed assurances to individual peasants and cattle ranchers.<sup>59</sup> On September 1, 1936, Cárdenas issued a government report that said he would give special attention to the organization of *ejidos* in Durango. An army of agronomists from the Agrarian Department moved to the Laguna region in Durango,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>58</sup> Gustavo Esteva, *The Struggle for Rural Mexico* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1983), 8.

<sup>59</sup> Alan Knight, "Cárdenas and Echeverría: Two "Populist" Presidents Compared," in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, ed. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L. O. Muñoz (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010), 33.

where they made new population censuses and collected endowment petitions from core areas of campesinos. On October 6 of that year, Cárdenas issued a presidential decree that started land redistribution.<sup>60</sup> During Cárdenas' presidency, 951,029 hectares of land would be redistributed in Durango. Of this amount, 549,000 hectares were redistributed during the time that Enrique Calderón was governor. The beneficiaries amounted to some 12,251 campesinos and their families.<sup>61</sup>

Peasant historical agency and the legal framework that governed the redistribution of land in the Cardenista years made these striking results possible. Campesinos' petitions made the most frequent references to the *Código Agrario* (Agrarian Code). Before articulating what this code allowed land-petitioning campesinos to do, an exploration of the contours of recent agrarian legal history, particularly Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution and its relationship to the Agrarian Code of 1934, is in order.

The writers of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 wrote Article 27 to deal with the land issue. This entry is the prime example of a mandate emanating from the Mexican Revolution that sought to endow Mexican citizens with the right to benefit from national resources and consider the land to be theirs. Mexican and foreign elite's increasing monopolization of Mexican land after the passing of the Lerdo Law in 1857 had disenfranchised most of Mexico's peasants. The Lerdo Law both made communal land holding illegal but also set the process for the breaking up of communal lands among private owners. The law worked in favor of ranchers and *hacendados* but it worked

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<sup>60</sup> Pavel Leonardo Navarro Valdez, *El cardenismo en Durango: historia y política regional 1934-1940* (Durango, Dgo: Instituto de Cultura de Estado de Durango, 2005), 155.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

against *campesinos* and rural workers by dwindling their land porssessions.<sup>62</sup> This condition smoldered for over half a century and created the impetus behind Article 27 and, indeed, the Mexican Revolution. As Joe C. Ashby has noted, Teja Zabre correctly assessed that of all the commands that the 1917 Constitution contained, Article 27 and which concerned agrarian issues, along with Article 123 which formed the bedrock of subsequent labor law, were seen as fundamental parts of the 1917 Constitution.<sup>63</sup>

The contents of Article 27 caused the most dissension in the Constitutional Convention. Venustiano Carranza's committee at the General Convention drafted an early version in January 1917, which made just a few changes to the version contained in the 1857 constitution to be supplanted by the final version approved by the Convention. Carranza's committee only briefly dealt with the issue of ejidos. Their draft failed to satisfy the uproar in Mexico over agrarian reform, public dominion of the nation's subsoil, and alien possession of real estate. As expected, other representatives at the Convention did not approve the draft. The delegate Francisco José Mugica's committee came to take charge of re-drafting the article but once it became clear that the re-drafting process would entail re-analyzing the whole idea of land reform and property, the Múgica committee found that it did not have the time to do it, passing on the task to another delegate by the name of Pastor Rouaix.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 37-38.

<sup>63</sup> Joe C. Ashby, "Labor and the Theory of the Mexican Revolution under Lázaro Cárdenas," *The Americas* 20, no. 2 (Oct., 1963): 160.

<sup>64</sup> Charles C. Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution: The Constitutional Years* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1972), 351.

Because of Rouaix's active role in drafting the final version, Durango's agrarian context came to be embedded in one of the most famous articles of the Revolutionary Constitution. As Jorge Sayeg Helú puts it, Pastor Rouaix was one of the most notable figures of the Mexican Revolution. Sayeg portrays Rouaix as one of the cleanest figures of the Revolution and as a solid pillar of constitutionalism. Rouaix, an engineer by training, had formerly been provisional governor of Durango in 1914 (and would later again be provisional governor again in 1931). During his sojourn in Durango, he spent sixteen years creating a blueprint that surveyed approximately one million and a half hectares of land in Durango. Rouaix's work was monumental for the decade and Rouaix would carry his experience with Durango's land to the Constitutional Convention of 1917.<sup>65</sup>

As stated, the *Código Agrario* built upon Article 27, furnishing most of the legal framework referenced in the petitions that campesinos sent to the governor of Durango in the Cardenista era. In terms of its basic structure, the legal code consisted of one hundred and seventy-eight articles, divided into ten *títulos* or sections. The first section concerning agrarian authorities is among the less frequent of the *títulos* referenced by the campesinos. It encompasses the first nineteen articles. The second *título* consists of articles twenty through twenty-six and covers provisions regarding the restitution and endowment of land and water. The third *título* contains articles thirty-three through sixty-one and these cover general provisions regarding endowment. The articles of the fourth *título* cover matters regarding the proceedings regarding the endowment of lands. The

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<sup>65</sup> Jorge Sayeg Helú, *Páginas de la Revolución Mexicana. Tomo II* (Mexico City: Instituto Politécnico Nacional, 1996), 229-230.

fifth *título* covers articles on the endowment of water. The sixth *título* covers articles on the creation of new centers of agricultural population. The seventh *título* concerns the national agrarian registry. The eighth *título* concerns the regime of Agrarian property. The ninth *título* is about responsibilities and sanctions. Finally, the tenth *título* is about general provisions.

With the Código, campesinos in towns or communities previously deprived of lands, forests, and water by any of the acts referred to by article 27 of the 1917 Constitution had the right to restitute those assets in the form established by the 1934 Code. More specifically, Article 21 stipulates that population nucleuses which lack lands, forests, or water, or that do not have these elements in sufficient quantity to meet their needs, would have the right to be endowed according to the terms of the *Código* as long as the settlement preceded the date of the corresponding petition.<sup>66</sup> Article 22 states that petitions concerning agrarian affairs should be presented in written form to the governor of the federal entity in whose jurisdiction the nucleus of the interested population is located. More importantly, claimants had to send a copy of the petition to the state's *Comision Agraria Mixta* (Mixed Agrarian Commission).<sup>67</sup>

Along with the Agrarian Code, the post-revolutionary government set up *Comisiones Agrarias Mixtas* in 1934 for each state. The purpose was to empower members of a given community to appeal for land, with the each Commission guiding the case file along and monitoring the redistribution of land (if granted). Governors should then order the publication of the petition and turn it in to the *Comisión Agraria Mixta*

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<sup>66</sup> Article 21, *Código Agrario*, 1934.

<sup>67</sup> Article 22, *Código Agrario*, 1934.

within ten days. If not done this way, the *Comisión* had the prerogative to initiate the case file with the copy that had been turned in to it. The *Mixta* (Mixed) aspect of the commission referred to the fact that the commissions were made up of commissaries of both the state governments and the federal Agrarian Department, typically accompanied by six members of local campesino councils.<sup>68</sup>

Campesinos requesting land had to send the titles and documents referred to in Article 27 to the *Comisión Agraria Mixta* and the *Departamento Agrario*, so that officials could study their authenticity over a period of thirty days. From that point, the *Departamento Agrario* had to return them with the respective *dictamen paleográfico*—an analysis and dating of the handwriting—and their decision on the matter.<sup>69</sup>

The *Código* allowed for the expropriation of public and private lands, forests, and water in order to fulfill an endowment for campesinos. Moreover, when endowing campesinos, the *Código* stated that it was preferable to expropriate private property to endow campesinos with before resorting to properties of the federal government, the states, or the municipalities.<sup>70</sup> Once a state governor or the *Comisión Agraria Mixta* chose a property, its owners or administrators were supposed to provide a report on the quality and surface area of the property under the system articulated in Article 38. With this report, the total number of disposable lands would be determined in accordance with the method of calculation established in Article 57.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> John J. Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 22.

<sup>69</sup> Article 27, *Código Agrario*, 1934

<sup>70</sup> Article 33, *Código Agrario*, 1934.

<sup>71</sup> Article 35, *Código Agrario*, 1934.



Under the *Código*, the campesinos were able to request not only the lands closest to their community, but also the best ones.<sup>72</sup> The *Código* also stated that, when properties that were eligible for endowment lacked cultivable lands or enough cultivable lands to cover the needs of the petitioning town, the Commission should endow petitioners with available lands. However, this article protected small properties that were in use from being expropriated for the endowment. Both the campesinos and representatives of the Comisión Agraria Mixta played a role in determining the needs of the petitioning town. The campesinos initiated the process by writing up and sending a petition to the Comisión Agraria Mixta in Durango's capital city, Victoria de Durango. In their petition, campesinos would enumerate the members claiming to qualify for an ejido and they would often name a specific property or properties in their town that they believed could cover their needs. Once the Comisión Agraria Mixta received the petition, they would send a representative, typically an engineer, to the petitioning town to assess the veracity of the campesino's claims, take censuses of both the community members and their livestock (presumably to better assess their need for pastureland or the value of their holdings), and inspect the property of community members who might be compelled by law to cede their landholdings to campesinos. In this kind of scenario, only individuals whose needs would be met with available lands would be endowed with a parcel in the *ejido*. Once the Comisión Agraria Mixta had re-distributed parcels of land to eligible individuals, the campesinos could use any remaining land to make a new community for an agrarian population. The Federal Executive branch would be the legal entity to decide the exact location of such a community and would do so in compliance with in a place

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<sup>72</sup> Article 38, *Código Agrario*, 1934.

designated by the Federal Executive branch in conformity with the relevant provisions of the *Código*. The *Comisión Agraria Mixta* was the specific entity to choose the individuals who would stay in the *ejido*. The *Comisión* was supposed to pick from among those with deepest roots in the locality and the most urgent needs for land.<sup>73</sup>

The *Comisión Agraria Mixta* ordered the publication of petitions to notify the property-holders of ranches and haciendas located within a seven-kilometer radius that their property could potentially be taken for the endowment of the *ejidatarios*. Similarly, the *Comisión* also had to notify property-holders or users of water sources that could be affected by the endowment.<sup>74</sup> Once the petition had been published, the *Comisión* sent a representative to the petitioning town, usually an engineer, who created an agrarian and livestock census for the petitioning population. This census was to include all individuals who qualified to receive an individual parcel. To make the census, the representative of the *Comisión* created a committee with himself as director of the work, a second committee member representing the petitioning population, and a third member representing the landowners of property that could potentially be taken for the endowment of the *campesinos*. The *Comité Ejecutivo Agrario* designated the representative of the petitioning population. Most landowners of affectable properties within a seven-kilometer radius also designated their own representative. However, if these landowners could not agree on a representative or if they failed to make the deadline to produce the representative, the two other committee members could proceed to make the census without a third member. Additionally, if there was a scenario where

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<sup>73</sup> Article 58, *Código Agrario*, 1934.

