

***Ejidos*, Land Sales, and Free Trade in Northwest Mexico: Will Globalization Affect the Commons?**

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Introduction Globalization Comes to Mexico's Peasantry

During the term of President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), Mexico retreated from its traditional economic policy of import substitution—protection of national industries and heavy and broad investment in state and parastatal enterprises. By the beginning of the *sexenio* (six-year term) of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) the country was moving rapidly to liberalize its economy. By the time the United States and Mexico ratified the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993, the Mexican government had sold off much (though not all) of its interest in productive industries (it still owns nationalized electrical and oil industries), vastly curtailed its intervention in the banking and communication sectors, and agreed to phase out its deep involvement in agricultural production.

As profound as these changes were to the Mexican economy, however, an enormous impediment to a truly “free” economy remained. Mexico’s *sector social*, the vast network of *ejidos* and *comunidades* (cooperatively/communally-owned lands¹) overseen by an immense government bureaucracy, remained as an impediment to free trade, for lands in the sector could not legally be bought, sold, or leased. Mexican leaders understood that for neoliberal policies of free trade and open markets to seduce investors into viewing Mexico as a place with potential for profits in real estate or agricultural enterprises, something had to be done about this, the nation’s quasi-socialist component: collective ownership affected nearly

230 million acres—one-third of Mexico's land (and one-half its arable land). Mexico had to be willing to make a good faith show of shedding its collectivist agrarian past in order to reap the purported benefits of the unrestricted flow of goods and currency across its borders. A country where land is not in one way or another up for grabs can hardly be a full player in the global marketplace.

In this essay I will discuss briefly the effect of the neoliberal reforms on Mexico's *ejidos*, the lands held in trust by the government for the country's more than three million *ejidatarios*. As Mexico's leaders became cheerleaders for globalization, how did their new policies affect the status of the peasantry? Are peasants in the process of becoming free yeomen? Are *ejidos* becoming more flexible in offering opportunities to outside investors? These are questions that need to be answered to determine the extent that neoliberal policies and the forces of globalization have penetrated Mexico's hinterland.

I have chosen several *ejidos* in the northwestern Mexican state of Sonora as a case study of the effects of this truly massive political change on the lives of real people.²

The Setting: *Ejidos* and Land Reform

In 1992 President Salinas announced constitutional amendments reforming Mexico's vast system of *ejidos*. He also announced the formation of a large federal bureaucracy, *Procede*,³ operating out of the Ministry of Land Reform (*Secretaría de la Reforma Agraria*), to oversee the reforms. These historic changes heralded sweeping alterations in Mexico's land tenure, the most comprehensive since the adoption of the Constitution of 1917. The Salinas administration touted the amendments as reform of an obsolete, corruption-ridden, and inefficient system. In reality, however, they constituted attempts to bring the *sector social*, the vast social and agrarian welfare bureaucracy and its clientele, into line with the neoliberal reforms taking place throughout the government and private sectors. To put it more crassly, they constituted a Mexican attempt to convince U.S. and Canadian negotiators for the NAFTA that Mexico was ideologically sincere in wanting to become a partner in free trade, and would begin to cleanse itself of institutions incompatible with the free market.

The urge to privatize that obsessed Mexico's new neoliberal technocrats and ideologues went beyond Mexico's state and parastatal production units. These had been undergoing transfer to private ownership since the presidency of de la Madrid. The newfound infatuation with privatization and the market economy extended to what had heretofore been considered sanctified and untouchable terrain—the distribution of land to the peasantry that had been the rallying cry for the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the tenure of those lands that had been distributed under the resulting programs.

