

**THE MAREÑOS:
Tradition and Transition
in
Huave Community Organization**

by

Charles Clark Cheney



**Vanderbilt University
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is twofold: to contribute to the general ethnographic record of the Huave people and, through the examination of their community organization, to lend understanding to the processes whereby formerly isolated Indian enclaves are transformed through increased interaction with contemporary Mexican national society.

The focus of this study is San Mateo del Mar, home of the Mareños.* Located in the Pacific coastal region of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, San Mateo is the largest (population 5,500) and most culturally conservative of four major Huave-speaking farming and fishing villages. Significantly, San Mateo presently manifests the most traditional version of Huave culture and currently functions under the greatest stress from both internal factionalism and exterior pressure for change.**

The need for ethnographic data on the Huaves results in part from the paucity of useful accounts that have been written to date. Fray Francisco de Burgoa's Geográfica Descripción, which was first published in 1674 and describes the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca in general, provides the oldest source of information on the Huaves in a discussion based in the main upon regional oral history. A few secondary sources--partially based upon Burgoa's work and

*This study is based upon field research conducted by the author during two periods of residency in San Mateo del Mar: the fall of 1967 and winter of 1967-68, and the winter of 1970-71 and spring of 1971. The second stage of fieldwork was supported by National Institute of Mental Health Training Grant No. 5T01 MH-12475.

**The word Matellano (from Mateo, Matthew) is recognized regionally as the proper designation for a person from San Mateo del Mar, whereas the term Mareño (from Mar, Sea) is in a broad sense applied to all Huave-speaking people because the names of their major communities all end in the phrase del Mar (of the Sea). However, for reasons that will be discussed in the following chapter, Mareño is most commonly used throughout the Isthmus as a specific term of reference for inhabitants of San Mateo. In accordance with local custom, it is in this latter, more restricted sense that the word Mareño is employed herein.

of questionable accuracy--are also available (León 1901, 1903; Basauri 1940; Cerda Silva 1941). Some helpful information may also be gleaned from the reports of ethnologists who have paid brief visits to Huave villages since the turn of the century (Starr 1900-02, 1908; Rohrsheim 1928; Monzón 1943; Covarrubias 1946; Cook and Leonard 1949).

Linguistically, aside from some inconclusive attempts to determine the relationship of Huave to the other languages of Mesoamerica (Radin 1916, 1918, 1924; Swadesh 1959, 1960; Longacre 1961), valuable work has been carried out by members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators; and although only one article (Warkentin and Olivares 1946) and a few Huave-Spanish childrens' primers and story books have thus far appeared, a Huave-Spanish dictionary, a Huave translation of the New Testament, and a collection of Huave legends are nearing publication. Also, excellent material may be found in the works of A. Richard Diebold, who, in addition to his specialized research into the relationship of linguistic change, i.e., increasing Huave-Spanish bilingualism, to social structural change in San Mateo del Mar (1961a, 1961b, 1966), has written a very useful descriptive article on the Huaves which appears in the Handbook of Middle American Indians (1969).

Furthermore, it is important that further ethnographic material on the Huaves be gathered at this time, not only because published information is insufficient, but also because the future may well hold little further opportunity to do so: in the light of recent history, it is probable that Huave culture will so continue to change as to eventually fade and meld into the general culture of the surrounding region.

The other purpose of this essay, the study of community organization in San Mateo del Mar, has been pursued in terms of both time-depth and contemporary processes: historically, within the memory of the Mareños; and currently through personal observation of the dynamics of change in process during the two periods of the writer's residence in the community. The changes affecting San Mateo del Mar today are, in a sense, unique; yet they may also have broader heuristic relevance, not only to other Huave-speaking villages, but also to all Mexican Indian communities attempting to cope with a rapidly changing world.

The Village of San Mateo del Mar

San Mateo is located one-third of the way out on a sandbar that runs from west to east and measures about 35 miles in length and averages one and one-half miles in width. The village lies about 26 miles southeast by dirt road from Tehuantepec, 21 miles due east along the coast from Salina Cruz, and 14 miles west of its sister Huave community of Santa María del Mar. The majority of the township's more than 5,000 inhabitants live within the

village proper, while the remainder reside in hamlets and homesteads scattered over the sandbar.

San Mateo proper is situated next to a long, narrow lagoon that separates it from the beach and the open sea, and on still nights the crashing of the ocean's waves may be clearly heard in the village. Most Mareño homes consist of clusters of palm-thatched huts, tiny gardens, and shade trees surrounded by high cane fences, which divide households from one another and from the town's thoroughfares of loose, heavy sand.

San Mateo retains two distinctive remainders of its former occupancy and administration by the Dominican Order: the typically Spanish colonial "chessboard" or "grid" plan of its layout formed by the rectilinear intersections of its wide, straight streets, and the imposing stone church that stands in the town's center. According to local church records, the construction of this edifice began in 1591 and terminated in the second decade of the following century, by which time all but its two belltowers had been completed (see map 3, page 6).

The overwhelming majority of San Mateo's men engage full-time in the subsistence activities of fishing, farming, and animal husbandry. However, because of the sandiness of the township's soil, Mareño farmers cannot produce enough staple starches, especially corn, to meet the needs of the people, and therefore agricultural foodstuffs as well as manufactured goods must be purchased from outsiders with cash earned through the sale of marine produce. Most of these transactions take place in San Mateo's small but busy marketplace.

Like many other Indian villages of southern Mexico, San Mateo is fairly representative of what has been termed a "closed, corporate peasant community" (Wolf 1957). As a closed society, San Mateo functions as an almost exclusively endogamous unit. There is little travel outside of the township, and few individuals have emigrated. New members are not welcomed into the community, and those that leave for extended periods are not easily reintegrated. All land is corporately owned by the town, and the right to its use is dependent upon birth in the town, usufruct, and fulfillment of communal obligations.

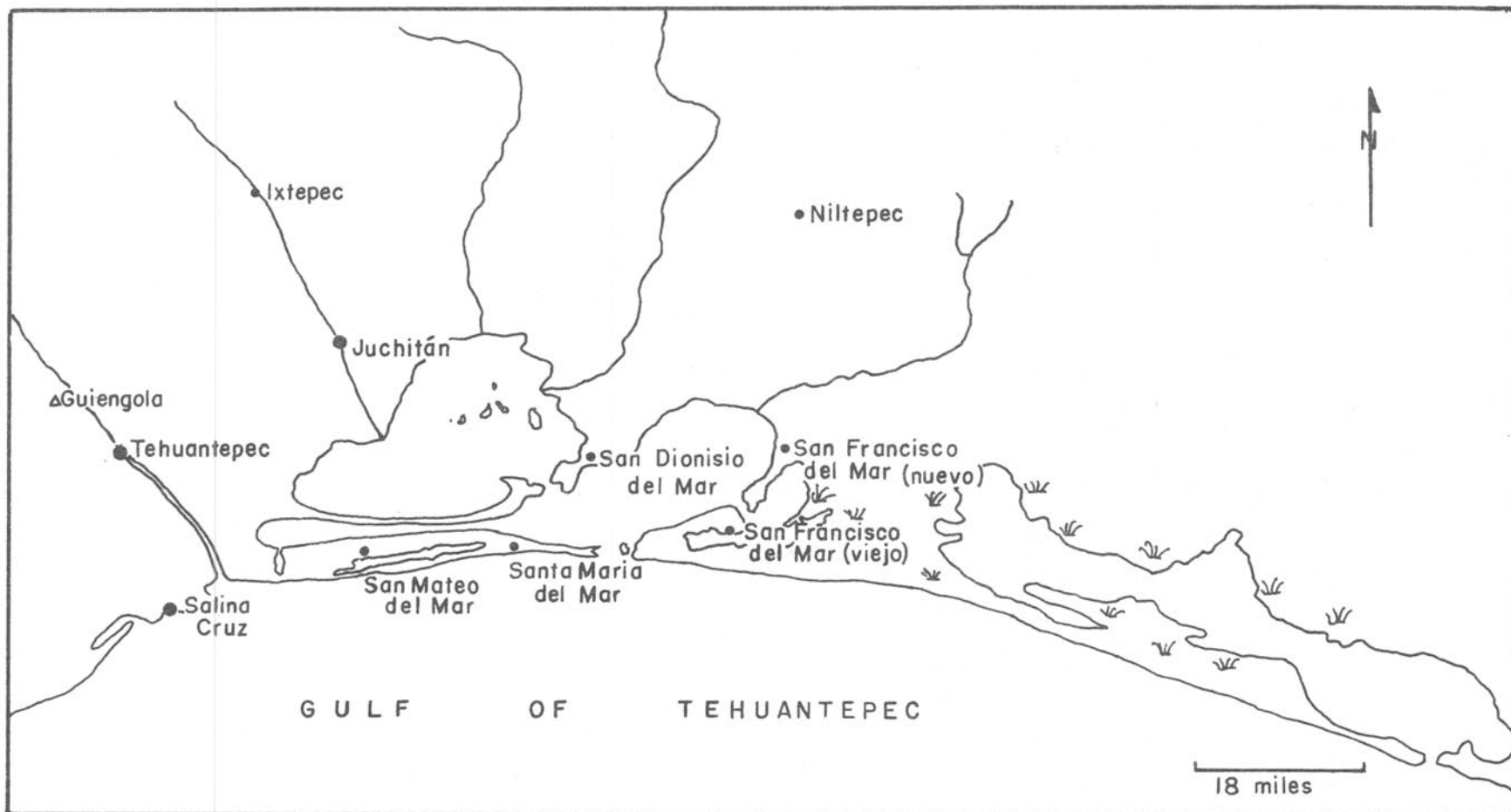
Mareño society functions within the framework of a complex, age-graded, civil-religious hierarchy of office-holding, in which all males are required to participate at the lower levels, and through which a few rise to the top. Group sanctions are strong, and social and economic leveling mechanisms involving ridicule, loss of status, and ceremonial obligations insure a high degree of conformity to social norms and cultural traditions. Fear of isolation and degradation within, or exile from, the community has proved sufficient to forestall most behavior so unconventional as to endanger social cohesion.