<sup>74</sup> Article 62, *Código Agrario*, 1934.

the third representative did not show up or was absent for any reason, the other two members could also proceed to make the census without him.<sup>75</sup> As one of the cases of this study will show, such a scenario where a representative of the landowners did not show up was not rare. It seems probable that they believed the whole process was biased against them and indeed it appears that this process was geared in favor of the *campesinos*.

During his sojourn in the petitioning town, the representative of the Comisión was also tasked with drafting a blueprint containing all information necessary to understanding the region in which the petitioners lived. This blueprint included not just the main settlement, but also the zone where the resident's communal lands were located, the portions of affectable ranches with the necessary extension to project the *ejido*, and even the ensemble of small agricultural properties that could not be affected by an endowment. In addition to his charge, the representative had to start a committee that would write up information to complement the blueprint. This paperwork was supposed to contain detailed information on the location of the petitioning locality, the extent and quality of the lands, the main crops, and any other information related to the agricultural, climatic, and economic conditions within the proper locality.

Additionally, the Code charged the Committee with furnishing information on affectable properties, preferably by obtaining certificates of the cadaster from the Public Registry of property.<sup>76</sup> Once all of these documents were produced for the case, and all of the evidence and documents presented by the applicants had been assembled with it, the

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<sup>75</sup> Article 63, 64, and 65, *Código Agrario*, 1934.

<sup>76</sup> Article 63 and 64, *Código Agrario*, 1934.

Comisión Agraria Mixta issued a verdict stating whether or not the petitioners would receive the endowment that they had requested. This verdict was first submitted to the state governor so that he could consider the Comisión's verdict. The governor was supposed to issue a writ within the next fifteen days. If the governor did not produce a decision within the allotted time, the case file would be turned in to the Agrarian Department so that it could make the final ruling. In another scenario, if the Comisión Agraria Mixta did not send out its decision in the allotted time, the governor could then order that the petitioners be endowed with the ejidos. The Comisión had to reach its decision and issue it within thirty days from the date that the case file had been completed.<sup>77</sup>

If the Comisiones Agrarias Mixtas did not send out their decision within the timeframe that the Code concedes them, the governors could order that possession of the *ejidos* be given in the amount that legally proceeded, and that they be authorized to pick up the case files of the Comisiones Agrarias Mixtas, to the end of the term delineated by the previous article. The same Comisiones had to notify the Agrarian Department of the dispatch of their decisions to the governors and of the cases in which these did not opportunely dictate orders. When the governors dictate orders of possession in use of the faculties conceded to them by the third paragraph of this article, the Comisiones Agrarias Mixtas, by turning in the orders of possession to the Agrarian Department, would complete the case files, sending a request for the information and still needed reports.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Article 67 and Article 68, *Código Agrario*, 1934

<sup>78</sup> Article 68, *Código Agrario*, 1934

Other articles of the Agrarian Code were equally relevant for the process outlined above. Article 69 stated that the presumed affected ones could then write to the Comisiones Agrarias Mixtas, and explain what to their right convenience, during the processing of the case file and until before they pay their verdict to the governor. In the same manner they can go before the Agrarian Department, from the time that the case file is integrated to this one until the Consultive Body rules it, but only for the purpose of making observations on the orders in their possession.<sup>79</sup> Article 70 stated that the orders of the governors should be dictated in a way that delineates the surface area and boundaries of the claimed lands, in case of restitution, as well as the total extent of the land and various kinds of land and their partial distribution to each property in case of endowment. If there is a restitution or an endowment with irrigation lands, the quantity of water that corresponds to the irrigation lands should be expressed.<sup>80</sup>

Article 71 stipulates that, when the order of the government is favorable to the petition, it should be remitted to the Comisión Agraria Mixta for its execution and at the same time, orders should be given to the Comité Ejecutivo Agrario of the nucleus of the petitioning population to concede the now restituted or endowed lands and water. In the report of concession, the necessary affidavits should be made with a representative of the Comisión Agraria Mixta acting as consultant. The concession of restituted or endowed lands.<sup>81</sup>

The articles covered here are the ones that appear the most often in the newspaper issues that will be investigated in the subsequent chapters. Perhaps most importantly, the

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<sup>79</sup> Article 69, *Código Agrario*, 1934

<sup>80</sup> Article 70, *Código Agrario*, 1934

<sup>81</sup> Article 71, *Código Agrario*, 1934

articles evince that the Mexican government favored the prosperity of the *campesinos*. Under this code, the *campesinos* had the power to initiate the process with their government so that they could receive the lands from wealthy landowners. The latter used to be able to depend on their government's favor prior to the start of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Additionally, the Agrarian Code of 1934 favored *campesinos* with the highest quality lands available.

As Jesús Carlos Morett Sánchez notes, there was an urgent need to adjust agrarian laws to the conditions of Mexico. Nonetheless, the laws that derived from the modifications of article 27 of the Mexican Constitution turned out to be both limited and contradictory.<sup>82</sup> When the government promulgated the 1934 version of the *Código Agrario*, two new elements were added to the modern *ejido*. The first one referred to the determination of its character as imprescriptible (i.e., it did not prescribe, disappear, or expire). In other words, the *ejido* went from being a transitory or provisional institution to a definitive and permanent one. The second element is the legitimization of the direct involvement of the state in virtually all aspects of the *ejido*. Thus, the Revolution simultaneously led to the empowering of the *campesinos* and to the empowerment of the state.

Indeed, the two were tied together as the revolutionary state legitimated itself by empowering or claiming to empower the *campesinos* who had been downtrodden and disenfranchised during the Porfiriato. In short, the Revolution was both statist in nature, or became so in the so-called “Post-Revolutionary” era, and it was also founded upon the

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<sup>82</sup> Jesús Carlos Morett Sánchez, *Reforma Agraria: Del Latifundio al Neoliberalismo* (México, D.F.: Plaza y Valdés, 2003),

empowering of the campesinos. The Mexican case, as discussed here for the state of Durango, shows that both things can be true. The appearance of the *Código Agrario* coincided precisely with the beginning of Cárdenas' six-year presidential term. The element that was still lacking in 1934 for the creation of the modern *ejido*, that is, the new modality of landholding (deriving from the agrarian reform), was the construction of a corporatized organization, that is an apparatus of the state, secured in 1935 with the compulsory affiliation of all *ejidatarios* to the Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Campesino Confederation), and for the time being, to the party of the government.

In sum, from 1935 onwards, the *ejido* acquired all the features of a state apparatus and of being a permanent modality of landholding that besides being corporatized, was inalienable, imprescriptible, and intransitive, and for the time being could not be disposed of, ceded, transmitted, rented, mortgaged, or taxed. The post-revolutionary *ejido* took twenty-three years to develop its definitive character, more than two decades of campesino movements, and of political recomposition in the countryside, together with the project of industrialization that saw the advantages of adjusting and taking advantage of a particular type of landholding.<sup>83</sup> John J. Dwyer notes that, in Sonora, agraristas seized upon the political discourse and ideology of the revolutionary elite when they petitioned federal authorities and their corresponding administrative divisions. Additionally, Dwyer finds that subaltern communities had an awareness of the rights guaranteed them by the 1917 Constitution and they often referred to specific land reform

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<sup>83</sup> Jesús Carlos Morett Sánchez, *Reforma Agraria: del Latifundio al Neoliberalismo* (México, D.F.: Plaza y Valdés, 2003), 82-83.

laws such as the 1915 Agrarian Law, the twenty-seventh article of the 1917 Constitution, and the Agrarian Code promulgated in 1934. They also used revolutionary cries like “Mexico for Mexicans” or “land for those who work it” in their appeals. It is hard to decipher if indigenous people and agraristas used this discourse as a way of obtaining their objectives or if they truly meant them. In the end, such a distinction does not ultimately matter. Regardless, the use such revolutionary cries signify that revolutionary consciousness was yet a part of the past but was alive and well during the Cárdenas era. Dwyer opines that the answer is probably both, for the balance between the two possibilities was different from person to person and locality to locality. Regardless, Cárdenas’ government tended to reply positively to these petitions as they made a sound match with the Cárdenas’ administration’s political, social, and economic blueprint for agrarian Mexico. The Confederación Campesina Mexicana (later supplanted by the Confederación Nacional Campesina) was the center-point campesino organization used by the Cardenistas to make the ejido endowment process run smoothly.<sup>84</sup>

As Frank Tannenbaum noted, the revolutionary agenda which developed during the battles of the 1910s can best be thought summed into a program of nationalism, the ordering of society, and the land question. This last point concerned the effort to rid Mexico of the hacienda system and is the *raison d’être* of Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution and the Código Agrario, created to fulfill the mandates of Article 27.<sup>85</sup> Constitutionals created Article 27 with the design of fulfilling the particular legal and social necessities of various groups of people in Mexican society. As Tannenbaum

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<sup>84</sup> John J. Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 122-123.