My Sonoran colleague, ecologist Alberto Búrquez, and I had been conducting socio/ecological studies throughout Sonora for several years when we quite accidentally happened in 1996 onto the east central Sonoran *ejido* community of

Tecoripa, which was facing upheavals produced by the new reforms. The abrupt changes (some would characterize them as traumas) facing the villagers left few other topics for conversation. For the next two years we followed the changes in and published our findings (Yetman & Búrquez 1998). Since then we individually or together have visited more than a dozen *ejido*-based villages to ascertain the changes in social structure and land tenure brought around by the *ejido* reform. Quite specifically, I have attempted to ascertain the degree to which newly privatized lots are being bought and sold as one might expect private property to be. I hoped to see to what extent the fears of opponents and the hopes of proponents of *ejido* reform were coming true. If Mexico has truly adopted a market-driven economy, to what extent has the market penetrated the formerly socialist or collectivist part of Mexico's economy? If the *ejido* reforms were driven by Salinas's push to propel Mexico into the global economy, to what extent would this effort show up as market activity in the social sector? My findings are based on necessarily cursory research. My data is ethnographic, even anecdotal. More rigorous studies will provide a clearer picture of the changes taking place in rural Mexico.

Most Mexican presidents before Salinas had shown disdain for *ejidos*, even going so far as to condone the assassination of populist peasant leaders.⁴ None, however, had dared suggest wholesale re-conceptualization of the *ejido* system, that most noteworthy and peculiarly Mexican institution. Indeed, through the mid-1980s presidents would announce the formation of yet another *ejido* or two on lands seized from various blackguards. Salinas, however, undoubtedly viewed privatization of the social sector as necessary to demonstrate to the United States Mexico's (and his) ideological and political commitment to free trade, hoping thus to influence U. S. politicians in the debate over the *Tratado de Libre Comercio* (Treaty of Free Trade) as NAFTA is known in Mexico. Previous presidents (Echeverría [1970-1976] and de la Madrid [1982-1988]) had carried out important reforms for *ejidos*, loosening the restrictions on agricultural credit, offering crop insurance, and permitting within *ejidos* the creation of civil societies (corporations) that could legally contract with outsiders for the use of *ejido* lands. But none had dared attack the institution of the *ejido* as such. Their gestures were intended to modernize *ejidos*, not to shove them into a capitalist economy.

Privatization of everything was for Harvard-trained Salinas as much a credo as it was for Bill Clinton, so the presence of such enormous acreage dedicated to collectivist ideology in a nation supposedly committed to free trade constituted an embarrassment to a gradually privatizing Mexico.⁵ Neoliberal and conservative Mexicans alike viewed *ejidos* as shackles. Neoliberals saw them as a hindrance to the opening of all of Mexico to the free flow of international capital and investment in productive resources. Conservatives saw them as wasting precious terrain on a mass of ignorant collectivists.⁶ Noting the general movement toward rationalizing *ejido* lands, Mexican cynics sniped that there were profits to

be had in privatizing the social sector just as there had been in selling off the public sector, as Salinas's brother Raúl, now incarcerated, found to his immense but temporary financial advantage.

In addition, but more quietly, neoliberals noted that small producers tended toward an inefficient subsistence form of production, raising crops and running cows for their own needs, not primarily for the market (Cornelius and Myhre 1998, 6). If millions of Mexican peasants remained outside the cash economy, Mexico's global attractiveness to foreign retailers would be diminished. Foreign investors in an economy require cash customers.⁷

Ejidos in Mexico, 1917-1992

While the Mexican revolution of 1910 failed to alter the class structure of the nation, it did offer major land reform through the creation of *ejidos* and with them, the social sector. The agrarian revolution in Mexico's south led by Emiliano Zapata was fueled by the failure of the Mexican government to recognize and legitimize ancient communal landholdings. Restitution of communal lands seized from peasants by landlords became the principal tenet of Zapata's *Plan de Ayala* (see Womack 1970). In the constitutional deliberations of 1917 Zapatistas triumphed over the disdainful objections of Mexico's wealthy and military elite when the agrarianist Article 27 became prominently and, its backers believed, permanently lodged in the Mexican Constitution.⁸

Ejidos were conceived and expounded in the Constitution as parcels of land collectively owned and either collectively or individually worked by the official tenants (*ejidatarios*). Title to the lands was held in trust in the national Ministry of Agrarian Reform (SRA), but actual decisions as to the uses and ultimate disposition of the land were to be decided by the *ejidatarios* in mandatory monthly meetings of the *ejido* general assembly. Under the highly committed leadership of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), who distributed far more land to peasants than all other Mexican presidents combined,⁹ the institution of the *ejido* grew to become a sacred symbol for millions of Mexicans. The dream of Mexican peasants of having land of their own was fulfilled only because of Article 27 and Cárdenas, who took it seriously. By the 1990s 94 million hectares¹⁰ (more than 230 million acres) were included in 28,000 *ejidos* and more than three million *ejidatarios* controlled them (Barry 1995, 12).