However, this picture is changing rapidly. Before proceeding to a closer examination of Mareño community organization and the

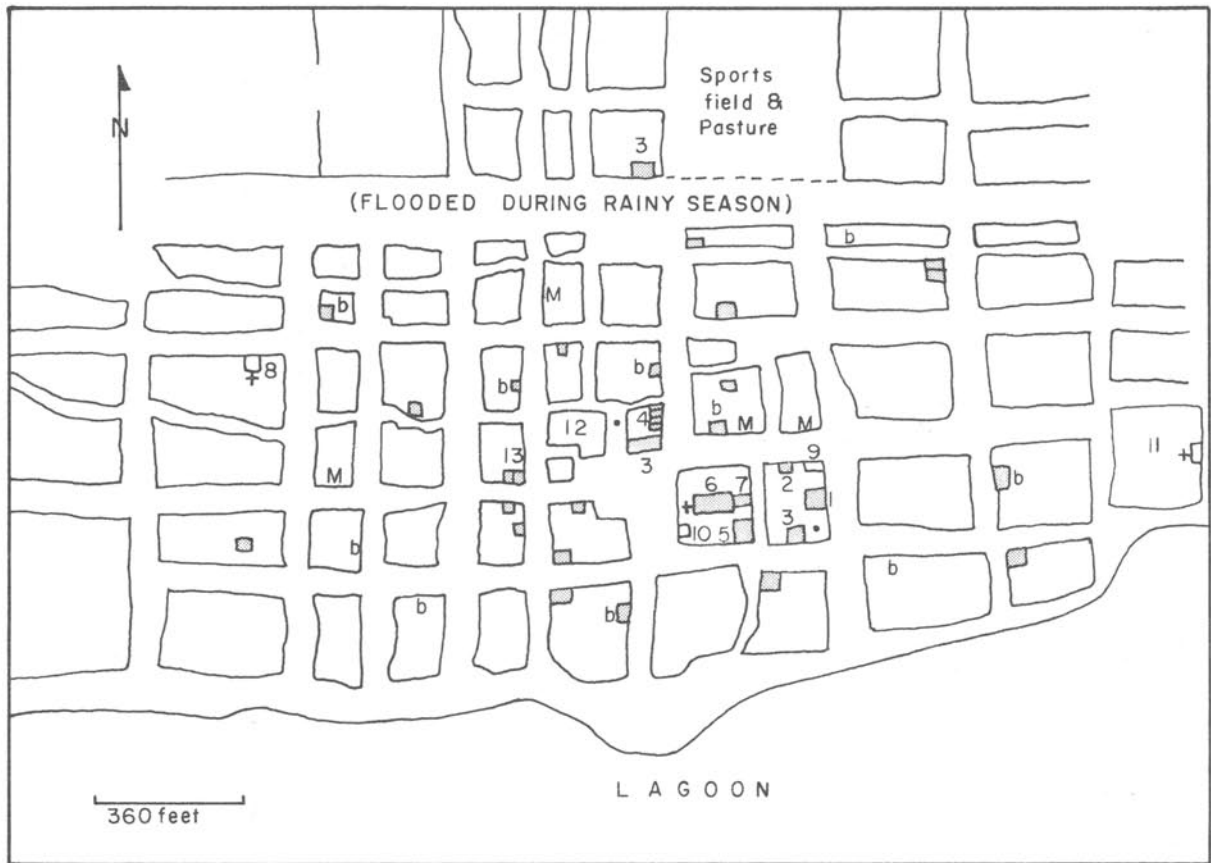
processes through which it is currently being transformed, a brief regional historical background will first be presented to lend perspective to the ensuing description of the San Mateo of today.



MAP 1: SOUTHERN MEXICO



MAP 2: THE ISTHMIAN REGION



KEY:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Town Hall | 10 Bell House |
| 2 Jail | 11 Graveyard |
| 3 School Buildings | 12 Market Place |
| 4 Teachers' Quarters | 13 Our House |
| 5 Clinic | ■ Brick or Cement Building |
| 6 Catholic Church | M Corn Mills |
| 7 Rectory | b Bars |
| 8 Baptist Church | • Town Wells |
| 9 Reliquary Chapel | |

MAP 3: SAN MATEO del MAR (Proper)

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEMPORARY CHANGE

The Historical Background

Fray Francisco de Burgoa's Geográfica Descripción, first published in 1674, provides the oldest extant source of information on the early history of the region. According to traditional verbal history, he wrote, the Huaves had arrived in the Isthmus about two hundred years prior to the Spanish Conquest of Mexico (1521-23). Huave legend held that their ancestors had originally come from very far south, perhaps South America, and had resided for a time in Central America before strife with the local inhabitants drove them to take again to their dugout canoes and search farther north for a home. After travelling northward for some months, always hugging the coast in their passage, they arrived off what is now Oaxaca's southern coast and put ashore. At that time this territory was in the nominal possession of the Mixe Indians, but because they apparently preferred the coolness and isolation of the mountains to the rich, hot flatland, they acquiesced in the Huaves' wish to settle there. Over the ensuing years, due to pressure created by the advance of Mixtec Indians against the Zapotec Indian communities of the Valley of Oaxaca, many Zapotecs moved down over the mountains to the Isthmian lowlands, where the ruling dynasty of the city-state of Zaachila established the city of Tehuantepec.

When the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma I and his armies passed through this region during his campaigns into the Guatemalan highlands in the latter part of the fifteenth century, the local Huave and Zapotec inhabitants submitted to his suzerainty without struggle. However, during the 1460s, the Mixtecs and Zapotecs temporarily resolved their long-standing feud and joined forces against the Aztecs. In the Isthmus, the Zapotecs massacred the Aztec garrison in Tehuantepec and engaged in very fierce fighting with the Huaves, who had remained vassals of the Aztecs. The attention of the Zapotecs and Mixtecs was then occupied by the advancing Aztec armies, which were eventually defeated in their prolonged and costly siege of the Zapotec mountain fortress of Guiengola in 1495. By this time the Huaves had retreated to the barren area around the two great lagoons southeast of Tehuantepec, where they established new communities and again took up the fishing economy of their seafaring antecedents. The Zapotecs refrained from pursuing them further, instead simply occupying the fertile lands abandoned by the fleeing Huaves (Burgoa 1934:338-41, 397-99).

Hence, since before the Spanish Conquest, the traditional homeland of the Huave-speaking Indians has existed as a cultural and geographical enclave, demarcated on the south by the Pacific Ocean, and on the west, north, and east by the lands of the Isthmus's Zapotec-speaking majority. Today, in spite of the current national trends toward ease of spatial mobility and increasing rural-urban migration, the overwhelming preponderance of the approximately 15,000 Huave people continues to reside in their major communities of San Dionisio del Mar, San Francisco del Mar, Santa María del Mar, and San Mateo del Mar, and in satellite hamlets distributed over the sandbars that frame the two large coastal lagoons southeast of Tehuantepec.

Archeologists have yet to adequately investigate, analyze, and compare with the materials of other regions the seeming abundance of artifacts, such as ceramic burial urns and shard mounds, which lie just beneath the surface of the sandbars. Also, in spite of a number of attempts to determine the Huave language's relationship to the others of Mesoamerica, linguists have failed to present a clear picture of how Huave fits into the linguistic framework of the New World. The older, generally accepted theory of Huave's putative close relationship to Mixe and Zoque (Radin 1916, 1918, 1924) has been recently rejected in favor of its tentative identification as part of the Macro-Mixtecan language family, partially on the basis of the similarity of vocabulary elements that it shares with Isthmus Zapotec (Swadesh 1959, 1960). Nevertheless, this latter argument has been seriously questioned on the grounds of geographic proximity and linguistic borrowing (Longacre 1961), and we are left with unconvincingly vague classifications of Huave which designate it as a "linguistic isolate" within the Macro-Mixtecan Family (Swadesh 1959) and even as a separate "trunk" of the larger Oto-Manguéan Group (Olivera de V. y Sanchez 1965).