<sup>85</sup> Frank Tannenbaum, *The Mexican Agrarian Revolution* (Archon Books, 1968), 188.



characterizes it, the article had to be one that had a notion of property that was expansive enough to encompass the primeval concept of possessing that nomadic indigenous Mexicans held which entailed short-term land holding, but without a concept of proprietorship based on written legislation. Additionally, lawgivers wanted an article that would fulfill the requirements of modern proprietorship both privately and corporately.<sup>86</sup>

This chapter has covered the main laws of the Agrarian Code that were relevant to each case in which campesinos petitioned for endowments, amplifications, and restitutions of mostly land but at times water as well. The Agrarian Code was a document created at the Federal level for the Mexican Republic. When Cárdenas won the presidential election in December 1934, this code was already available to him and all he had to do was enforce it if he wished to work for the *campesinos*. Cárdenas did enforce this code and together with the *campesinos* who used the law to their advantage, Cárdenas and Mexico's rural masses changed the power relations in the countryside. They disempowered local *hacendados* through the law and spread economic well-being among *campesinos* who had lost much of their land more than seventy-five years prior with the Reform laws.

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<sup>86</sup> Tannenbaum, *The Mexican Agrarian Revolution*, 201-202.

### III. The Revolution Fulfilled: Land Grants in Durango

The most common view of what years the Mexican Revolution encompassed are 1910 to 1920. These are the years that include the toppling of President Porfirio Díaz (which signified the start of a revolt against the Mexican government as it had existed under Díaz for decades) and the major battles of revolutionaries like Francisco “Pancho” Villa, in the northern states of Durango, Chihuahua, and Coahuila, and Emiliano Zapata, in the southern core state of Morelos. Such a view of the revolutionary years fits in with the general usage of the noun “Revolution,” which implies that physical battles were fought, and that people died over a power struggle.

However, some scholars in the field of modern Mexico extend the view of the revolutionary era to the end of the Cárdenas era or less frequently beyond that. For example, prominent scholar of the Mexican Revolution Alan Knight does not believe it would be correct to end a general investigation of the Mexican Revolution in 1920.<sup>87</sup> This perception that one should see the Mexican Revolution as extending into the Cárdenas era makes sense and it is a major contention of this study that this longer timeframe is correct. I offer two reasons here on why this is the case. First, although physical battles were no longer waged after the early 1920’s, many of the goals of the revolutionaries had only been partially fulfilled or not fulfilled at all. The most prominent of these goals was land reform and the elimination of foreign control of Mexico’s most valuable resources, which included not just land useful for agriculture, but also its oil (later expropriated by

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<sup>87</sup> Alan Knight, “The Mexican Revolution: Bourgeois? Nationalist? Or Just a ‘Great Rebellion’?” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 4, no. 2 (1985): 10.

Cárdenas in 1938), guayule, precious metals, and livestock. The campesinos and Cárdenas together achieved these objectives in a revolutionary pact between the emerging modern Mexican state and its masses.

Secondly, the longer time frame for the revolution makes sense because the revolutionary ideology was not fully developed in the years of 1910 and 1920. Indeed, it is hard to find a coherent ideology among the masses who fought the battles or even among its most famous leaders, like Durango's Francisco Villa in the north or Morelos' Emiliano Zapata in the south. The longer view allows scholars to organize more points of comparison between Villa and Zapata and other revolutionary leaders of the twentieth century. As Friedrich Katz has noted, both Villa and Zapata contrasted in crucial aspects from other revolutionaries of the twentieth century. Unlike revolutionaries such as Fidel Castro, Vladimir Lenin, or Ho Chi Minh, who were all very learned intellectuals who headed highly organized political campaigns and causes, Villa and Zapata emerged from the lower strata of Mexican society, possessed minimal education, and did not assemble any political parties.<sup>88</sup> It took time for politicians and intellectuals to articulate a revolutionary ideology in Post-Porfirian Mexico and the Cárdenas administration most truly codified the revolutionary thought that had come before and set the groundwork for how successive generations of Mexicans and presidents construed their revolutionary inheritance. As Alan Knight has correctly noted, Cárdenas' populism Cárdenas' populist style brought the Mexican state and the masses into a revolutionary pact in which both the president and campesinos worked together to fulfill the Mexican Revolution and

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<sup>88</sup> Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), xiv.

spread Mexico's wealth to the bulk of its citizenry (and out of the hands of foreigners and domestic oligarchs).

The agrarian reform that took place in Durango during the Cárdenas years demonstrates that it is propitious for scholars to look at the Mexican Revolution as extending into the Cárdenas period. The hacienda framework that revolutionaries like Zapata in Morelos and Villa in Durango had fought to destroy during the 1910s did not fade away into the past even as the physical battles waged by the revolutionaries reached a conclusion in the early 1920s and a revolutionary government was set up thereafter. Thus, how could the revolution have been completed? Cárdenas and his administration arrived to the Mexican presidency with the belief that the agrarian reforms made by his predecessors were not enough to fulfill the Mexican Revolution. This chapter looks at three cases where campesinos successfully petitioned for natural resources like land or water and received them during the Cárdenas administration. These resources were often taken away from the private holdings of hacendados who had been able to wait out the battle-plagued 1910s.

Although the sample analyzed here is small, the three cases are representative of many successful cases that campesinos in Durango sent to the capital of their state. This study looks at Cardenista land reform as being "revolutionary." As Ben Fallaw has noted, Cárdenas envisioned agrarian reform as being much more than just about who possessed the land. To Cárdenas, land reform was tied up with the broader cultural and social change he wanted to effect in Mexico. Moreover, the Cárdenas administration saw land reform (in addition to educational reform) as a way to finally rid Mexican society of what they perceived to be the vices of an older Mexico that had survived the colonial period

into the Porfirian era and persisted into the 1930s. These vices included the gross economic inequality between hacendados and the bulk of the rural population.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, for the Cardenistas themselves, the Mexican Revolution was not finished and the Old Mexico that allowed corruption to proliferate and monopolization of wealth by the few was not yet entirely dead. For them, the continued presence of the hacienda which they would come to eliminate, meant that the Old Mexico was still alive in the 1930s.<sup>90</sup> While the power struggle on the battlefield was over, campesinos, hacendados, and governing officials continued in a tug-of-war struggle over the extent to which the legislation contained in the Constitution of 1917 would actually be implemented. For the campesinos, the question of implementation had particular regard to Article 27 of the constitution, which promised Mexican citizens that their country's resources belonged to them. These laws empowered campesinos to take back lands that in many cases had belonged to their forebears but that wealthy Mexicans and foreigners had gradually taken away under the Lerdo Laws that put them up for grabs.

This chapter deals with petitions that Durango's campesinos wrote to the Comisión Agraria Mixta in their state capital city Victoria de Durango that were successful during the Cárdenas presidency. As John Mason Hart has shown, the Mexican government distributed more than 100,000,000 acres of land to Mexicans during the 1920s and 1930s. The Mexican government was able to claim and then distribute this land by nullifying grants, claiming preeminent dominion, land reform, and auctioning of estates whose owners had failed to pay taxes. Cárdenas gained the presidency in part by

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<sup>89</sup> Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>90</sup> Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised*, 13.

playing on the public's wide-spread feeling that previous revolutionary governments had not distributed enough land and had not achieved the work and nationalist objectives of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>91</sup>

During Cárdenas' presidency (1934-1940), worker and agrarian discontent increased dramatically, which heightened insecurity for American land proprietors, corporations, investors, and residents of Mexico. A key contention of this study is that the distribution of land that took place during Cárdenas' was not only Cárdenas' doing but also that of the campesinos in Durango. The campesinos fought battles during the turbulent decade of 1910 to create a better Mexico for themselves. The campesino's actions spurred Mexico's politicians like Pastor Rouaix, Francisco Mugica, and others to draft legislation like Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917 which, as explained, profoundly altered the way subsequent administrations prioritized their citizenry and others living in the Mexican Republic. From then on, the state began subtracting land holdings from the people it had formerly protected to hand it over to the campesinos. The campesinos had thoroughly transformed their national and state governments by 1920. Their revolution cannot be said to have been completed in 1920, however, nor did their fight for change end there.

The campesinos caused the "powerful" to effect change in Mexico through the drafting of legislation that promised Mexican citizens the benefits of Mexico's natural resources. However, though the hacendados' former power had been lost, some still clung on to some of their haciendas in all of Mexico. Durango was no exception. The

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<sup>91</sup> John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 371.

campesinos finally dismantled the remaining haciendas completely during the Cárdenas administration by sending petitions to the Comisión Agraria Mixta and persuading governing authorities like the Comisión and their state governor that they qualified to receive land, and often right out of the hands of the hacendados who had formerly had power over them and had privilege under the Porfirian and colonial regimes. The actions of the campesinos and the effects that ensued clearly indicate that the changes that came out of the Mexican Revolution had a popular root and that the campesinos simply cannot be deemed to be passive recipients of the Mexican Revolution. Thus, the case of Durango bolsters the claims of earlier scholars, like John Mason Hart, Friedrich Katz, and Alan Knight, who credited the campesinos with the benefits they received from the Revolution.<sup>92</sup>

Throughout Mexico, campesinos petitioned for and received 44,000,000 acres of the land during the Cárdenas administration. Cárdenas also took several million acres of American-held land along coastal and peripheral regions by means of presidential edicts. Thus, he complied with Pastor Rouaix's twenty-seventh article of the 1917 Constitution, which stipulated that Mexico's resources belonged to Mexican citizens. Furthermore, as stated, the state took land by means of foreclosures for dereliction and unpaid taxes, uncertain deeds, and the usefulness for the public.