The attitudes of succeeding presidents toward the social sector ranged from outright hostility (Miguel Alemán, 1946-1952 and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, 1964-1970) to tepid endorsement (José López Portillo, 1976-1982). Presidents and the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) party used a wide variety of tactics (short of making the sector economically viable), especially ongoing rhetoric, to retain the electoral support of the three million *ejidatarios*. For example, towards the end of his administration (1970-1976), President Luis Echeverría perceived (correctly) that his and his party's popular image had been deeply tarnished by his involvement in (among other things) student massacres

and the nearly single-handed destruction of the Mexican economy (Krauze 1998, 739-752). To bolster his historic stature (he envisioned himself as a 1970s Cárdenas) he proposed aggressive populist schemes for increasing *ejido* productivity and in Sonora expropriated large landholdings of some of his political enemies, turning them over to newly formed *ejidos* (Calderón Valdés 1985, 231). It was apparent, though, that he and his party functionaries really cared only for the votes the social sector could deliver. Almost none of them—from the President to lowly bureaucrats—believed in the viability of the *ejido* (Looney 1975, 85) except as a repository of deliverable votes. For all his public posturing, Echeverría failed to produce any reforms that might have made *ejidos* more productive, efficient, and honest. During the 2000 presidential campaign, PRI officials handed out checks to *ejidatarios* as they had done for decades, warning that unless the *ejidos* voted solidly for the PRI candidates, the checks and all other government assistance would dry up.¹¹

Prior to the 1992 reforms, *ejido* lands could not legally be bought, sold, rented, or leased, a key provision in the Constitution to prevent concentration of land in private hands, or the re-emergence of *hacendados* (land barons). While each *ejidatario* could be assigned a parcel, no *ejidatario* could claim a parcel on an absentee basis. The law required that he (virtually all *ejidatarios* were men except for cases where an *ejidatario* died leaving only female successors) live on *ejido* lands and could be absent for extended periods of time only with permission of the *ejido*'s general assembly. No *ejidatario* could be granted a parcel larger than that allocated to others or constituting more than five percent of the total land. Furthermore, any *ejidatario* who failed to work his parcel faced losing it. Lands not allocated as individual parcels or urban lots were to be available to all as commons for firewood, herbs, lumber, rock, and free-roaming livestock.

These provisions were instituted to ensure that peasant lands would be inalienable, so that the phrase "land to the tiller" would be something more than a mere slogan. No matter how wealthy members of Mexico's ruling class might become, they could not (legally) buy, rent, or lease land from under a peasant's feet, even with a shotgun to his head. No peasant could become a stand-in for a fatcat land baron, nor could a class of absentee landlords arise among the social sector. At the same time, however, the land could not be (legally) bought and sold. According to liberal economics, this precluded the incorporation of land into the efficiencies of the market, making foreign investment in half of Mexico's farmland illegal. We must assume that all the protective provisions of pre-1992 Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution were albatrosses around the neoliberalized neck of Carlos Salinas. They also help account for the determination Salinas exhibited to undertake something no previous president had done—attack the *ejido* system head on.

Salinas had a rational basis for his *jihad*. Since public ownership also precluded the use of *ejido* lands for collateral, credit for seed, fertilizer, beasts of burden, and, in the case of prosperous *ejidos*, farm machinery, could not be obtained from traditional or commercial banks. Instead, it was to be arranged

through a nationalized *ejido* bank (*Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural*). Invested with enormous power, the bank became a vast dispenser of political favors and a virtual bottomless pit of disappearing public funds (see Myhre 1996, 130-136). Although it was reformed on several occasions and it lumbered through a number of incarnations as of the late 1990s (it is now known as *Banrural*), the bank invariably lost money, often lots of it. It could hardly require collateral from peasants who had virtually no assets besides their corn and beans to post, and it was plagued with numerous cracks and holes within its structure through which funds vanished like fog. Throughout its existence, the bank managed to provide credit to only 40 percent of *ejidatarios* (Thiesenhusen 1996, 42) and most of these loans were of amounts too small to be of economic benefit to the recipients. Only *ejidatarios* with solid connections to the (then) ruling PRI¹² could hope to snag useful loans. These usually carried no penalty if repayment became inconvenient. Peasants came to view credit from *Banrural* as a right, especially when they voted correctly (Myhre 1998, 41).