Despite the lack of documentary evidence, it appears that since the Spanish Conquest the Huaves have shared a considerable similarity of experience with other relatively isolated Mexican Indians, particularly in regard to the major historical stages of the colonial era. Thus, during the first major period, members of the Dominican Order directly administered, resided in, and directed the construction of large stone churches in the major Huave communities of San Mateo del Mar, San Dionesio del Mar (now Pueblo Viejo, Old Town) and San Francisco del Mar (now San Francisco del Mar Viejo). This stage would typically have been characterized by a marked degree of culture contact and have witnessed the borrowing of a considerable cultural inventory--many elements of which persist to this day--including sixteenth-century Spanish vocabulary, ecclesiastical-civil organization and administration, religious beliefs and practices, and concepts governing health, medicine, and witchcraft.

During the second colonial period, dating from the secularization of the mission system in the 1720s until Independence, Mexican Indian communities as a rule underwent a process of reorganization and reintegration. For the most part left to

themselves by civil administrators and secular clergy, it was presumably during this time that the principal Huave towns, too, combined indigenous and European cultural elements into a crystallized, syncretic blend and assumed the type of closed, corporate structure which, to varying degrees, they retain today.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Huaves' history has been their relationship to the surrounding Zapotecs: politically, economically and culturally, the Zapotecs are dominant, the Huaves subordinate.

Politically, the Zapotecs have maintained the upper hand in this relationship since before the Spanish Conquest. They have enjoyed not only superiority of numbers and military power, but also the position of legal authority in the Isthmus: the Zapotec cities of Tehuantepec and Juchitán, as the capitals of the region's two Ex-Distritos, are the immediate administrative superiors of the major Huave communities. Since the Conquest the Huave territories have progressively shrunk under the pressure of expanding Zapotec farming communities, and disputes over land rights have tended to be settled in favor of Zapotecs, either by force of arms or by resolution in the district courts of Tehuantepec and Juchitán.

Economically, the Zapotecs are also in control. As a consequence of the loss of their valuable lands in the 1490s and steady Zapotec encroachments ever since, the Huaves have been forced into a situation wherein they are economically dependent on the surrounding Zapotecs for agricultural produce and for goods from the outside world. In trade they sell marine produce, but always to the Zapotecs, and the Huaves are at the disadvantage imposed by the perishability of their goods.

Culturally, the Zapotecs have strongly influenced the Huaves. What elements of Huave culture may long ago have become part of the basis of general Isthmus culture is not known, but recently history indicates that the flow of cultural diffusion has been overwhelmingly from Zapotec to Huave. In this century most of the Huave towns have been partially acculturated into national culture--but by Zapotecs (e.g., teachers, traders, administrators), who have conducted the process of culture change according to their own precepts and have presented the Huaves with innovations that are a blend of their own special traditions and those of the nation. Not only have the Zapotecs introduced such items as transistor radios, kerosene and gas lamps, flashlights, rifles, schools, baseball teams, and party politics, but also they have initiated the adoption of some of their own customs relating to food and drink, dress, courtship, marriage, mourning, fiestas, and social mores in general.

As is generally true of Indian Mexico, the Huaves identify themselves--and are identified--primarily in terms of their respective home communities (e.g., San Francisco del Mar: Francisqueño; Santa María del Mar: Mariano). The term Huave, while its exact etymology is not known, is believed by Zapotecs

and Huaves alike to have been an ancient Zapotec perjorative, and, unless talking with non-Istmeños, Huaves avoid its use in reference both to their language and to themselves. The word Mareño, which alludes both to the principal subsistence occupation and the place names of the Huave communities, is most commonly employed today in specific reference to the conservative Huave community which epitomizes to Istmeños the most stereotyped aspects of traditional Huave culture--San Mateo del Mar. The members of the major Huave towns speak mutually intelligible dialects of the same language, and they of course recognize the degree to which their common cultural traditions differentiate them from the other Isthmian peoples; but they share no sense of pan-linguistic or tribal unity vis-a-vis non-Huave-speaking people, and they are at least as divided amongst themselves as are their Zapotec neighbors.

In their relationship to the Zapotecs, the Huaves are on the defensive, and it appears that Huave culture owes its survival, not to its inherent adaptability, but rather to having been allowed to exist in relative isolation behind a Zapotec Buffer zone. However, this situation has changed greatly in recent years. The towns of San Dionisio, San Francisco, and Santa María have gone far along the road of acculturation into generalized Istmeño culture, many of their traditional customs have been abandoned, and many of their young school children speak no Huave at all. These communities are under the jurisdiction of Juchitán and have been integrated to a considerable degree into the economic and political life of that vigorous town. San Mateo, on the other hand, is the most culturally conservative of the Huave communities. For the most part left to itself by its administrative superior of Tehuantepec, San Mateo remains a closed, corporate community, retains its traditional civil-religious hierarchy, and--although boys have attended school since the early 1940s and girls since 1957--all of its people speak Huave, and many speak little (e.g., marketplace) or no Spanish.

Current Cultural Change in San Mateo del Mar

Although it remains the most traditional Huave community, San Mateo has in recent decades been subject to mounting internal and external pressures for change; and despite their wide variance in source and intensity, these forces today combine to profoundly affect Mareño culture and society. The impetus for contemporary change has six distinct sources.

1) In the last thirty years, San Mateo's population has grown at an extremely rapid rate for a combination of reasons: (1) the cessation of the widespread warfare that had afflicted the region during and after the Revolution; (2) the institution of an effective national anti-malarial campaign that has continued since the late 1940s; (3) and the provision of modern medicine and care through the efforts of missionaries since the early

1950s. This demographic trend, which has resulted in population pressure within the village proper and in the dispersal of population to small hamlets within the township, has increasingly impaired San Mateo's traditionally small-scale administrative organization's capacity to represent and to control all segments of the population.

2) Over the same period of time, but particularly since the early 1960s, San Mateo has experienced increasing contact with regional representatives of Mexican national society. Politically, this has meant closer supervision by Tehuantepec, and it has entailed the introduction of national precepts governing separation of church and state, private property, dispute settlement, law enforcement, election proceedings, and political parties. Economically, it has involved increased commercial contact with Zapotec merchants facilitated in recent years by the opening of a seasonal road that has permitted limited motor transportation. And, socioculturally, it has been effected by the opening of public schools, in which the Mareño children have been taught by Istmeño--usually Juchiteco--instructors, and by increased migration and interaction with the other peoples of the region.

3) Since the mid-1940s Zapotec merchants have been coming to San Mateo, of whom by 1971 about forty have taken up semi-permanent residence in the center of town, where they dominate the town market. The continued presence of this numerous, unassimilated, economically powerful group of representatives of the surrounding dominant society has seriously challenged the traditionally closed, homogeneous nature of Mareño society.

4) Since the early 1940s, American fundamentalist Protestant missionaries have resided for varying lengths of time in San Mateo. They now speak fluent Huave, have transcribed the language, have provided limited medical services, and have converted about one hundred adults to their faith. This development has posed problems for the converts and for the Mareños as a whole in terms of participation and representation in the community's monolithic civil-religious hierarchical structure.

5) Early in the 1960s an American Roman Catholic missionary arrived in town and assumed the role of parish priest. Over the ensuing years, in addition to swaying approximately one hundred people (e.g., the number who now regularly practice Confession) from their traditional syncretic religion to the modern, more orthodox version of Roman Catholicism, he made motor vehicle transportation possible by using a bulldozer to open a difficult section of the town road, constructed an apartment and clinic adjoining the church, and he has brought to town religious instructors, physicians, and nurses. In asserting his control over the church and religious matters, he has successfully challenged the authority and viability of the community's civil-religious hierarchy and traditional religious beliefs and practices.

6) In January of 1971, the National Government announced the "Huave Plan," a program intended to ameliorate the living conditions of the Huaves through economic development of their region. Numerous federal and local officials, members of research teams, and even journalists have already visited San Mateo. To date, this program has included the piping of potable water and the building of gravel-surfaced roads to San Mateo, Santa María, and San Francisco; and its long range plans entail the improvement of health conditions through better diet and sanitary systems, the provision of large fishing launches, and the eventual construction of hard-surfaced roads, pre-fabricated homes, freezing plants for marine produce, and, perhaps eventually, resort hotels. For the people of San Mateo del Mar, the ramifications of these proposed changes are, of course, tremendous.

These forces of change have significantly influenced San Mateo in recent years, and they will doubtless continue to transform it in the near future. In the following chapter, they will be discussed in the context of their affect on various aspects of Mareño community organization.

CHAPTER III

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

San Mateo's dominant organizational feature is its monolithic civil-religious hierarchy, a graded system of office-holding in which all adult males are obliged to participate at the lower levels, and through which a few eventually rise to the top. Following a delineation of the overall hierarchical structure and of the specific functions of each office, this chapter shall deal with the processes of selection and advancement within the system, as well as with conflicting older and newly introduced patterns of political behavior, social control, and conflict resolution.