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<sup>92</sup> Heather Fowler-Salamini, "The Boom in Regional Studies of the Mexican Revolution," *Latin American Research Review* 28, no. 2 (1993): 179. Friedrich Katz, "Introduction: Rural Revolts in Mexico," in *Riot, Rebellion, and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 16; Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

The agrarian reform under Cárdenas strongly impacted Mexican society, not even the rural Mexican property-holding upper-class was able to withstand it. Additionally, American corporations that had built networks of communication, travel, and railways, were also assailed during the Cardenista agrarian reform. The Comisión Nacional de la Reforma Agraria and the Mexican Labor Department worked with urban and rural laborers, much to the displeasure of the United States government and American property and corporation owners in Mexico. These American owners of large and small properties would continuously take their claims to court and argue that they held exemptions to land seizures. Owners of large properties found a strategy in dividing their properties and referencing Article 27 in their arguments, which gave exemptions from land confiscation to small holdings, and Álvaro Obregón's Plan de Agua Prieta, which stipulated that small holdings were considered to be 100,000 acres or less.<sup>93</sup>

The early tensions with Mexican officials and the instability caused by the Mexican Revolution set the backdrop for the land confiscations that took place in the 1930s. From 1906-1911, public registry administrators denied registration of many of the land deeds and sale documents shown to them by recently arrived Americans. Many of the deeds were thus never recorded into Mexican public registries. This reality came as a shock to many of the American inhabitants in Mexico when the landownership battles increased in the 1930s. Many of them did have de facto possession of the land, although they did not hold a record testifying to the effect with the public registry.<sup>94</sup> The Cardenista government would expropriate much of this land and thus have much land in

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<sup>93</sup> Hart, *Empire and Revolution*. 371-372.

<sup>94</sup> John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 373.



hand that had formerly been owned by foreigners. The Cardenista government would re-distribute much of this land back into the hands of *campesinos* when they began petitioning in earnest during the second half of the 1930s.

The first petition examined here concerns the municipality of Cuencamé in eastern Durango. The region's Porfirian and Revolutionary past sets the area as a region where *campesinos* particularly felt the effects of modernization and did not gain at all from it. Under Díaz's regime, the region became a zone of expanding business agriculture. This eastern part of Durango was much like the state of Morelos, where big haciendas thrived at the cost of land-deprived pueblos and where largely absent hacienda owners living most of the year in urban areas extracted as much profit as they could through the modernization of social relations on the estate. This modernization entailed a less personalized relationship between workers and proprietors on the estate than had existed in the colonial period and in the early nineteenth century. As Nils Gilman has described it, the modernization process that began in earnest in various parts of the world during the nineteenth century was directed by "modernizing elites" who as Gils puts it, had "modern psychocultural traits." The elites would spend effort in directing what they considered potentially intractable segments of the population to their modernizing vision.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, large hacienda owners of Porfirian Mexico had imbibed capitalism and modernization from the United States and German, British, Spanish, and other foreigners whom Díaz had welcomed to Mexico for the intent of bringing Mexico up to speed with the most technologically and "socially advanced" countries.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 101.

<sup>96</sup> This came out of my head from all my reading. It is common knowledge for those who study this field.

For the hacendados in eastern Durango, this social configuration included getting rid of employees that they perceived to be superfluous, cutting wages, raising rent costs to occupants, drawing out the utmost vantage from peons, and closing off the hacienda and charging residents if they wanted access to the land and on water on the estate.<sup>97</sup> As William K. Meyers explained, the Laguna region of northeastern Durango and southwestern Coahuila were important in the Mexican state's ongoing modernization project. After the railroad was implemented in 1884, cotton-producing estates sprung up in the region, which led to the zone becoming the most valuable agrarian region for commercial purposes in Mexico. More specifically, the upsurge of mining, rubber, and textile production and the increased urbanization of settlements gave it the status of being Mexico's most consequential agrarian region.<sup>98</sup>

Sometime in early 1936, a group of vecinos of Cuencamé sent a petition to the Agrarian Department of the state asking for land for their legal foundation. Specifically, they wanted the land occupied by the farmhouse of the old Hacienda de Pedriceña. Most of the petitioners lived there and it was the only site with a waterwheel to provide the needed water. The following year, in early January 1937, the Agrarian Department sent José Guadalupe Salas, an engineer, to Cuencamé, so that he could investigate the case firsthand.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> David W. Walker, "Homegrown Revolution: The Hacienda of Santa Catalina del Alamo y Anexas and Agrarian Protest in Eastern Durango, Mexico, 1897-1913," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, no. 2 (May 1992): 241.

<sup>98</sup> William K. Meyer, *Forge of Progress, Crucible of Revolt: The Origins of the Mexican Revolution in La Comarca Lagunera, 1880-1911* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>99</sup> *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Durango*, September 11, 1938.

On the 25<sup>th</sup>, Salas reported back to the Agrarian Department. He stated that, after looking at some sites next to the pastureland of Cuatillos (the name of the vecinos' *ejido* or land endowment), he could not find an appropriate site because the site lacked any water. Salas further determined that only the farmhouse of the old rustic estate of Pedriceña would be viable for establishing a new population center or expanding the already extant one. In his report, Salas also stated that, after having spoken with the petitioners, he had verified the boundaries and lot divisions of the requested surface area.

From his measurements, Salas delineated a zone with eleven sides. This eleven-sided zone had a surface area of twenty hectares and forty areas of land that would be considered pastureland. Salas also demarcated a separate communication zone so that the ejidatarios could have access to their endowment. Salas informed the Agrarian Department that, within the demarcated polygon for the legal founding, there were houses occupied by servants of the Hacienda that, however, had been completely occupied by the ejidatarios for several years. These houses would soon need repairs.

Officials at the Agrarian Department studied Salas' findings, along with a report from the General Direction of Rents as to fiscal value of the demarcated area. This second report valued the pastureland of the Hacienda de Pedriceña at two pesos per hectare. With the background of the case in mind, the Agrarian Department ruled that the petition of the ejidatarios living in the Hacienda de Pedriceña and having an ejido in the pastureland of Cuatillos agreed with the decree of the then current Expropriation Law. The Agrarian Department deemed that the majority of the ejidatarios were currently living in the farmhouse of the Hacienda de Pedriceña. The Agrarian Department took into consideration that this was the reason why the ejidatarios were petitioning for their legal

foundation on that same site. The houses in which the ejidatarios lived had been provided for them by the owner after he had destroyed some constructions that the forbears of the ejidatarios had built so that he could extract metal from the land. While the ejidatarios had received their parcels in their current form, they became independent in their agricultural work and expected that the Executive Power of the State would endow them with the surface area necessary to be able to create their population center with the category of Free Pueblo.

From this information, which the Agrarian Department deemed accurate, government officials ruled that the petition was legally appropriate. To tend to their petition, the interim governor ordered the expropriation of the surface area of the indicated adjacencies of the Hacienda of Pedriceña from the possession of the lawyer José Villalobos Ruiz. The interim governor then sent his decision to the General Director of Rents so that he would then deal with the property-holder of the land set out for the legal founding petitioned for by the ejidatarios. Finally, the interim governor ordered that the Department of Agrarian Control and Ranching be the one in charge of tending to the petitions, contracting of the plots of land for urbanization, and naming an administrator to oversee the legal founding of the town.<sup>100</sup> That the campesinos and the governor together created a new town suggests that for the campesinos and their government, land was not just about providing soil for the planting of crops for the survival of campesinos. It was also tied up with self-autonomy for the campesinos who could then manage their own affairs apart from the municipal president and other officials of the old town who may or

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<sup>100</sup> *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Durango*, September 11, 1938.

may not have been sympathetic to their material needs or the social needs they may have had.

In another case for the town of San Juan del Río, Durango, the *vecinos* successfully petitioned for amplification of their ejidos. This is the town in which Francisco “Pancho” Villa had been born in 1878. In this case, 149 individuals were endowed with a total surface area of 1,201 hectares of land, of which 218 hectares were of seasonal land and 983 hectares were of arable land. The latter amount also afforded vecinos land for a school parcel as well which was set at 150 parcels. The nucleus of the population was also endowed with a surface area of 5,421 hectares of pastureland for cattle-raising. The land was to be used in common. Governor Enrique Calderón decided to expropriate the land needed for the endowment from three different parties.<sup>101</sup>

One property was the El Saucito estate, which belonged to the Sociedad Agrícola Industrial, of which 173 hectares of arable lands were to be taken. The second source of land for the amplification were the lands of José María Fierro, who had to concede over 218 hectares of seasonal land and 430 hectares of arable land. The final source was the Hacienda of Santa Catalina del Alamo, which belonged to Pablo Martínez del Río, and from this estate was taken 380 hectares of arable land and 5,421 hectares of pastureland.<sup>102</sup>

This last estate, which dated back to the colonial era, was massive. By 1897, Santa Catalina del Alamo extended not only over most of the municipality of Cuencamé,

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<sup>101</sup> *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Durango*, September 8, 1938.