Thus, the Salinas reformers had ample ammunition for their reforms. They pointed to widespread corruption, illegal sale and renting of *ejido* lands, disastrous ecological conditions, and low productivity. Virtually every provision of *ejido* law was routinely violated. Entire *ejidos* existed without a single resident.¹³ *Ejidatarios* leased out arable land with impunity.¹⁴ Furthermore, because credit could be obtained only through the government bank, a relationship of dependence between the *ejidatarios* and the government evolved that had become unhealthy at best, critics maintained.¹⁵

All of these criticisms of the social sector and many, many more were widely documented. Corruption was as widespread in and among *ejidos* as it was in Mexico itself, shades of Tammany Hall on a national scale, only worse. *Ejidos* were fraught with nepotism, favoritism, graft, and extortion.¹⁶ The corruption perverted the purpose of the *ejidos*, which was to provide productive land for the peasantry that would be safe from seizure by the ruling class. For example, in an *ejido* in which I was conducting research, its *comisario* (president) sold a prime street corner to a wealthy and well-connected gasoline concessionaire for constructing the town's only gasoline station. Although the sale was patently illegal, the station was built, the new "owner," a non-*ejidatario*, assumed "title," and the station continues to operate. It is widely assumed that the *comisario* pocketed the proceeds, which must have been substantial. The other *ejidatarios* declined to report the felonious transaction to authorities for fear of retaliation (or perhaps because they were in collusion). Often the federal authorities themselves were in on such deals, demanding their cut. My research and reports from *ejidatarios* and officials within the Ministry of Agrarian Reform in Sonora indicate that this experience can be reproduced to varying degrees in a majority of Sonora's nearly 900 *ejidos*. Salinas viewed privatization as a means of eliminating this source of corruption.

In the same vein, drylands (non-irrigation) *ejidos* tended to be allocated marginal lands, and because parcels were usually far below the size necessary to

support a family, the bulk of these lands exhibited a dismaying degree of ecological degradation. It was widely known, for example, that in the Mexican northwest one could determine the ownership of livestock pastures merely by looking at the range condition. If overgrazing was rampant and erosion on the increase, the pasture could usually be assumed to be *ejido* land. One could learn quickly to identify at a glance from the highway which lands were *ejidos* and which were privately owned. Common lands were routinely overstocked and textbook cases of erosion are common throughout the country.¹⁷ Furthermore, in Mexico's arid northwest, parcels were of such limited productivity that nearly all *ejidatarios* were forced to find separate employment apart from what their parcels and the common lands would yield. Interviews that Búrquez and I conducted reveal that many older Sonoran *ejidatarios* worked in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s as *braceros* and later as green card workers or, more commonly, as illegal aliens. Some of these workers would return to their lands to meet residency requirements. Others did not bother to return. Instead they bribed *ejido* officials or had relatives stand in for them and forge their signature at meetings.¹⁸ For the most part these former *braceros* now reside permanently in their *ejidos*, but according to testimony from Sonoran *ejidos*, their children tend to leave the *ejidos*, not for the United States, but for the Sonoran cities of Hermosillo, Ciudad Obregón, and Navojoa.

President Salinas also pointed out that one of the functions of Mexico's agrarian reform (and Article 27 of the Constitution) had been to distribute land to peasants. Now, he proclaimed, there was no more land to distribute. The peasant population was increasing, but no new lands were available for *ejidos*. Yes, there were private estates operating in excess of constitutional prohibitions, but these were not touchable by a president who extolled the virtues of private property.¹⁹ Salinas felt compelled to assure private landowners that they would no longer be subject to expropriation. There would be no more Echeverría's. This assurance, he hoped, would encourage more investment to "modernize" Mexico's agricultural production.²⁰

In summary, the Salinas reforms led to only one conclusion: Mexico's 75-year experiment with agrarian reform and collectivization of land had been a failure. Yes, the new changes would result in fewer peasants in the countryside and more in the cities, but this was a good thing, Salinas and his allies argued. The new arrivals from the countryside would be absorbed into manufacturing and service industries created by the wave of new investment stimulated by Mexico's neoliberal reforms. Or so they insisted it would be. It was a clear as anything could be—to the already convinced (Cornelius and Myhre 1998, 6).