Of special significance is the traditional system's response to challenges posed by current forces for change: the attempt of its functionaries to maintain the organization's viability by on one hand asserting the ideal of its general structural integrity while on the other so gradually modifying its internal operation as to better cope with the reality of irrevocably altered and progressively changing circumstances.

Community Organization: Structure

San Mateo's civil-religious hierarchy is composed of two substructures, or "ladders," of office-holding: one civil, the other ecclesiastical. Few definitive distinctions are drawn between matters civil and religious, however, and although the duties of church officials are limited to ecclesiastical affairs, many political posts combine secular and sacred functions. Moreover, advancement up the civil ladder entails the fulfillment of religious as well as civil obligations, and the positions at the uppermost level of community organization, which are recognized as equally civil and ecclesiastic, may be reached by proceeding up either ladder (see Figure 1 on the following page).

The major differences between the two subsystems consist in number of personnel and degree of community participation. In the municipal organization, all Mareños are required to take part, the town's three central sections are supposed to be equally represented, and, prior to attaining high office, men are expected to first serve as mayordomos for a prescribed series of major religious celebrations. In contrast, those holding church offices comprise a small group of men selected in their youth without

FIGURE 1:
THE CIVIL-RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Level 7

1st Alcalde
2nd Alcalde

Level 6

<u>Municipal Ladder*</u>	<u>Ecclesiastical Ladder</u>
Presidente	Maestro de Capilla

Level 5

1st Mayor de Topiles
2nd Mayor de Topiles
Juez de Mandado

Level 4

	Vice-Presidente	Fiscal
Jefes de Sección (3)	1st Substitute Alcalde 2nd Substitute Alcalde	

Status of Principal

Level 3

	Síndico	Sacristanes (2)
	Regidores (6)	
	Tesoreo (Secretario)	
	Escribano	

Level 2

1st Comandante
2nd Comandante
Tenientes (24)

Level 1

	Topiles (12)	Topiles de
Topiles de Sección (9)	Pregoneros (6)	Iglesia (2)

*Traditionally, the fulfillment of a series of mayordomías has been required for progress beyond level 2.

regard to sectional balance; they are exempt from municipal duties, and their progress up the ecclesiastical ladder is not contingent upon fulfillment of mayordomías. Starting at the base of each ladder, we shall now deal in turn with first the civil, then the ecclesiastic, hierarchy of offices.

The municipal ladder is composed of seven steps, or levels, most of which include two or more ranked positions in which serve varying numbers of functionaries. Depending upon how many men are needed for a given office, sectional representation is either equal or rotates each term; that is, for the numerous offices in the lower levels, each of the sections elects the same number of men, whereas for the individually-held positions at the upper steps, the three sections take turns in selecting officials from their memberships. Civil posts are held for terms of either one or three years, an individual never occupies the same position for more than one term, and he need serve in one post at each level only once to qualify for advancement to the next higher step. The hierarchy's seven-tiered structure represents a pyramid that is broad at its base and narrows sharply about halfway up: of its 62 officials, 44 hold posts in the lowest two strata, 53 in the lowest three.

The first, or lowest, level contains the offices of pregonero (town crier) and topil (daytime policeman). The six pregoneros are elected each year and occupy the lowest political rank. Typically, as they make their predawn rounds to the music of flute and drum, they spread word of the coming day's municipal assembly or religious activity, announce the names of those just selected or about to assume offices or mayordomías, or notify individuals of their required participation in a forthcoming communal endeavor. Next in rank are the 12 annually elected topiles, who are grouped into two six-man squads that alternate their week-long shifts each Sunday. In maintaining order and apprehending offenders, a topil often employs a macana, a stout, foot-long piece of wood that can be used either as a club or, when its attached length of rope is lashed around a recalcitrant prisoner's wrists, as a short leash with which to drag him along to jail.

The second level has two categories of office, both of which are held for one year terms: teniente (nighttime policeman) and comandante (commander). The 24 tenientes are divided into two 12-man platoons that, under the supervision of the first and second comandantes, take weekly turns in performing duties equivalent to those of their diurnal counterparts.

The lowest rank in level three is held by the escribano (scribe), who for the duration of his year's term maintains a check-list of adult males subject to communal labor. The other offices at this level are held for three-year periods and, in ascending order, include: the tesoreo (treasurer), whose major function is the taxation of merchants in the marketplace; the regidores (aldermen), who form a six-man advisory council for the high officials; and the síndico (syndic), who serves as the

municipal executive officer and specializes in the investigation and settlement of disputes. Once having served at level three, a man attains the status of principal, and thenceforth, even if he does not proceed to higher office, his presence is welcome and his words have weight in major community meetings. Also, from this point on, offices entail more religious functions, and the fulfillment of mayordomías becomes an increasingly important prerequisite for further advancement up the hierarchical ladder.

Level four contains three suplentes (substitutes), each of whose term is equal to that of the high official he understudies: two hold one-year posts as suplentes of the junior and senior alcaldes (mayors), and the other serves for three years as vice-presidente municipal. These substitutive positions are mainly honorary and preparatory, and although the suplentes take part in civil councils, their principal function is to familiarize themselves with their potential future roles. Moreover, while they may assume the responsibilities of their senior counterparts temporarily, new elections will be held should the high officials vacate their posts permanently.

Level five contains the three one-year offices of juez de mandado (literally, judge of mandate, or errand) and the first and second mayores de topiles (police chiefs). The juez is in charge of the six pregoneros and responsible for spreading word of important community events, and his duties also include the selection of individuals for minor roles in religious ceremonies. Slightly above him rank the two mayores, who, while supervising the alternating weekly shifts of topiles, also take turns serving as alguaciles, keepers of the jailhouse keys. In addition to their peace-keeping functions, the mayores also oversee message service and choose couriers from the list of males subject to communal labor. Furthermore, they select participants for some church activities and name individuals to some mayordomía cargos.

Level six has only one office: presidente municipal. Elected triannually, the presidente ranks near the top of the civil-religious hierarchy and is recognized by the Federal Government as the town's highest authority, and as such he serves as mediator between the community and higher political authorities. Among his duties is the selection of the secretario municipal, a position that lies outside of the ladder system, requires literacy in Spanish, and represents the only office whose occupant is paid a salary out of municipal funds. The presidente must also fulfill certain religious functions, the most important of which entails a series of springtime vigils of prayer for abundant rainfall, crops, and marine life.

Level seven is composed of the first and second alcaldes, the highest posts in the civil-religious hierarchy. These two annually elected officials, together with the presidente, form a triumvirate that decides major community issues, with him they make ritual spring prayers for rain, and like him they carry silver-topped canes of office. They also oversee the proper functioning of the ecclesiastic officials and the care of church

property. Thus, at the topmost stratum they unite state and church and coordinate the smooth interaction of the sub-systems of community organization.

The ecclesiastical ladder system includes four levels, each of which consists of one office held for a maximum of three nonconsecutive year-long terms. Level one contains the two topiles de iglesia (church policemen), who may be distinguished from their municipal counterparts by their long, black (as against short, brown) canes of office; they protect the church's interior against possible vandalism. Level two has two sacristances, who take care of ritual paraphernalia, assist at mass, and pray for the deceased during wakes, funeral processions, and interment ceremonies. Level three consists of the office of fiscal (literally, attorney general), who aids and understudies his superior at level six, the maestro de capilla (chapel master). The Maestro's ecclesiastic rank is analagous to that of the municipal presidente, and as such he is the head of church affairs and performs his duties under the supervision of the alcaldes, to whose level he, like the presidente, can eventually rise. His functions include: the giving of the sacraments of baptism and extreme unction in the absence of a priest, the guardianship of sacred objects, the keeping of almanacs of saints' days and other religious occasions, and the selection and instruction of lower church officials and acolytes, the latter of whom usually number about five or six, and who in early adolescence commence their service as altar boys and in their early twenties begin to ascend the ladder of ecclesiastic offices.

San Mateo is today composed of five subdivisions: three central sections and the outlying hamlets of Huazantlán del Río and Colonia Cuauhtemoc.* These two hamlets enjoy the political status of congregaciones, or agencias, and as such they constitute semi-autonomous entities under the authority of the municipal government. Their officials (agents, vice-agents, police) are elected from their own memberships, although the

*Prior to the early 1960s, the population was roughly divided into what had traditionally represented four balanced administrative units within the cabecera; regardless of one's actual place of residence in the township, he and his family belonged to one of the four central sections in terms of civil-religious representation and obligation. The viability of this system was demonstrated during the years of the Revolution and those of religious fighting, banditry, and prevailing civil disorder which followed, for the Mareños of the outlying area were able to secure relative safety by gathering into the cabecera. After a tentative beginning in the early 1940s, and in mounting numbers since, however, the Mareños have been moving out of the confines of San Mateo proper. In order to adjust to this development, the sectional system has been changed to more closely reflect this shift in residence pattern and to satisfy the demands of satellite hamlets for legal recognition and representation.

town presidente has the right to appoint functionaries and assume direct control whenever these municipal subdivisions either fail to exercise effective self-rule or attempt to assert too much independence.