<sup>102</sup> *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Durango*, September 8, 1938.

but also over the neighboring municipalities of San Juan del Río and Nazas. The hacienda's extension explains why it was deemed eligible for use for the requested amplification. Martínez del Río had in fact purchased the Santa Catalina del Alamo estate in 1897 for the very low price of 40,000 pounds from British capitalists who had been developing it and gone bankrupt. After obtaining the estate, Martínez del Río would come to expend over 500,000 pesos to improve the estate. This included the construction of a dam, a series of canals and gutters for the irrigation of cotton plots and wheat; purebred sheep and cattle to enhance wool and meat output, mills and wells for the provision of water for 16,000 mules, horses, and head of cattle. Additionally, Martínez del Río paid for barbed-wire and stone fencing to enclose farm animals and to block out potential encroachers. Last came the housing, where Martínez del Río provided housing for supervisors and peons, warehouses for the product generated by the hacienda, and machines to separate wheat and a cotton gin.<sup>103</sup>

After the Comisión Agraria Mixta ordered the expropriation of the land it stipulated to the receiving vecinos that they had to preserve the roads that crossed over the lands being conceded to them. Additionally, the Comisión Agraria Mixta stipulated that vecinos were obligated to restore and propagate the forests and woodlands that they contain. This last stipulation probably had to do with Durango's forestry industry, which hearkened back to the colonial period and was still active in early twentieth-century Durango. Under the Cárdenas administration, industry was actively promoted and the Comisión likely stipulated that the vecinos propagate the forests so that they could reap

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<sup>103</sup> David W. Walker, "Homegrown Revolution: The Hacienda of Santa Catalina del Alamo y Anexas and Agrarian Protest in Eastern Durango, Mexico, 1897-1913," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, no. 2 (May 1992): 242-243.

economic benefits from forestry later. This final decision was signed by state governor Enrique Calderon on February 7, 1938.<sup>104</sup>

The third case covered in this chapter concerns the town of Arroyo de Coneto in the municipality of Rodeo. On February 7, 1938, Calderón approved the prior verdict of the Comisión Agraria Mixta that endowed 14 eligible individuals of Arroyo de Coneto with 1,600 hectares of general land. Of this amount, 60 hectares were irrigation lands and 1,540 hectares were pasturelands for cattle-raising. These lands were taken from two haciendas. One was the hacienda of Guichapa, then owned by Colonel Juan B. Fuentes. The Comisión saw it fit to appropriate 40 hectares of irrigation land and 1,540 hectares of pastureland from it. The second hacienda was the El Parián estate, then owned by Antonio Camacho Fierro. The Comisión ordered that 20 hectares of irrigation land be taken from it for the amplification. After approving the Comisión's verdict, the governor ordered that Fuentes and Camacho were to be alerted as to the time frame in which they needed to vacate the lands expropriated from them. Even with this amplification, however, twenty-one individuals did not receive a parcel of land. Addressing them, the governor affirmed that their rights remained protected to attempt to create a new agrarian population center whenever they deemed it convenient. Finally, the governor ordered that his decision and the verdict of the Comisión be published in the *Periódico Oficial del Estado*.<sup>105</sup>

As these cases show, the Cárdenas political era in Mexico caused a significant shift from the era of Porfirio Díaz in that it generally worked for the benefit of the masses

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<sup>104</sup> *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Durango*, September 11, 1938.

<sup>105</sup> *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Durango*, June 26, 1938.

through the redistribution of land instead of providing lucrative concessions to foreigners for the sake of the modernization of Mexican industries, communication, and travel networks. This chapter has explored three cases where campesinos successfully petitioned for land. Thus, if one extends the Mexican Revolution from ending in 1920 to ending in 1940, as some scholars have done, one can indisputably portray campesinos as taking on a crucial role in the Mexican Revolution. During Cárdenas' sexennial, they started case files and petitioned for amplification and endowment of land from their state governor. The process was directly tied up with the revolutionary ideologies and events in Mexico between 1910 and 1920 and indeed fulfilled the fundamental stimulus behind them, that is, to recover the land that Díaz chose to put in the hands of capitalist foreigners and wealthy Mexicans.

In hindsight, the modernization agenda initiated by Díaz did not go hand in hand with the betterment of Mexico's masses. Instead, it disseminated the bulk of the benefits derived from Mexican resources to foreigners and a few Mexican elites. Mexico's masses were consequently left in need of land and impoverished. This is where the Mexican Revolution and its extension into Cárdenas' presidency unraveled into a tapestry of Mexico's past and present.

The successful cases here demonstrate that Cárdenas' reform was done on the ground and that campesinos initiated it and put it into practice as they asked for the land resources that were promised to them by article 27 of the 1917 Constitution. Thus, it would be wrong to portray the campesinos as ignorant masses merely receiving the benefits of what memorable revolutionaries were able to obtain out of the overthrow of Díaz and of what they re-created from the shards of the Mexican government left by the



regime's shambles. Campesinos used the law and skillfully crafted petitions that demonstrated a clear understanding of their rights to their nation's resources as enshrined in revolutionary legislation like the 1917 Mexican Constitution and the 1934 Agrarian Code. The state government also assumed power over the campesinos by deciding whether the campesinos would be granted what they desired. Thus, the relationship between the Mexican revolutionary state that succeeded Díaz and the campesinos can best be viewed not with the statist view suggested by some scholars in which campesinos were just passive recipients of a government that called the shots both during the battle-plagued decade of the 1910s and after. Instead, the cases covered here most aptly fit under Michel Foucault's idea of "micro-technologies of power," where power is not embodied in the state or in ruling elites. Instead, power was scattered among different "classes" in post-revolutionary Mexico and the campesino's power lay in their successful petitioning for Mexico's natural resources.<sup>106</sup>

This might seem like a moot point but it entails a great deal for understanding the ways that Mexico evolved from Porfirian social and cultural structures into the social and cultural structure of the twentieth century. By petitioning for land owned by the Porfirian elite, campesinos initiated a Mexico where campesinos held more political power and could depend on the government that would take their side against wealthy landowners rather than the other way around. This was the inverse image of Porfirian Mexico, and the inversion signified to Mexican campesinos that the Mexican Revolution had been completed. For Cárdenas and his administration, their working with the campesinos signified to them that they had brought a revolutionary utopia into reality. But in a longer

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<sup>106</sup> Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 192.

view of Mexico's trajectory that perhaps neither the campesinos nor the Cardenista politicians fully perceived, they politically, socially, and culturally created the modern Mexico that Mexicans experience today and that scholars of modern Mexico study. This is apparent not only in unambiguously economic topics like Cárdenas' agrarian reform and 1938 oil expropriation. As art historian Jennifer Jolly has noted in her recent study on the art and tourism industries that Cárdenas' administration patronized in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, Cárdenas is key for studying Mexico, not only due to the way he shaped the modern Mexican state by ways of programs like the land reform analyzed here and institutions like the Comisión Agraria Mixta that he either founded himself or led, but also because of the mythology that formed around his legacy. Here, Jolly has in mind the ideology that implies that Cárdenas' six-year term completed the Mexican Revolution and that during his administration Mexico's masses got their golden age when the Mexican government worked for their prosperity.<sup>107</sup>

As Enrique Krauze has put it, Cárdenas "became an icon, a kind of moral *Jefe Máximo*, the only true living Mexican Revolutionary, the moral conscious of the Revolution."<sup>108</sup> In 1990s, when the trends in Mexican Revolutionary historiography had shifted from centering on Mexico City and its surroundings (read "national" history) and had shifted to the study of various states (regional history), Mark Wasserman noted that it was the plebeian classes throughout Mexico that allowed the Mexican nation state to emerge from the Revolution and to prevail over Mexican society. Quite in agreement with the author of this study, Wasserman says that Cárdenas, like Álvaro Obregón,

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<sup>107</sup> Jennifer Jolly, *Creating Pátzcuaro, Creating Mexico: Art, Tourism, and Nation Building under Lázaro Cárdenas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018), 227.

<sup>108</sup> Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 481.

depended on the backing of labor and agrarian unions (not the other way around) for the fortification of the nation state in opposition to regional elites. In a mutual pact that had been hinted at in revolutionary legislation but that Cárdenas came to consolidate, the unions of the ejidatarios, which occurred side by side with that of laborers in areas like Durango and the Laguna region, turned to Cardenista national government for backing now that the stakes of local and state elites did not clash with their goals of obtaining land and for laborers, increased wages.<sup>109</sup>

Cárdenas' land reform in Durango was reflective of his desire to imbue his administration's policy with his views on increasing plebeian participation in the political structure of the country, national incorporation of Mexico's regions, that is, the inculcation of national identity and loyalty, termed *mexicanidad* by some scholars, and economic equality. With these principles and a pact with Mexico's campesinos and laborers throughout Mexico, Cárdenas aimed at detonating Mexico's old oligarchic framework and expanding its market. The left-wing of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (of which Cárdenas was the first president) was the most open-minded to the integrating conception that Cárdenas had for Mexico. It was this part of his party that agreed with Cárdenas that the integration of the plebeian classes was essential for the party that they wanted to direct and for the ongoing revolution that they believed they were still fulfilling.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Mark Wasserman, "Provinces of the Revolution: An Introduction," in *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History: 1910-1929*, ed. Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 9.

<sup>110</sup> Stuart F. Voss, "Nationalizing the Revolution: Culmination and Circumstance," in *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History 1910-1929*, ed. Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 291.