Even with the social sector's acknowledged unimpressive record of accomplishments, however, defenders of the *ejido* had rejoinders. They pointed out that the majority (but by no means all) *ejido* lands were inferior in productive potential to adjacent privately owned lands. *Ejidos* were often examples of "lemon socialism" in that the government would distribute worthless or nearly worthless

land to applicants and claim the distribution as proof of commitment to agrarian reform and The Revolution. Or land would be distributed but no resources for "developing" it made available. *Ejidors* were seldom the beneficiaries of the massive agricultural development projects sponsored by the government. The *ejido* bank was as riddled with corruption as any institution could be, so meaningful credit seldom reached the people who needed and deserved it.

Furthermore, with the exception of the vigorous pro-*ejido* activity by officials of the Cárdenas administration, agricultural research in Mexico was almost entirely directed toward the private sector. Jennings (1983) studied the Rockefeller Initiative, a program based in Mexico and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation from the early 1940s through the 1960s to increase the yield of basic grain crops. The Initiative formulated Mexico's agricultural policy, which stressed capital-intensive, large-scale irrigation projects. Jenkins found that the Initiative was highly biased towards the owners of large tracts of privately owned land, who benefited overwhelmingly from Rockefeller-sponsored research. The social sector was deliberately excluded, and officials within the administrations of Presidents Avila Camacho (1940-1946) and Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) who objected to the model and the snubbing of the needs of smallholders were dismissed from their positions, apparently at the behest of Rockefeller officials. Jennings concludes that the Green Revolution was designed deliberately to undermine the economic viability of *ejidos* and communally owned lands while strengthening the economic power of large holders. Critics of *ejidos* shrugged off their nonproductivity as just another proof of the failure of the social sector, not as a result of the government's refusal to provide *ejidos* with the tools necessary for increased production.

Defenders of the *ejido* system pointed out that on the one hand, then, government officials withheld the necessary assistance to make *ejidos* viable while, on the other hand, assiduously trying to corrupt *ejidos* by offering bribes and other illegal payments in return for political favors, which were often reciprocated. Since successful and self-sufficient *ejidos* would not depend on governmental largesse, they were to be discouraged, not subsidized as private farms were.²¹ Finally, new *ejidos* were often formed by members selected by anonymous government bureaucrats from lists compiled countrywide, so the new associations, especially in the northwest where land tenure is often more recent, were often formed by strangers with no shared interests other than the desire to have land.²² One's new neighbors often spoke with strange accents, ate alien foods, and exhibited queer customs.²³

In the face of these innumerable obstacles to developing *ejidos'* productivity, defenders countered the government's (and conservative critics') attacks on the *ejido* system. Belittling *ejidos*, they said, was akin to assassinating peasants, then accusing their children of being orphans and condemning their poverty. If the government were to dedicate the funds and enthusiasm toward the social sector that it had to the private sector, the health of the social sector would be far different, they argued. How could the social sector be a model of productive

efficiency given the profound and unsettling limitations with which it was saddled?

Perhaps the most thoughtful critique of *ejidos* lay in the observation that the system nurtured a relation of dependency between the *ejidos* and the government, which provided (and withheld) credit, subsidies, and legal assistance at its pleasure. Critics and apologists alike agreed that the *ejido* system had become a huge drain on government resources (see, for example, Gates 1993), and that most *ejidos* could not have survived without infusions of public money, which *ejidatarios* claimed as a right. This dependence was fostered by the ruling PRI party in order to retain the bloc of *ejidatario* voters it viewed as essential to its perpetuation of its political hegemony. Through the CNC (*Confederación Nacional de Campesinos*), the government-sponsored National Peasants' Union, the government maintained control over *ejidos* and quashed dissident movements before they could expand (Bartra 1996, 175). The party also maintained close affiliation with as many *ejidos* as possible, bestowing favors upon party loyalists and punishing dissidents, warning of dire consequences if any opposition party were to assume power in Mexico. In other words, the PRI needed dependent *ejidos* to guarantee its electoral domination. During voting, PRI goons would frequently watch peasants as they voted, to ascertain that the *ejidatarios* made correct notations on their ballots.²⁴