Each of the town's three central sections is headed by a jefe (chief, leader) principal. In order to qualify for this year-long post, a man must have risen through the first three levels of the municipal hierarchy, and this is the only civil office in which an incumbent may succeed himself. Each jefe has three annually elected topiles under his command, with whom he meets on Sundays and then sends out to patrol their respective sections, where they check on household numberings and occupancy statuses, and, if necessary, order residents to clear away any debris that may lie in the streets in front of their homes. In addition to gathering and recording census data, the three jefes preside together over the annual nominating sessions in which the coming year's civil functionaries are selected.

Apart from the offices of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, a number of other options are available to those who wish to participate formally in religious activities, including the bearing of year-long mayordomía cargos and long-term membership in ceremonial cofradías (confraternities, or brotherhoods). Most mayordomía cargos entail the stewardship of a saint or other sacred entity and center around a special religious event. For one year prior to the annual celebration of a saint's day, the mayordomo goes regularly to the church to visit the saint's image, in front of which he lights candles, places flowers, sees to the good condition of the saint's vestments and of the image itself, and prayerfully inquires as to whether the saint is satisfied with his demonstration of piety and performance of ritual duties.

During the year the mayordomo saves money for the celebration he will sponsor on the saint's day, and throughout this period he fulfills the ritual requirements of his cargo and prepares for the culminating event under the tutelage of a miteatpooch (father of the word), one of a half-dozen elderly men who, through long years of apprenticeship and experience as cargoholders, have become well versed in ceremonial lore. These individuals are highly respected in the community, receive small monetary rewards for their services, and are welcome guests at all saint's day festivities. The mayordomías are divided into two categories of importance: those of the lower level include both primary sponsorship of minor cargos--such as San Isidro, Santa Cruz, and Asunción de la Virgen--and secondary assistanceship of major ones; while those on the higher level entail the principal stewardship of the town's three chief ceremonial cargos: San Mateo, Virgen de la Candelaria, and Corpus Cristi. The annual, day-long celebrations of the minor mayordomías entail the paying of the costs of mass as well as those of entertaining other cargo-holders at the mayordomo's home with food, drink, and music, whereas those of the three major mayordomías involve three days of masses and fireworks and major fiestas for the entire town. In his cargo career, an individual normally first

undertakes at least two minor mayordomías before attempting to assume the greater responsibility of a major one, which will cost him a great deal of effort and money--and will earn him considerable prestige.

Another type of mayordomía, one which blends secular and sacred functions, is that of the Mardom Awan (Mayordomo de Municipio, of the town hall). To qualify for this cargo, an individual must first have achieved the status of principal, and throughout the year-long course of the mayordomía, three sectional representatives take weekly turns in fulfilling the cargo's requirements. Each cargo-holder is responsible for the cleanliness of the town hall (and has the right to commandeer labor to maintain it), for the protection of such sacred objects as the silver-headed canes of high office and the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe within the town hall and for others in the nearby reliquary chapel, and for the caretaking and veneration of the large cross which stands outside, in front of which he daily places fresh flowers and, like the high-ranking civil authorities, bows his head in prayer at dawn and dusk.

Other cargos include the duties of caporal and pastor. Each of the two caporales has 12 boy assistants that aid him in caring for one of the two herds of cattle, horses, and burros that belong to Mñm Candelar and Mñm Soledad (Mother Candelaria and Mother Soledad). Each of the two pastores is solely responsible for one of the two flocks of sheep and goats that belong to two large crosses located on the outskirts of town. These herds and flocks are the communal property of the town, and individual animals are sold when money is needed to pay for repairs to church property and for new vestments for the images. In December a number are slaughtered for a fiesta in which the civil officials take part, and at this time the retiring cargo-holders are allowed to take a few animals as their own.

Most of the town's cofradías are organized around the veneration of crosses in the tiny chapels that stand at many street intersections. About 15 of these voluntary associations are in evidence today, each of which has a membership of about ten men who rotate the duty of leadership among themselves. Although each chapel's cofradía is composed in the main of inhabitants of nearby households, these groups do not in themselves represent rival sectional organizations, and their memberships cut across sectional boundaries.

The most important cofradía is that of the Apostoles, a group of elderly men who oversee the ceremonial activities of Easter Week. At any given time, this group contains as many as, but never more than, 12 individuals, and the often smaller size of its membership is explained on the one hand by the time and effort required to achieve a cargo career prestigious enough for qualification and on the other by the high mortality rate of its necessarily aged constituents.

Other cofradías include the Capitanes, Malinches, and Modanzas, male groups which perform on major ceremonial occasions. The first of these provides exhibitions of horseback riding and ritual exchange, and the latter two perform dances. These organizations, each of which usually contains about a dozen members, constantly recruit youths into their ranks, and at least once a year an older, middle-aged man marks his retirement with a small fiesta to which are invited his fellow cofradía members.

Community Organization: Process

San Mateo's civil-religious cargo system functions on three governing principles: all sections should be equally represented; all young men must participate at its lower levels; and a few older men may participate at its upper levels. The importance of formal equal representation is illustrated by the tradition that all three sections nominate men for higher posts although that position can only be filled by the nominee of the section whose turn it is to place its man in office. The hierarchy is also age-graded. Men are nominated to lower offices when in their early twenties, and if they proceed in correct fashion up the steps of the ladder, passing alternating civil and religious cargoes, they cannot reach the third level until their thirties, the sixth level until their fifties, the final step of alcalde until their sixties.

Although a man must advance in precise order to level three, once he has attained the status of principal the rules for his further climb become more flexible, and he can thereafter assume offices out of regular order, can bypass levels altogether, and can take such options as membership in the Apostoles as a step up the ladder. It is possible for a man to proceed very rapidly and jump ahead of the regular order by working hard for a nomination to a high post. But having served in that capacity does not in itself make him eligible to succeed to a still higher position, and he may later be humiliated for his display of ambition by being nominated to a very low office he has skipped and compelled to begin his climb anew--although he will never again hold a post at a level he has already occupied. The man is most respected who appears to neither seek nor avoid cargos, who humbly accepts the nominations of his peers and through the years steadily ascends the ladder, gradually acquiring a position of prestige through the fulfillment of a cargo career that attests to both his piety and community-mindedness.

While service in the two lowest strata is required of all men, and refusal to take part is punishable by brief imprisonment and small fine, social sanction operates as the principal impetus for participation at all levels. Traditionally, no viable alternatives exist for achieving prestige. And a man who refuses to accept a civil or religious cargo is not nominated again and finds that his opinion on community affairs is no longer

asked, his participation no longer requested; he is made to feel unwelcome even in informal drinking sessions, where he is isolated and ignored. Moreover, he may well discover that his usufruct land rights have suddenly come into question and that any civil litigation in which he might become involved will tend to be resolved in favor of his opponent by the municipal authorities. For a man who from early adulthood has eschewed cargos and resided with his family on a ranch outside of town, these sanctions exert little force; but for an individual who has once held high public office and is later nominated to a low post, the situation is problematic: he has already revealed his political aspirations, and he knows that to eventually regain and surpass his former status he must accept the job, serve with a junior age group, and suffer a consequent loss of face and the townspeople's enjoyment of his discomfiture.

Civil officials are selected by voice vote in annual assemblies of the town's adult male population, and anyone except his close relatives or compadres may place a man's name in nomination. Also, at least above the two lowest levels, two members of a immediate family may not serve during the same term. The formal consensus demonstrated in these meetings is made possible by the prior arrangements of sectional and municipal leaders, who beforehand engage in much behind-the-scene maneuvering and join in compromise decisions on candidates for important positions. Hence, nomination is usually tantamount to election. The process for removing men from office is similar: although low-ranking ones are simply dismissed by agreement of their seniors, principales are either persuaded to relinquish their posts through the quiet counsel of their peers or, if they refuse, are compelled to do so by a voice vote of no confidence held at a special town meeting.

Elections for the mayores, topiles, juez, and pregoneros are held on November 1, and those for the other civil officials, formerly held on December 1, now take place on July 5 in conformance with national law. Those officials recognized by federal authorities--the presidente, vice presidente, regidores, síndico, tesorero, commandantes--assume their duties on January 1, when they go to Tehuantepec to be invested in office by the District authorities. Immediately after their own elections, the mayores either consider the requests of volunteers or appoint individuals to the cargos of mardom awan, caporal, and pastor. Similarly, after consultation with the other principales, the mayores name men to the mayordomías of saints at the close of each saint's day ceremony.

In the elections of 1963, the community was divided between two candidates for the town presidency, one of whom represented the traditional system, the other of whom had secured the backing of State authorities. Despite the intervention of troops on the latter's behalf, the former won the election. Since that time San Mateo's municipal administration has been more closely supervised by its superiors, and major civil and criminal cases formerly handled locally are increasingly taken to Tehuantepec for resolution.