A crucial point of the present study has been that Cárdenas continued and fulfilled the Mexican Revolution with the agrarian reform. As mentioned earlier, Cárdenas himself believed that he was continuing the Mexican Revolution. This was evident in that he made a massive land reform, thus signaling that previous land reforms had not been adequate to fulfill the stipulations of Article 27 and thus that his predecessors had not fulfilled the Mexican Revolution. It was also apparent that Cárdenas did not believe that the Mexican Revolution had ended when he continued to use the symbolism of revolutionaries like Emiliano Zapata of Morelos. Both Cárdenas and his predecessor, President Álvaro Obregón, arrogated Zapatismo as a major base of Obregonismo and then Cardenismo during Cárdenas' six-year term, thus buttressing the idea that their administrations were genuinely part of the continued Mexican Revolution.<sup>111</sup> In the case of Durango's Francisco "Pancho Villa," the Cardenista epoch would revive the debate over the as of yet undetermined niche that the revolutionary Villa held in the collective revolutionary national memory that the Cardenistas were in the process of consolidating.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Thomas Benjamin, "Regionalizing the Revolution: The Many Mexicos in Revolutionary Historiography," in *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History 1910-1929*, ed. Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 323.

<sup>112</sup> Max Parra, "The Battle for Pancho Villa during Cardenismo, 1935-1940," in *Writing Pancho Villa's Revolution* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), 121.

#### **IV. Cases Rejected: The Justifications of the Cardenista Government and Perceived Benefits for Campesinos**

As stated in previous chapters, the Cárdenas administration enforced the Agrarian Code of 1934. This document fundamentally changed Mexico for ordinary Mexicans who were thus empowered to request the land and natural resources of their more affluent neighbors. How did this process work on the ground? What did governing bodies and officials like the Comisión Agraria Mixta and the state governor justify negative responses to petitioner's requests for water, or amplification, or endowment of ejidos?

To answer these questions, this chapter will analyze cases that were published in Durango state's gazette newspaper, called the *Periódico Oficial*, in depth. This section seeks to probe the actual lived experience of campesinos petitioning for land by looking first at a petition for water, then a petition for amplification of ejidos, and finally a petition for endowment of ejidos third. The three cases examined here are examples of petitions that were deemed inadmissible by the Comisión Agraria Mixta and the state governor.

In the cases examined here, we find that petitions were denied at times because the minimum number of individuals that the Agrarian Code of 1934 set was not reached and thus the petitioners did not qualify for an endowment. Perhaps, the reasoning behind this minimum number lies in the aim to extend the benefits of Mexico's national resources to all Mexicans or at least as many ordinary Mexicans as possible. Thus, by setting minimal numbers for who could qualify for an endowment, the writers of the Agrarian Code were perhaps hoping to ensure that land endowments were benefitting as

many people as possible and not just very small groups. The Cárdenas administration's goal was to transform Mexico so that the Mexican masses could see a conspicuous change in their lives during the Cardenista presidency.

When campesinos asked for land, water, and resources of community members carrying out a business enterprise, the Comisión Agraria Mixta could also decide to deny the petitioners their request. As one of the cases below demonstrates, the Comisión might decide that a fruit industry that furnished work and wages for local campesinos could be deemed propitious to campesino's economic well-being. Thus, the Comisión and indeed the Cardenista ideology behind it, might rule against the campesino's petition in the name of still helping the *campesino* in other ways.

Between the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920 and the start of Cárdenas' presidency in 1934, certain historical progressions tied up with rural politics conducted agrarian people to re-situate themselves in Mexican society. Studies for other states such as Christopher Boyer's case study of Michoacán have found that this re-situating of the campesino started around 1920, at a time when populist politicians and radical agrarian leadership began portraying campesinos "as the incarnation of rural masses who (it was said) had played the leading role in the Mexican Revolution."<sup>113</sup> This arising political discourse depicted campesinos as a distinct political grouping. In other words, campesinos were portrayed as a possible component to be rallied up by appealing to their financial and political stakes. Additionally, some campesinos formed groupings and annexed aspects of the ideology that had developed out of the Mexican Revolution and

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<sup>113</sup> Christopher R. Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos: Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán, 1920-1935* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003): 20.

created novel parts of post-revolutionary ideology. The denouement of this process was the evolution of the masses of campesinos from simply a political grouping into a group of people with a novel consciousness. This campesino political consciousness that unraveled after the Revolution derived from the mutual influence of the experiences of agrarian people who took part in agrarian reform and the revolutionary government's shaping.<sup>114</sup>

In one of his first discourses on the land problem, Cárdenas declared that the government rejected the practice of former administrations that limited themselves to creating a cap off the peons with parcels of land. Cárdenas declared that he would fight so that agricultural production would find itself in the hands of "organized campesinos and technically prepared to radically transform the semi-feudal structure of the Mexican fatherland."<sup>115</sup> In his greeting to the nation on November 30, 1936, Cárdenas clearly defined the work ahead for agrarian transformation. He also examined in detail the way the government planned to end the (perceived) backwardness and misery of the campesinos. Cárdenas said that his goal was for the agrarian reform to amplify and strengthen the agriculture of the country in the ejidal sector. Additionally, he wanted to turn the salaried worker with a parcel into an independent campesino of his community. This was deemed to be a very important factor in constructing a new Mexico, and in

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<sup>114</sup> Christopher R. Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos: Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán, 1920-1935* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003): 20-21.

<sup>115</sup> Anatoli Shulgovski, *México en la encrucijada de su historia* (México D.F.: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1968), 229.

strengthening ejidal agriculture. In order to elevate the work of agrarian people the state was to give all possible financial and technical aid to the campesinos.<sup>116</sup>

As explained in previous chapters, the framework for how the campesinos petitioned for land was provided by the Agrarian Code of 1934. As was true for Mexico as a whole, it was up to the campesinos who wanted land to write up a petition for their community. To recapitulate, during the Cardenista era, the campesinos of one or more towns or villages would create a local agrarian committee (Comité Agrario) that was responsible for making land requests to the agrarian commission (Comisión Agraria Mixta) at the state level. Durango's campesinos sent their petitions to the Comisión Agraria Mixta in Victoria de Durango, the capital city of their state. The petitions were usually type-written in the 1930s, though occasionally the petitioners sent a handwritten document. The Comisión Agraria Mixta then formally established a case for the petitioners and begin processing it. For the Comisión Agraria Mixta to be able to reach a decision, it sent engineers and census-takers to the petitioning town so that these professionals could undertake a series of studies. These professionals traveled from Victoria de Durango to the petitioning town. Once there, the professional formed a committee to help him undertake a census of the inhabitants and a census of the livestock. The committee was composed of the professional representing the Comisión Agraria Mixta, a person representing the petitioners, and a third person representing the people who could potentially have their property expropriated for re-distribution to the campesinos. The census and the rest of the studies were used to investigate the eligibility

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<sup>116</sup> Anatoli Shulgovski, *México en la encrucijada de su historia* (México D.F.: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1968), 229.



of the petitioners, their land needs, and the availability of land within a radius of seven kilometers of the community.<sup>117</sup>

Once the professional had completed the census and the rest of his paperwork and suggested what he thought the ruling should be, he would then send the documents to the Comisión Agraria Mixta. After reviewing the documents, the Comisión Agraria Mixta would issue its verdict (usually in line with what their representative had already suggested), and then send the verdict to the state governor. The governor would then either approve it or disapprove it. The petitions and rulings were all published in Durango's official gazette newspaper, the *Periódico Oficial*, which granted easy access to official rulings and precedents for anyone who had an interest in seeing them. The evidence from this whole process thus accords with Tobler's argument that it is not enough to think of the Cardenista land reform as deriving solely from the campesinos pushing for it. Rather, a coalition between the poorer classes and the Mexican state made allowed for massive land reform to become a reality.<sup>118</sup> The publication of campesino's petitions, the process undertaken by the Comisión Agraria Mixta, and the final verdicts all suggest that the government was providing the campesinos with the tools to refer to prior cases and thus better understand how they might acquire land.

The disputes over land and the battles waged for it among rural people most frequently conjures up an image of the country person's needs to pasture livestock or to plant and grow crops. Agrarian strife in Cardenista Durango also encompassed water

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<sup>117</sup> Susan Walsh Sanderson and Magda Benútillo, "La política de la reforma agraria en México: nexos locales, estatales y nacionales," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 42, no. 1 (1980): 132-134.

<sup>118</sup> Hans Werner Tobler, "Peasants and the Shaping of the Revolutionary State, 1910-40," in *Riot, Rebellion, and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, ed. Friedrich Katz (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 517.

sources from the land, however, and not just the land itself. The region under study is semiarid and mostly composed of sierra. The Sierra Madre Occidental is conspicuous in the physical features of Durango. The mountain range directs substantial difference in the precipitation and temperatures of the state. Of the rain that falls in the region, seventy-five percent falls from July through September. The total amount of rain that falls each year depends on the elevation of a given town.<sup>119</sup> Thus, the seasonal limits that the nature of the region imposed on rainfall made water access a resource that campesinos in Durango did not take for granted in the 1930s.

The case of La Magdalena, a town in the municipality of Canatlán where the ejidatarios petitioned for water, serves as a prime example of the clashes that ensued over water. Moreover, the case demonstrates what the results could be for petitioners when their needs for natural resources intersected with the needs of capitalist industry. For as the case unravels it becomes clear that the fruit industry that required the water the campesinos of La Magdalena were requesting could rely on the support of the government.<sup>120</sup>

In their request, petitioners asked for water that two brothers surnamed Torres held in two dams on their land. Their property was composed of 150,000 hectares of irrigation land that constituted the orchard of La Magdalena. This orchard had given rise to a nascent fruit industry after it had planted around 25,000 fruit trees. Of the trees, most were apple trees that the Torres brothers had been imported from the United States. The

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<sup>119</sup> Susan M. Deeds, *Defiance and Deference in Mexico's Colonial North: Indians under Spanish Rule in Nueva Vizcaya* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003), 39.