Few, then, would dispute that Mexico's social sector was desperately in need of reform. But was Salinas's solution the right one? American negotiators for NAFTA were aware of the structural pitfalls of the social sector, as the abundant literature on *ejidos*, some cited in this essay, demonstrate. They surely maintained that public money invested in a socialist enterprise would not reap profits for individual investors. The *ejidos* were an obstacle to free trade. Cornelius and Myhre (1998, 5) cite then Mexican Undersecretary of Agriculture Luis Téllez as saying, "... we must have institutions that are compatible with free markets. ... There is a need for well-defined property rights, enforceable through the judicial system. The lack of such security has hindered agricultural investment in Mexico." Such unabashedly neoliberal sentiments have a decidedly un-Mexican ring. Téllez referred not only to assurance that large holdings would not be expropriated by some populist politicians but also to the security of owning land free of ideological and political encumbrances, that is to say, free of *ejido* complications. Until a land developer could make an offer with the hope of acceptance on *ejido* land to build a new subdivision or a foreign investor could willy-nilly contract for a field of exportable cantaloupes, Mexico did not have a system of free markets.

Salinas's program of privatization was to have been completed by 1994, the end of his *sexenio*. We can only assume that he envisioned a couple of million proud new landowners brandishing their scrolled land titles heavenward in praise of the outgoing president. He did not figure he would wind up banished and seeking refuge in Ireland and Cuba, a pariah in his own country.²⁵ By the year

2000, precious few *ejidatarios* had achieved full ownership of their parcels, not because it was not possible, but because they were apparently not motivated to do so.²⁶ Mexico's peasants appeared to be balking at assuming the role of full-fledged capitalists.

Privatization

In spite of spirited opposition, primarily from left-wing groups and intellectuals, Salinas pushed his reforms through a mostly pliant congress. To undertake the truly massive task of restructuring the nation's *ejidos*, a bureaucracy was established within the Ministry of Agrarian Reform to oversee the transition of *ejido* land from the social sector to (it was hoped) private hands. Each *ejido* was to be given the choice whether or not to privatize.

The privatization program, called Procede, required each *ejido* to vote to privatize or to reject privatization. Safeguards were incorporated to guarantee that the vote was legitimate and that a genuine majority view was expressed. With a vote in favor of privatization, the government would provide free of charge an official land survey of *ejido* and parcel boundaries (Gómez Carpinteiro 1998).²⁷ After *ejidatarios* fulfilled a series of legal requirements, they would take a second vote. Once this was accomplished and approved and the land survey completed, they could receive individual certificates for their lands. They then had the right to sell or rent their parcels to other *ejidatarios*, residents of the *ejido*, or certain corporations, and to pay taxes on them. Arms-length sales to non-*ejido* individuals, however, could only take place if the *ejidatario* received papers of *dominio pleno* (full ownership), and this was possible only with the concurrence of the *ejidatarios*' successors and the adjacent *ejidatarios* and approval of the general assembly of the *ejido*.²⁸ This provision of *ejido* reform—requiring an additional step from receiving a parcel certificate to receiving full title—was instituted to address the concerns of critics that full ownership of parcels would lead to rapid buying of *ejidos* by outsiders and, by implication, North Americans. To date, very few Sonoran *ejidatarios* have applied for full ownership (*Procuraduría Agraria* 2000, personal communication.)