However, most cases are still dealt with at the municipal level, the major exception being homicide: whereas suspects were formerly tried by San Mateo's senior officials and if judged guilty were hanged from a specially designated tree at the town's western edge, suspected murderers are now taken to Tehuantepec. Aside from crimes of passion, most homicides are perpetrated under cover of night by small groups of men that waylay solitary victims that are often drunken, old, or otherwise enfeebled, who are bludgeoned or strangled and then immersed in nearby bodies of water to give the impression of accidental drowning. These murders, which occur about once every two months, are apparently committed for robbery, revenge, or both, by secret groups of young men who take these actions at least partially in connection with ongoing interfamilial feuds. These clandestine murders are seldom solved, and, unless the victim's relatives are adamant, the municipal authorities pursue only cursory investigations, for they, like the other townspeople, are loath to become involved in someone else's vendetta.

The town's police are called upon to catch thieves, to disengage and subdue brawlers, and to conduct obstreperous drunks to jail. Other nuisances in town include sheep, goats, and pigs that break down fences and invade gardens. These, together with bothersome drunks and petty thieves, are incarcerated in the small, two-celled jailhouse. The cost of bail for both man and beast, 15 pesos apiece for the first day, is usually promptly paid by their relatives or owners, for each subsequent day in jail brings an increase of another \$15 fine. The money thus gathered constitutes an important contribution to the municipal coffers, for which it and the taxes collected from the marketplace merchants comprise the two major sources of revenue.

A curfew is in effect between eight in the evening and four in the morning, and unless an individual can represent his presence abroad as a legitimate activity such as going fishing, he is subject to arrest. Although the cantinas are supposed to be closed during these hours, violations of this restriction are frequent, and practically all adult males, including most of the present municipal officials, have at one time or another been jailed for drinking after hours. When first in office, policemen tend to be zealous in the pursuit of their duties, and during the first two months of the year the jailhouse is therefore often full of minor offenders; but in time most law officers gradually relax their vigilance, exercise greater constraint, and become amenable to bribery.

The police help round up the young men for communal labor whose turn is indicated on the escribano's list. Formerly, a youth who refused to participate was first borne overhead by the policemen to the church to apologize to the images of San Mateo and the Virgen de la Candelaria. If the offender remained recalcitrant, he was next taken to the home of the juez, who applied torture with a wooden vise to the calf of the individual's leg. Short of having his leg broken the youth usually gave in, admitted the error of his conduct, and then hobbled or crawled to

the church altar to contritely ask forgiveness and promise to not repeat his anti-social and irreligious behavior. This form of corporal punishment was discontinued in the mid-1950s in conformity with national law and in tacit recognition of its diminishing effectiveness as a negative sanction. Apparently that period saw the emergence of today's pattern, wherein, when the call goes out for workers, the young men hide and have their whereabouts concealed by their families, or once the work parties have begun their labor, their membership often melts away as soon as the attention of the watching officials is directed elsewhere. Although now this institution is only occasionally and half-heartedly employed for house construction, it is still used efficaciously for the annual task of widening and clearing underbrush from the town road.

In accordance with national law, municipal officials require the weekly attendance of eighteen-year-old boys (conscriptos) at the weekly drill meetings held each Sunday morning in a clearing at the west end of town. Under the supervision of an individual with some experience in the national army, the boys march about in formation and drill with either their own .22 caliber rifles or with pieces of wood carved to roughly resemble military firearms. A boy's failure to attend a drill session is punishable by incarceration and a 15 peso fine.

The alcaldes and presidente sit in judgement and the síndico serves as district attorney for cases involving minor crimes and civil litigation. The former include such acts as theft, rape, assault, and vandalism, and the latter usually involve property disputes (over land, animals, or inheritance), adultery, and desertion. When charges are brought, the accused is often jailed immediately, and his family then solicit the aid of a defensor, a community elder whose knowledge of traditional custom and contemporary law, combined with his ability as a public speaker, equips him to argue his client's case in front of the town council. The defendant's counsel receives food or money for his efforts, while the accused, if found guilty, is required to pay a fine in cash or in service by doing manual labor for the civil authorities or by helping to beautify the cemetery and the church under the direction of the ecclesiastic officials.

When possible, it is considered best to settle out of court, for in this way the individuals concerned are not exposed to notoriety and possible disgrace, the offending party pays less, and the injured party rather than the municipal authorities benefits from monetary compensation. The process of airing private, sometimes intrafamilial, scandals in public is considered painfully degrading, not only for the litigants, but also for the high officials who must hear the cases. Moreover, their decisions are often harsh, and the traditional phrase "if you do not wish to settle this matter here, let us go do it in front of their batons" is employed by one man to another as a threat that, if his conditions are not met, he will take his grievances to the strict authorities who sit behind the judgement table on which lie the silver-topped canes of office. It is particularly advisable to resolve property

conflicts at a lower level, for if, despite the intercession of the *síndico*, the litigants remain deadlocked, then the matter will be settled by the court. If the contestants cannot reach agreement on the equitable division of the property, then it will be lost to all private parties concerned: land will revert to the township, and other items will be sold, their proceeds deposited in the municipal fund. Although the municipal council was in effect once the court of highest appeal, some of its decisions are now contested by *Mareños* in the Tehuantepec district court--particularly in regard to land disputes. Communal and private land rights now uneasily coexist in San Mateo, and an individual who has gone to the effort of securing a land title in Tehuantepec will hardly be inclined to relinquish his claim solely upon the basis of a municipal ruling--especially if he has built a brick house upon the property in question.

Traditionally, litigation could take place only between peers. That is, in spite of the age or sex of the individuals actually involved, only adult men could place charges and receive punishment for an offense, or participate in civil actions. Women and unmarried boys were legally represented by husbands, fathers, and brothers, and it is apparently only within recent years that they have themselves initiated legal proceedings and suffered incarceration and fines. However, in spite of the acknowledged technical legality of the new trend, the traditional system is still preferred, and the unassisted woman or boy engaged in legal difficulties against an adult male will often find the municipal authorities prejudiced on their opponent's behalf. Moreover, in spite of the increasing recognition of youths' responsibility for their own actions, should a young man flee town to escape punishment for a crime, his father or older brother can still be jailed and fined in his stead.

Community Organization: Culture Change

Although the overall structural features of San Mateo's community organization have probably changed little since colonial times, its internal operation has been gradually modified over the years. The traditional institutions have been increasingly challenged in the last three decades, and today the town's principles are simultaneously attempting to preserve the old forms while striving to adjust to the quickening pace of change.

Ideally, San Mateo's community organization functions as a democratic and egalitarian system, for during their lifetime all men can theroretically participate in and pass through at least a few municipal ranks, and power and wealth are regularly re-distributed--or at least diffused--and supposedly not allowed to accrue to any one segment of the population for any appreciable length of time. Although this may formerly have been the case when San Mateo was a smaller, more closely-knit community, it does not hold true today.

For instance, the municipal ladder system simply has too few positions and too many steps to permit many men to successfully climb to the top during their cargo careers. When the offices of presidente, vice-presidente, tesorero, and síndico were added in the 1920s, the older posts were retained, and with the further inclusion of the ranks of comandante and teniente in the early 1960s, the number of levels increased from a probable original five to the current seven. While the hierarchy's base was broadened by the last addition, its sides become steeper as a result of the change from the cuartal sectional system to the present one, for when the settlements of Huazantlán and later Colonia Cuautemoc shifted to the status of congregación, the former positions of section four's representatives were abolished. While there is now more opportunity for the members of the remaining three central sections to take part, one-fourth of the township's men are now excluded and instead hold office in their own hamlets.* Furthermore, after the town's 1963 election dispute led to increased outside supervision, the terms of the federally recognized municipal offices were changed from one to three years, thus creating temporal bottlenecks in the advancement process below traditional one-year term posts and requiring that individuals skip levels in order to keep all positions filled. Also, although one's progress up the ladder is supposed to lead him to increasingly more prestigious positions, in fact the relative powers of the offices bear little relation to their hierarchical level, for all of the federally recognized posts are increasing in importance as the others decline. Hence, although the municipal officials have managed to preserve much of the old structure while including modifications demanded by demographic change and by government authorities, the present system no longer permits total participation and equal representation in the lower tiers; and its hierarchical arrangement of offices reflects a decreasingly less accurate picture of the relationship of power to rank.