<sup>120</sup> *Periodico Oficial*, October 20, 1938.

remainder were fruit trees that the Torres brothers were cultivating on the property as an experiment to see if their continued cultivation would be profitable.

The ruling issued by the Comisión Agraria Mixta determined that the fruit trees in the orchard of La Magdalena had to be irrigated at least four times annually. Moreover, each irrigation had to reach water that was no less than eight centimeters above ground level. According to the ruling, this meant that the trees in the orchard needed an approximate volume of 480,000 cubic meters of water. The joint amount contained in the two water dams owned by the Torres brothers amounted to 285,700 cubic meters of water. One of the dams, denominated La Presa, held 202,500 cubic meters and the second dam, known as Los Alamos, held 83,200 cubic meters. The Comisión Agraria Mixta determined that the dam of La Presa was capable of holding double its content if the Torres brothers desilted the stored water but the Comisión Agraria Mixta opined that desilting it would be costly.

Finally, the Comisión determined in its ruling that the fruit industry of La Magdalena provided jobs to a good number of ejidatarios of the town and that, as the development of the fruit industry intensified, it would begin to need more workers. From this finding, the Comisión judged that the fruit industry on the Torres brothers' property would be beneficial for the campesinos, since apart from receiving part of the product, they would also be paid for their work as cultivators, pickers, selectors, and packagers of the fruit. From these findings, the Comisión also judged that the petition submitted by the ejidatarios of La Magdalena for the endowment of water from the Torres brothers' property was inadmissible. Thus, the Comisión accorded with the presidential decision,

which deemed that the water held on the orchard of La Magdalena was not to be used to endow ejidatarios with because it was used for the irrigation of a small property.

Once the Comisión had reached this verdict on October 15, 1938 and received approval by all of its members on the 17<sup>th</sup>, it then sent its decision off to the governor of Durango. Only a day later, the governor, his undersecretary, and the minister in charge of the office issued their decision in the Palace of Executive Power of the State in Durango. They approved all sections of the Comisión's ruling. The governor then mandated that his decision and the Comisión's decision be published in the *Periódico Oficial* in accordance with the stipulations of Article 73 of the Agrarian Code. The original case file, including the decision of the governor, was then returned to the Comisión.<sup>121</sup>

This case demonstrates how governing bodies like the Comisión and state officials like the governor decided whether to take away the private property of others to endow ejidatarios with water, land, or other resources. The size of the property played a role as the Torres brothers' orchard of La Magdalena was deemed to be small. Additionally, that the water on the property was being used for the irrigation of 25,000 fruit trees cultivated by workers also seemed to convince the authorities that the orchard was already benefitting the campesinos by providing them with work. This privileging of capitalist industry reflected another aspect of Cardenismo. As Charles H. Weston, Jr. has aptly put it, Cárdenas did not propose a socialist economy. Rather, Cárdenas' vision for Mexico entailed a hybrid economy where private, corporate, and state business organizations would all stake a presence in the post-revolutionary Mexican economy.

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<sup>121</sup> *Periodico Oficial*, October 20, 1938

Cárdenas would often say that his administration would back private business if capitalists conceded to pay their employees fairly.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, they did not wish to divert water from a nascent industry.

Perhaps, as Wolfe, citing the work of Beatriz Jaguaribe and Claudio Lomnitz, has argued, dam sites and other structures created to modernize and improve the lives of humankind also helped endow the legacy of Mexican presidents with validity.<sup>123</sup> Cárdenas received a growing belief in the possibilities of engineering from the 1920s when he came into presidential office, which led to his initiation of high dams, which Wolfe has termed “construction-cum-ideological projects.”<sup>124</sup> In a long recounting of the projects it had done and its achievements in the duration of Cárdenas’ presidency, the CNI described the company towns’ social assignment when they were established next to dam sites. By carrying out the “postulates of the Revolution” and “undertak[ing] an enterprise of such extraordinary proportions” that would extend irrigation all over Mexico in order to use “convenient and adequate exploitation of our agricultural resources” the workers and peasants would be permeated in the “ideas of order, work, and progress” (which stemmed from the nineteenth-century liberal watchwords of “order and progress”).<sup>125</sup> As Paul Hart has noted, the agrarian reform that Cárdenas implemented in Mexico enabled the single-party government to gain a great deal of rural Mexico and also helped give credit to the thought of all socioeconomic classes being unified into one

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<sup>122</sup> Charles H. Weston, Jr., “The Political Legacy of Lázaro Cárdenas,” *The Americas* 39, no. 3 (Jan., 1983): 386.

<sup>123</sup> Mikael Wolfe, “Bringing the Revolution to the Dam Site: How Technology, Labor, and Nature Converged in the Microcosm of a Northern Mexican Company Town, 1936-1946,” *Journal of the Southwest* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2011):

<sup>124</sup> Wolfe, “Bringing the Revolution,” 8.

<sup>125</sup> Wolfe, “Bringing the Revolution,” 11.

“revolutionary family,” as symbolized by the Mexican government and the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Government).<sup>126</sup>

Later that year on December 11, the *vecinos* of a settlement in the municipality of Nazas known as Santa Bárbara received a negative response to a petition they had sent and had published in the *Periódico Oficial* a year before. In their petition, they had requested an amplification of ejidos. The petitioners had been endowed with 1,473 hectares of ejido lands already from the president, but they claimed these additional lands proved to be insufficient to meet their needs.<sup>127</sup>

Upon receiving the petition, the Comisión Agraria Mixta collected the technical data and other necessary information for the case file and to this end commissioned engineer Eduardo A. Bautista on March 11, 1938 to make the required census record and inspection visit of Santa Bárbara. Before going to Santa Bárbara, the commissioners sent notifications to the property-holders whose property could potentially be used to amplify the ejidos of the petitioners. By the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Bautista and a committee composed of himself, representing the Comisión Agraria Mixta, and a representative of the petitioning campesinos named Donato Pedroza had verified the census information. There was supposed to be a third committee member representing property-holders who might have to concede part of their property to the campesinos but apparently no person wanting to serve in such a capacity ever came forth. Most likely, the property-holders’ main reason for not producing a representative was that they did not believe that representation would

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<sup>126</sup> Paul Hart, *Emiliano Zapata: Mexico’s Social Revolutionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 278.

<sup>127</sup> *Periodico Oficial*, December 11, 1938.

help them keep their property intact. Perhaps, the property-holders believed that the Comisión would make a ruling based on the professionals' data and the Agrarian Code of 1934 and that furnishing a representative would not influence the Comisión's decision. The property-holders knew that the Cardenista administration was serious about following through with agrarian reform. Moreover, these landowners correctly perceived that the Cardenista administration was not allied with them, but with the campesinos and that this alliance trickled down to governing bodies at the state and local level.

In its census report, the committee found that there were 171 inhabitants in Santa Bárbara. Of these, 35 were heads of family and the committee recognized 50 individuals as having a right to amplification. The census also counted 82 heads of large livestock, and 31 heads of small livestock. Separate from the census taking was the actual inspection visit. Upon undertaking the inspection, Bautista found that there were no longer any affectable lands because the land pointed out by the petitioners, which pertained to a ranch known as "Tomatillos," had recently been conceded over to the ejidatarios of the two nearby towns of Paso Nacional and La Perla. Bautista also noted that there was an ongoing dispute between Santa Bárbara and the nearby towns of Dolores and San José del Molino over parts of a nearby hacienda. The parts of the hacienda under dispute were owned by three men in the town. However, Bautista found that although the men's three plots of land were marked as linking parts of one division, the combined surface area amounted to only 96 hectares of irrigation land, which was not enough to make them affectable. Bautista also looked at another property owned by a couple that had a surface area of 28 hectares and 40 acres, respectively, which was also not enough to make it affectable.

Once Bautista and his committee had completed the study, and given that no dispute ensued over the census, the Comisión Agraria Mixta studied the case file and determined that 50 individuals qualified for the amplification of land being requested. However, the Comisión decided that the study undertaken by Bautista proved that the ranches located within the legal radius and that the engineer had deemed suitable to be expropriated and given over to the campesinos no longer had available land because they had already been used to endow campesinos in nearby towns. Moreover, the Comisión found that the parts of the hacienda pointed out by the petitioners could not be used since they did not reach the minimum surface area set by the Agrarian Code. In sum, the Comisión ruled that the vecinos of Santa Bárbara did have the need and the right to receive more land. Nonetheless, it was not possible to obtain an amplification of ejidos for them due to the lack of eligible land. All members of the Comisión Agraria Mixta approved the verdict in Durango on May 4, 1938. Ten days later, representatives of the national and state government, the secretary of the Comisión Agraria Mixta, and a representative of the campesinos signed the decision.

From this point in the process, the Comisión Agraria Mixta, sent the case file to state governor Enrique Calderón so that he could examine it. Calderón and his secretary Luis Ramírez de Arellano approved the verdict and signed it on June 3, 1938. The governor's office then returned the case file along with his decision to the Comisión Agraria Mixta.<sup>128</sup> Whether the campesinos appealed or not would require further investigation.

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<sup>128</sup> *Periódico Oficial*, December 11, 1938



Now let us look at a case started by the *vecinos* of a town called “Carrizalillo,” also in the municipality of Nazas. In a document dated September 30, 1936, the *vecinos* petitioned Governor Enrique Calderón for an endowment of ejidos, alleging that they did not have land to cultivate. As usual, the petitioners already had some lots of land in mind that they wanted the government to confiscate and issue to them. They wanted the lands known as San José del Recodo and their Anexos. Two weeks after drafting the petition, a president, secretary, and treasurer from the petitioning town were selected and approved by the governor to be members of the community’s Comité Ejecutivo Agrario. On October 21<sup>st</sup>, the Comisión Agraria Mixta formally established the case and had it published in the *Periodico Oficial* the next day.