Local administration of Procede became the responsibility of a corps of bureaucrats, for the most part young technocrats schooled in neoliberal economics, and hence supporters of privatization with varying degrees of enthusiasm. I found the agents to be for the most part eager, honest, well-trained, and well-intentioned, but perhaps not prepared for the variety of responses they encountered when presenting their case to the *ejidos*.²⁹ Their presence (impending or actual) invariably caused a flurry of activity within the *ejidos*—of boundary checks (and, in some instances, sneaking fences), re-creations and re-inventions of history, recent and ancient, and family discussions and arguments. In Ejido Tecoripa new fences popped up maze-like in advance of Procede as *socios* (as *ejido* members are often called) frantically marked off their claims in advance of the new land deal.

Promoters of the *ejido* reform and the techno/bureaucrats charged with selling the program to *ejidos* spoke optimistically of increased productivity as individuals became responsible for their own lands and were able to obtain credit using their parcels as collateral.³⁰ With varying degrees of articulation these tech reps promoted reform to the *ejidatarios*, usually in meetings outside under a *ramada* or in an open field.³¹ They envisioned an emerging class of rural yeomen motivated by profit providing better husbandry to the land and developing rural resources according to market needs. They pointed out that privatization would increase the local tax base.³² They viewed merging parcels into larger ones as an efficient move that would permit economies of scale to increase productivity, whether through grazing or through crops, or any other enterprise that would bring about the highest possible return. Although their vision was thin on real-world case studies, their neoliberal instincts took the place of empirical data and gave them inspiration.³³

Other critics of Procede see the process as intimidating to and a virtual blackmail of the peasant who hopes to arrange credit and receive farm subsidy payments (Pérez Castañeda 1998, 58; Baitenmann 1998, 112). Consciously or unconsciously, the Procede officials also successfully played on deep-seated resentments nearly universal in *ejidos* where many *socios* complained that they worked on common lands only to see some slackers and drunkards sharing in the benefits when they did nothing to earn them.

Skeptics within and without *ejidos* warned that in the wake of Procede sales would begin to concentrate parcels in fewer and fewer hands (a charge proponents welcomed) and a new rural oligarchy would emerge, creating once again a vast landless proletariat in Mexico's hinterlands.³⁴ They foresaw outsiders buying up *ejido* lands, using various stratagems to gain control of entire *ejidos*. They fulminated that the new privatization, combined with Mexico's new policy inviting foreign investment, would re-create the conditions of the *porfiriato* (the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz 1880-1910) and produce a new generation of *hacendados* (see, for example Harvey 1996; Rubio 1996; Toledo 1996).³⁵ One hundred years earlier, those conditions—welcoming foreign investment and ownership of lands, disciplining the work force with an iron hand, and lodging political power in the hands of a small number of landowning elites—created such vast social discrepancies that the Mexican Revolution became virtually inevitable.³⁶ The critics contended that the changes to Article 27 would initiate a return to those same conditions. They warned, moreover, that dispossessed *ejidatarios* would swell the ranks of illegal migration to the United States.

Lingering in the recesses of the critics' minds, as several have explained to me, is fear that foreigners, especially investors from the United States, will grab land parcels and gradually (insidiously, from the Mexican perspective) come to control Mexican territory and, through it, Mexico. Their fears are not groundless, for during the *porfiriato* North American capital made a shambles of Mexican sovereignty (Ruiz 1988F).³⁷ And the history of the secession of Texas still grates on Mexican's patriotic instincts.

Procede lagged far behind the initial optimistic schedule for completing privatization by 1994. By May 1995, only roughly a third of Sonora's nearly 900 *ejidos*³⁸ had completed the Procede process (Martínez Rascón 1998, 185). Nearly all *ejidos* were receptive to the reforms, especially those in Sonora and other states of the north. Historic ties to the land were more tenuous there than in *ejidos* of the south where *ejidatarios* lived on lands tilled by many generations of their ancestors. Many Sonoran *ejidatarios* with whom I spoke (in more than a dozen *ejidos*) found the idea of personal (as opposed to community) ownership attractive. Yet the complexity of the proceedings led to numerous complications and delays. In the *ejido* Tecoripa, for example, what appeared to have been a simple question posed to the *ejidatarios*, i.e., Do you favor privatizing your parcels?, became inextricably mixed up with the internal question, Do you wish to expand the size of your parcel prior to the privatization? The controversy surrounding the latter question (see Yetman and Búrquez 1998) delayed the final vote on Procede for at least a year. In Tecoripa it was clear that as Baitenmann (1998) found in Oaxaca, few *ejidatarios* understood Procede. She found, as did we, that confusion on the details of the reform was to be found among Procede officials as well.