At the sectional level, attempts to preserve the balance of the town's old structural cuartel subdivisions failed when Huazantlán was granted semi-autonomy by District officials. But the rotation among the three central sections of the right to elect high officials still manages to keep political power from being dominated by any one of them and balances the in-

*However, the situation is still in flux, and the recent adjustments have not clarified matters: at least twenty percent of the population maintains residence both in one of the three central sections and on small farms (ranchos) outside of town, many of which, through proximity, are registered as belonging to one of the new outlying administrative subdivisions; and members of extended families move back and forth constantly between town and farm. Moreover, some who no longer reside for even part of the year in their houseplots in the cabecera claim residence there in order to maintain their eligibility for political office as members of one of the three central sections.

fluent sectional jefes against one another. However, it appears that the system was not prepared for the eventuality that there might emerge other long-term loci of power not based upon territorial subdivisions. Today, two rival groups, the Municipal Committee and the Municipal League of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Mexico's ruling political party), are both working behind the scenes to manipulate Mareño politics. Both are recognized by District and State authorities, both are composed of individuals somewhat sophisticated in the ways of the outside world and marginal to traditional Mareño institutions, and their memberships include some of the community's wealthier citizens. As of 1971 the two associations were approximately equal in strength, and rather than produce a repetition of the election crisis they precipitated in 1963, their leaders now maintain the semblance of traditional Mareño consensus politics. For example, all recently elected town presidentes represent compromise candidates upon whom the two factions' leaders have tacitly agreed. Thus, the present balance of power is not so much attributable to the system's preservation of the equilibrium of territorial units as it is the result of the precarious balance maintained by two private interest groups. Moreover, the rivalry between the sections themselves has diminished in recent years. Formerly, although this rivalry was never formally recognized, strife took place at the level of drunken brawls during fiestas. Today, tension has been reduced, and the only overt conflict is carried on by adolescents. However, as a result of the dispersion of the population outward from San Mateo proper and the new status of semi-autonomy gained by the outlying settlements, a rural-urban territorial dichotomy has developed, and today most vendetta-like violence is carried on by gangs of youths, not on the basis of sectional membership, but rather on urban versus rural territorial loyalty.

San Mateo's traditional community organization should also ideally maintain balance and equality by preventing wealth as well as power to accumulate in one segment of the population, for participation in the civil-religious cargo system is so expensive as to serve as an economic leveling mechanism. The successful operation of this principal is predicated upon the assumption that all will want to participate because no alternate means exist of achieving social prestige and no alternate choices exist for the expenditure of capital. But the failure of some to take part limits the efficacy of the cargo system for maintaining economic equality.

Participation does indeed prevent the accumulation of capital, and today's relatively wealthy men and those with distinguished cargo careers constitute mutually exclusive groups. Outside of the traditional system, men can now participate and gain prestige in the Protestant sects, in the two political leagues, and in the two school committees, and opportunities for capital investment now include corn mills, cantinas, stores, brick houses, and even land itself. Moreover, the municipal offices in themselves entail no economic sacrifice, and because of the decline of the institution of mayordomía, the highly expensive aspect of participation has gradually diminished.

In recognition of this trend, and in an effort to maintain the interconnections of the civil and religious aspects of service, the principales have been steadily adjusting downward the mayordomo requirements while asserting that some religious criteria be kept; but they have been fighting a losing battle, and according to their own estimates, they have failed to make the requirements hold. For example, the number of mayordomías required between the preparation for the offices at the third level and advancement to the sixth level (presidente) has been steadily reduced through time according to these rough temporal periods: up until 1930, four minor mayordomías or assistantships and three major ones; from 1930 to 1950, two minor mayordomías or assistantships and three major ones; from 1950 to 1960, two minor mayordomías or assistantships and one major one; and in the early 1960s, the principales judged that only one mayordomía be required for the office of presidente. Apparently, each downward adjustment of requirements has always been reluctantly made after the fact, and by the late 1960s even the newest reduction became obsolete, for the man elected as presidente in 1968 did not meet even the newest minimal mayordomía prerequisite.

Another major principle of San Mateo's traditional social organization that has been challenged in recent years is the monolithic unity of its civil and religious institutions. The increasing separation of church and state has been effected on the municipal side by the secularization of political offices through both the increased influence of outside governmental authorities and the participation of Protestants, and on the ecclesiastical side by the actions of the American Catholic priest.

When the Protestants first formed an organization under the guidance of American missionaries in the late 1940s and early 1950s, they refused to participate in community activities involving the traditional syncretic version of Catholicism. The situation was apparently exacerbated by their newly adopted holier-than-thou attitude and by their childrens' behavior, which included throwing rocks at "idols" (chapel crosses) and informing their peers that adherents to the old religion were "pagans," not "true Christians." According to all accounts, some Protestants were threatened with death by the town council, which, even after relenting, struck the names of Protestant converts off the municipal roles and declared that they were no longer "sons of the town." For a couple of years the Protestants lost their Mareño citizenship, including the right to vote and to hold office, and they even had to pay special fees to bury their dead in the town cemetery. In the late 1950s, when it became obvious that these sanctions would not force them to recant, the Protestants' rights were grudgingly restored, and they began to hold office again at the lower two municipal levels. As of 1972, one Protestant had achieved the post of vice-presidente, but without fulfilling any mayordomías or serving in any civil office which entails sacred functions. It remains to be seen whether a Protestant will be chosen for such a post, and if so, how he will deal with its ritual aspects.

Since the departure of the Dominicans in the 17th century, San Mateo's church officials had assumed the responsibility for all ecclesiastic matters and during most of the year served in the absence of outside priests, who made semi-annual visits to town on the days of the major religious celebrations of San Mateo (September 21) and the Virgen de la Candelaria (February 2) to say mass and to give the sacraments of baptism, communion, and marriage. Since his arrival in the early 1960s, however, the resident American priest has taken control of the church, and he will brook no interference from municipal officials in religious affairs. Although I have been told that his conduct aroused much initial hatred, and he was once dragged to jail by drunken policemen to whom he had denied entrance to the church, the municipal officials took no action against the priest, who now has the upper hand and either dictates to or ignores the town council. Since his assumption of his duties, some traditional church offices have lost many of their functions. For example, although the maestro de capilla still conducts a minor 5 a.m. service in the church and has nominal authority over the acolytes, he and his assistant, the fiscal, now perform few of their traditional duties. On the other hand, the post of sacristán has if anything been strengthened, for its traditional supportative functions, such as assisting at mass, are still required by the priest. Moreover, municipal offices with church duties, and particularly the supervisory civil-religious offices of the alcaldes, have suffered a diminution of importance through the priest's curtailment of their authority in church affairs.

There is no indication that the priest intends eventually to depart, and even were he ordered to retire by his superiors, another would probably be sent to take his place. Hence, there is little chance that the ecclesiastic offices will ever reassume their former importance. Although the form of civil-religious unity is maintained, the process of the separation of church and state has nonetheless gone far; and rather than somehow reverse itself, it appears that the present trend will run its full course.

At probably no time in its past did the community of San Mateo ever exist as a completely closed, corporate, self-contained entity, although some village elders, in witnessing what is occurring today, are prone to idealize it as such in their memories and legends of earlier times. Today, membership is no longer completely closed to outsiders, for in the late 1960s a Juchiteco became a citizen, i.e., he was allowed to purchase the house he had been renting, vote, and was nominated to the municipal post of comandante. This would not have been possible had the man not been married to a Mareña, but even this criterion was not in itself sufficient formerly, for he and others with Huave spouses had always before been refused membership. Some older Mareños view this exception to the rule with trepidation, fearing it sets a dangerous precedent, whereas Zapotec merchants are elated, seeing in it the eventual possibility of at last being allowed to purchase houses and places of business.

San Mateo still remains a corporate community in that land rights are inalienable from citizenship rights. However, the

emergence of the trend to purchase private land titles from District authorities in Tehuantepec now poses a threat to the older system, for although private and communal land rights now uneasily coexist, the former can only be further expanded at the expense of the latter. Because San Mateo's highest officials are no longer recognized as being the court of last appeal in all matters, the issue of land ownership will probably be resolved in Tehuantepec's district court. Moreover, it is increasingly difficult for the municipal authorities to appeal to the townspeople's sense of corporate responsibility for the community, as is shown by the decline of the institutions of communal labor and guardianship of communally owned animals: individuals now attempt to avoid participation, and the importance of the responsible officials--the mayores, juez, and escribano--has suffered a consequent decline.

Thus, although the structure of San Mateo's community organization remains essentially intact, it increasingly fails to reflect the realities of changing circumstances. The continuation of current trends of change will make it more and more difficult for the town's leaders to maintain the old forms while adjusting to new situations, and, in the long run, the traditional system will be abandoned as the community becomes more closely integrated into national society and its community organization adjusts to resemble those of the surrounding Isthmian towns (see Figure 2, page 30).

FIGURE 2:
THE CIVIL-RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY THROUGH TIME

Past (reconstructed, ca. 1910)

Level 5	Alcaldes (2)	
	mayordomías	
	Mayores (2)	
Level 4	Juez	Maestro
	mayordomías	
Level 3	Suplentes (2)	Fiscal
	mayordomías	
	Regidores (8)	
Level 2	Escribano	Sacristanes (2)
	mayordomías	
	Topiles (12)	
Level 1	Pregoneros (6)	Topiles de Iglesia (2)

Mandatory alternating of mayordomías with occupancy of civil posts in climbing civil ladder.

Present (1972)

Level 7	Alcaldes (2)' (Cura (Priest))	
	(mayordomía)	
Level 6	Presidente	Maestro
	(mayordomía)	
	Mayores (2)	
Level 5	Juez	
	Vice-Presidente	
Level 4	Suplentes (2)	Fiscal
	Síndico	
	Regidores (6)	
	Tesoreo (Secretario)	
Level 3	Escribano	Sacristanes (2)
	Comandantes (2)	
Level 2	Tenientes (24)	
	Topiles (12)	
Level 1	Pregoneros (6)	Topiles de Iglesia (2)

Preferred fulfillment of at least some mayordomías prior to advancement to high municipal offices.