The Comisión Agraria Mixta began working on the case three months later, or at least taking concrete steps on it. Sometime probably in early January, the Comisión Agraria Mixta commissioned census-taker Heriberto Pacheco to go to Carrizalillo and make a general census and a livestock census for the case. Before taking off for the town (presumably from Victoria de Durango), Pacheco sent notifications to the property-holders of lands that were tentatively deemed eligible for confiscation and distribution to the petitioning campesinos. By January 11<sup>th</sup>, Pacheco was in Carrizalillo establishing a census committee with himself representing the Comisión Agraria Mixta, and one Juan Arreola representing the petitioning population. There was supposed to be someone representing the property-holders who could potentially lose land for a re-distribution to the campesinos but, as usual, no person came forth wanting to serve as such a capacity even though they had been notified ahead of time. One can imagine, that no one wished to serve in such a capacity out of resentment at the whole case and a refusal to even

acknowledge a legal process that could potentially subtract from their landholdings through coercion and without any kind of compensation. Additionally, perhaps the property holders did not believe that sending a representative would improve their chances of holding on to their property.

Two days later, Pacheco and Arreola had finished the census, finding that there were 159 inhabitants. Of these, Pacheco and Arreola found that there were 30 heads of family and that 49 individuals qualified for endowment. In the livestock census, they found that there were 189 heads of large livestock and 261 heads of small livestock. However, the Comisión Agraria Mixta saw evident problems with the data reported by Pacheco. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, the Comisión commissioned engineer Eduardo A. Bautista to go to Carrizalillo and rectify the census after the Comisión had been notified that the information in the census was wrong. This was due to allegations that several *vecinos* deemed eligible for endowment lived in Nazas, not Carrizalillo. Moreover, Carrizalillo consisted of approximately ten houses, which made it unlikely that there were 159 houses living in them. Two weeks later, Bautista, who represented the Comisión Agraria Mixta, had rectified the census with a new census committee. Again, property holders who might face property loss for the endowment produced no representative. The new results painted a drastically different picture, reducing the previous figure by about half or more. In the new census there were 67 inhabitants, 14 heads of family, 17 eligible individuals accepted by the census committee, 76 heads of large livestock and 6 heads of small livestock. Two of the individuals did not live in Carrizalillo but lived in nearby the nearby towns of Noria de Torreña and Magueyes.

With the results of his inquiry in hand, Bautista determined that the petition for endowment of ejidos from Carrizalillo was not permissible because the number of eligible individuals did not reach 20. Bautista did offer the petitioners an alternative route, suggesting that the petitioners of Carrizalillo could join forces with the petitioners of San Luis del Cordero in seeking amplification of ejidos. However, the President of the Comité Ejecutivo Agrario deemed such a scenario to be unlikely, saying that relations between the *vecinos* of the two towns were known to be hostile. Nevertheless, by the time Bautista wrote up his sum of the case, residents in Carrizalillo and San Luis had reached an agreement. According to it, the ejidatarios of San Luis del Cordero would admit the eligible *vecinos* of Carrizalillo in the amplification that the former was then processing. From this, the agrarian rights of the *vecinos* of the managing town were recognized in the amplification conceded to San Luis del Cordero. Bautista then submitted his completed work and decision to the review of the Comisión Agraria Mixta. The members of the Comisión Agraria Mixta discussed Bautista's verdict and approved it on April 16, 1938. They then sent it to governor Calderón, who promptly approved all sections the Comisión Agraria Mixta's verdict on the disqualification of the petitioning *vecinos* of Carrizalillo. Calderón also recognized their rights in the amplification conceded to the *vecinos* of San Luis del Cordero on April 25, 1938.<sup>129</sup>

The three cases analyzed here exemplify some of the failures of campesinos to get what they wanted. They show the limitations that laws and the jurisdictions of other towns placed on campesinos. Nonetheless, the government still tried to justify its decision in terms of how the *campesinos* still benefitted from the land as in the case of the nascent

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<sup>129</sup> *Periódico Oficial*, May 1938.

fruit industry in Canatlán. This justification demonstrates not only the continued government preoccupation with the economic well-being of the *campesinos* but also show the government's approval of capitalist modes of production. Thus, the thesis offered by previous scholars that Cárdenas was communist (in the modern sense) does not hold. The communal lands were part of a medieval Spanish and post-Conquest Mexican style of resource distribution that had nothing to do with the modern Communism articulated by Karl Marx in the nineteenth century and the regimes it spawned in the twentieth century.

The Cardenista government aimed at making capitalism work for *campesinos* in the case of the fruit industry. In the successful cases where *campesinos* successfully elicited land grants for communal ownership, the Mexican government was not promoting a modern Communist style of resource ownership. Instead it sought to re-integrate a remnant economic style of the colonial period that had helped protect Indian lands into modern capitalism. Thus, together the *campesinos* and Cárdenas re-integrated what was useful from the Mexican past into the modern Mexico that they were trying to create in reversal of much of the economic policies of the Díaz era.

## V. Conclusion

At the Rocky Mountain Council of Latin American Studies conference in 2018, a doctoral student presented a paper titled “‘Sembradores de Amistad’: Civic Associations, Catholicism, and Monterrey’s Opposition to the Post-Revolutionary State.”<sup>130</sup> His paper concerned the Cárdenas era in urban Michoacán. The panel as a whole concerned conservative politics in Mexico from 1920-1950 and it included Professor Ben Fallaw who published a study on Cárdenas in Yucatán in 2001. So research on the Cardenas era is still proliferating and it surely will be for quite a while. With that said, scholarship on the Cardenista era was already proliferating within a generation or two after Cárdenas’ six-year term as president and its continued prominence as a topic in contemporary scholarship testifies to its continued vitality for shedding light on modern Mexico.

Scholars keep finding interest and new focuses on the time period. I had not encountered a study of Nuevo Leon in the Cardenista era for example until this conference so scholars are now examining more regions during the Cardenista era and also looking at the period from new angles and other disciplines. For example, art historian Jennifer Jolly who published a monograph last year looks at Cárdenas’ role as a patron of modern art in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán and as a promoter of the modern tourism industry in that city. The artwork that she chose for the cover of her book is a watercolor by the artist Roberto Cueva del Río that depicts Cárdenas with some local people (mostly fishermen but also a mother and her child and a young boy and a young girl on either

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<sup>130</sup> David Tamayo, “‘Sembradores de Amistad’: Civic Associations, Catholicism, and Monterrey’s Opposition to the Post-Revolutionary State” (paper presented at the 65<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies, Reno, NV, April 4-7, 2018).

side) studying some documents and the scroll that Cárdenas has on the table has the words *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (National Campesino Confederation) written upon it. Now Jolly explains in the book that this imagery in the mural is based on an earlier print that had been made by a man named Xavier Guerro who was pressing for agrarian reform and who had titled that print *La tierra es de quien la trabaja con sus manos* [The Land Belongs to Those Who Work It with Their Hands].<sup>131</sup> This mural is meant to signify that Cárdenas is the one who would complete the Mexican Revolution by re-distributing land. So the land issue inevitably pops up everywhere in studies of Cardenas. But still interest has declined in recent years.

At least in part, this is because current historiographical trends that have become fashionable have geared many scholars toward looking at the past from a transnational or global perspective analysis and this trend has lent itself to studies on topics such as the exchange of commodities and ideas. These topics have steered scholars away from topics like land that not only seem to have been fashionable before for Latin American history but also seem less trendy now.

This study has aimed at highlighting the connection between two crucial moments of twentieth century Mexican history, the Cárdenas era and the Mexican Revolution. It contributes a case study of Pancho Villa's home state to the literature and seeks to act as a base from which to launch deeper investigations in landholding conditions and how they changed during the Cárdenas era in Durango. Thus, this study contributes a local case study of a key revolutionary state and this perspective from the vantage point of

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<sup>131</sup> Jennifer Jolly, *Creating Pátzcuaro, Creating Mexico: Art, Tourism, and Nation Building under Lázaro Cárdenas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018), 228.

Durango could potentially offer not only a greater understanding of the Cardenas era, but also a greater understanding of Villa and Durango in the earlier part of the twentieth century if we sort of read the past backward (always avoiding anachronistic thinking of course) but we can see how the links between the Villista past and the Cardenista past and see what the consequences of the Villista past were for Cardenista Durango and also see how Villa's memory was being shaped in the decade after his death.

As Friedrich Katz has noted, evaluating the influence that Villa and his campaign had on twentieth-century Mexico and the Mexican Revolution is difficult.<sup>132</sup> However, by analyzing land reform in Villa's home state during the Cárdenas era and investigating the connections between Cardenista thought and Villista thought, one can perhaps arrive at a better appraisal of how Villa's live changed Mexico's destiny for the rest of the twentieth century and beyond.

This study has analyzed six land reform cases in depth in Durango that show the extension of the Mexican Revolution into the Cárdenas era. It shows that the Mexican Revolution was still a work in the making during the 1930s and that the campesinos and Cárdenas were still building upon the objectives bequeathed to them by Villa, Zapata, and other revolutionaries who took a leadership role in the battles of the 1910s. Additionally, this study aims at establishing a base from which future studies that analyze Villa and Cárdenas can perhaps spring out from. Young scholars might perhaps find Cardenista agrarian reform in Villa's state as fertile ground from which we can better understand two of Mexico's most influential twentieth century figures. With that, we can

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<sup>132</sup> Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 816.

arrive at new ways of seeing the Mexican northern frontier's development during the turbulent twentieth century.



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