Future (Projected)

Presidente		Cura
Vice-Presidente		Sacristanes
Regidores		Acolitos
Síndico		
Comandante		
Tesorero		
Secretario		
Policías		

Election to municipal posts not contingent upon 1) ordered progress through a ladder system of offices or 2) fulfillment of mayordomías. Separation of church and state.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

We still do not know whether in fact the ancestors of today's Huaves long ago migrated to their present location from far to the south, as is widely believed in the Isthmus to this day. Certainly, further, more thorough linguistic and archeological comparative research is needed to clarify the Huaves' pre-Columbian spatial and temporal relationship to other peoples of the New World. Nonetheless, whether or not we acknowledge the veracity of local legend and Burgoa's account, we may be reasonably certain that the Huaves resided for a considerable time in the Isthmus prior to the Spanish Conquest; and because during that period, as since, they shared in the cultural traditions of the region, they may be legitimately regarded as representative Mesoamerican Indians.

Living in coastal fishing villages and surrounded on land by their Zapotec neighbors, the Huaves have been politically, economically, and socioculturally dominated by them for almost 500 years. The Huave communities have been both separated from and linked to the rest of Mexico by Zapotec society, and elements of national culture have been passed on to them after first being filtered through a Zapotec cultural screen, after having been selected, reinterpreted, and modified in terms of the rich, eclectic Istmeño culture.

During this century, the Huave villages within the Ex-District of Juchitán--San Dionisio, San Francisco, and Santa María--have become increasingly integrated and acculturated into Istmeño-mestizo society, whereas San Mateo, for the most part left to itself by its administrative superior of Tehuantepec, has remained the most conservative of Huave communities. In recent decades, however, San Mateo has experienced mounting pressure for change from a variety of sources, including demographic growth and dispersion, increased interaction with representatives of the surrounding regional society, the innovations of foreign Catholic and Protestant missionaries, and, most recently, the introduction of the federal "Huave Plan."

Tradition and Transition in Community Organization

In Chapter I, San Mateo was categorized as an example of what has been defined as a "closed, corporate peasant community" (Wolf 1957), and it corresponds closely to one of the two polar

types of Latin American peasant villages that have been presented in the literature: "centripetal" versus "centrifugal" (Cámara 1952), "highland" and "closed" versus "lowland" and "open" (Wolf 1955, 1957), and "Indian" versus "mestizo" (Wagley 1964). According to Cámara,

A Centripetal Organization has a structure the content and symbolism of which is oriented toward the conservation of an already established socio-cultural order; this order is traditional, homogeneous, collectivistic, well-integrated, and obligatory. In it, theoretically at least, the well-being of the community tends to be placed before that of the individual.

On the other hand,

A Centrifugal Organization has a structure the content and symbolism of which is not oriented toward the conservation of any traditional order of beliefs and practices; it is changing, heterogeneous, weakly integrated, and voluntary. In it, theoretically, the well-being of the individual, or of a specific group, is placed before that of the community (1952:143).

In his cross-cultural study of "Closed Corporate Peasant Communities in Mesoamerican and Central Java," Wolf states:

Peasant communities in both areas thus show certain similarities. Both maintain a measure of communal jurisdiction over land. Both restrict their membership, maintain a religious system, enforce mechanisms which ensure the redistribution or destruction of surplus wealth, and uphold barriers against the entry of goods and ideas produced outside the community. These resemblances also mark their differences from other kinds of peasant communities. They form a contrast, for instance, with the "open" peasant communities of Latin America where communal jurisdiction over land is absent, membership is unrestricted, and wealth is not redistributed (1957:6).

For example, while envy would be present in both types, it would play a different role in each: in the open society it would excite individual competition, while in the closed one it would serve as an institutionalized leveling mechanism (Wolf 1955:460).

A measure of the relative openness or closure of a community may be seen in the function served by ritual kinship. In the closed community it is used to extend one's relationship broadly enough among one's peers to serve as an equalizer, to insure that no one either starves or becomes rich; in the open community its function is to give an individual unequal advantages by allying

him in a patron-client relationship with a person of superior status who can help him to achieve upward socio-economic mobility. In analyzing the compadrazgo system of ritual co-parenthood, Mintz and Wolf have noted the correlation between closed communities and horizontal ties on the one hand and between open systems and vertical ties on the other:

The aim would be to assess whether the individual is seeking to strengthen his position in a homogeneous socio-cultural community with high stability and low mobility, or to strengthen certain cross-cutting ties by alignment with persons of a higher socio-cultural stratum, via reciprocal-exploitative relationships manipulated through compadrazgo (1950:358).

To a degree, these contrastive models are based on historical differences that distinguish semi-autonomous Indian villages from lowland communities that have developed out of the plantation system. However, Cámara, Wolf, and Wagley also suggest that centripetal, closed, corporate, horizontal, and Indian villages will be eventually transformed into centrifugal, open, individualistic, vertical, and mestizo communities. Yet they do not indicate how the difficult transition will be made, do not delineate the processes whereby the disorganization of the former leads to the reorganization of the latter or explain how polar opposition becomes a continuum of gradual transition. Rather, one gains the impression that the former type of community organization is inherently brittle and is prone to suddenly collapse under pressure, to be rapidly replaced by the latter.

San Mateo is remarkably representative of the first polar type. However, despite powerful internal and external pressures for change, its community organization has not been shattered, and, while trying to maintain its overall formal structure, its leaders have demonstrated flexibility in so modifying its operation as to better cope with a changing situation. To be sure, this is a holding action, and San Mateo's organization, like that of the other Huave towns, will doubtless come increasingly to conform to the regional norm. Certainly, such attempts to maintain traditions as the reassertion of traditional communal land rights cannot in the long run succeed; but neither is San Mateo's community organization in danger of imminent collapse.

The processes of social change transforming San Mateo today might best be interpreted in terms of alternatives. That is, recent years have witnessed the introduction of alternate choices for investment, participation, and commitment. For the youth, fishing and ceremonial dancing now have the alternatives of school and baseball; for the adult, aside from participation in the civil-religious cargo system, options now include Protestantism, political parties, school committees, and capital investment in land, housing, and commercial enterprise. In the face of these new options, one of the traditional strengths of San Mateo's monolithic civil-religious community organization, the ideal of

total representation, now works to undermine it: not only have demographic growth and dispersion outstripped its small-scale administration's ability to represent and control all segments of the Mareño population, but also, to accommodate to the changing situation, requirements have already been reduced to permit the participation in the organization, not only of individuals who have not fulfilled religious cargos, but also of Protestants, who will not perform the offices' traditional sacred functions. Hence, with the increasing viability of alternatives on the one hand, and the increasing separation of church and state and the secularization of civil offices on the other, San Mateo's community organization will grow to more closely resemble those of the surrounding towns: the force of the egalitarian ethos of "shared poverty" and the necessity to entirely disburse one's wealth to achieve social prestige should decline as the possibility grows of combining personal wealth and political power.

San Mateo and the Future

San Mateo's cultural traditions are on the defensive. In recent years, in response to outside forces for change, the initial reaction of resistance and rigidity has quickly given way to passive, grudging acceptance. Many older Mareños blame their community for having lost the traditions of their forefathers, believing they were first abandoned by their ancient goddess, Nic Mior, for allowing the Dominicans to come to town, and later by their Patrón, San Mateo, for having capitulated to the missionary priest. Never eager to spread their culture to other peoples, and fearful of non-Mareños' ridicule, they tend to be guardedly protective of their religious beliefs and rituals. Noting their community's recent experiences and the changes that have affected the other Huave villages, many sense that, through the sharing of knowledge of their special traditions with outsiders, their culture becomes sullied and, like something tangible, not only lost, but also a weapon that can be turned against them. Moreover, they despair at the attitudes and behavior of younger Mareños, whose speech is marked by an increasing tendency to substitute Spanish for Huave terms, and who seem to attach little importance to ancestral customs, but rather to view them with guarded amusement. There is not the faintest indication that Mareño youths may eventually try to reassert the integrity of the community's traditional institutions; indeed, they betray some contempt for the humilde ways of their elders and, when outside of town, are anxious to be accepted as full-fledged members of wider Isthmian society.

Should the "Huave Plan" be fully implemented, San Mateo and the other Huave towns would be greatly affected. They would receive direct federal and state attention and, if the fishing cooperatives were not instituted, their men would become wage laborers in fishing launches, freezing plants, or even hotels. Hence, San Mateo might conceivably be transformed from a semi-isolated Indian village of peasant fishermen and farmers into a company town of rural proletarians. But even if such sweeping

changes do not transpire, San Mateo will nonetheless never return to its former marginal semi-autonomy. Now that its turn has come, San Mateo, like the other Huave communities, is on the road to gradual integration and acculturation into the regional Isthmian variant of Mexican society.

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