There were other systemic blockages. The supply of trained technocrats lagged far behind their ability to administer the program to 28,000 *ejidos*. The burden of conducting thousands of land surveys simultaneously fell upon the national department INEGI, which lacked trained land surveyors and could hardly anticipate the complexities of surveying every parcel in each *ejido* (some 4.6 million parcels and 4.3 million urban lots! [Pérez Castañeda 1998]), especially in a system where internal disputes over boundaries were legion.³⁹ The rebels in Chiapas in late 1994 castigated the *ejido* reform as a prime example of the government's sellout to the rich at the expense of the poor. The Zapatistas' pronouncements caused many southern *ejidos* to hesitate about implementing the reforms and many *ejidos* in Chiapas denied entry to Procede officials. In the north, some *ejidos* were located in isolated mountain terrain hours from the nearest highway, making the required series of meetings and the engineering surveys cumbersome for government officials. Although the government had envisioned a rapid completion of Procede, as of late 1999, the crew responsible for overseeing the presentation to *ejidos* had not yet arrived at an *ejido* I visited in a remote section of the Sierra Madre Occidental in Chihuahua. This is not surprising, given the enormity of the undertaking: surveying, documenting, and providing legal proof of ownership to one-third of Mexico's land.⁴⁰

In the Wake of Procede in Sonora

In 1995 the respected national newspaper *La Jornada* reported the claim of Procede officials that privatization nationwide had not yet led to the sale of the newly privatized plots (Ibarra Mendivil 1996, 60). The much-feared takeover of *ejido* lands was not occurring, they claimed.⁴¹ Data I have gathered in Sonora indicate otherwise. By the year 2000 nearly all *ejidos* in Sonora have voted to

approve *Procede* and have privatized or are in the process of privatizing, that is, nearly all have or will soon have certificates granting them ownership of their parcels. I have uncovered no evidence of strong-arm tactics or deceptive practices by *Procede* administrators, even though they appeared strongly to favor privatization. To date, few *ejidatarios* have received *dominio pleno* (clear title) to their lands, for it requires an additional series of steps to obtain. Sales (many of them illegal, since the necessary papers have not been transmitted) have been proceeding briskly nonetheless. A survey of *ejidos* in the central and southern portions of Sonora indicate a clear trend toward concentration as poorer *ejidatarios* sell their parcels to wealthier ones.

In the eight Sonoran *ejidos* I surveyed for this study between late 1998 and spring 2000, all reported sales among *socios* (members), and six reported sales to outsiders. In most cases the sales appear to be hardly sufficient to provoke much ideological interest. For example, in Ejido Benito Juárez, an *ejido ganadero* (ranching *ejido*)⁴² in southern Sonora created in the 1970s with vague promises of future irrigation water, 50 of 177 *socios* have sold their parcels, but only 5 of these were sales to outsiders (all illegal). Each *ejidatario* was allocated 20 hectares, roughly enough to raise two cows. The buyers appear to be wealthier *ejidatarios* who have sufficient cash or income to cough up the 25,000-35,000 pesos (\$3,000-4,000 U.S.) to buy out their neighbor's interest.⁴³ The *ejido* also contains roughly 500 ha of common land, which is in the process of being divided among the remaining *ejidatarios*. Those who sell are usually poorer and less influential *ejidatarios* who, not unexpectedly, also were allocated only marginally useful parcels. Usually the sellers owned no livestock and felt they had no need for land. One of these indicated that he will also sell whatever land constitutes his share of the remaining common lands when they are divided. Even so, it will be necessary to assemble a lot of parcels to produce a working ranch. In a decade or so, a bone fide ranch might emerge, but there are presently no land barons on the horizon around Benito Juárez.

Many of the grazing portions of nearby Ejido Francisco Sarabia (some portions are reserved for irrigated farming) have been purchased (illegally) by a wealthy outsider from a nearby village apparently intent on building a small cattle empire and being in a position to snatch up irrigation canal rights should irrigation water arrive at the *ejido*. Prices are considerably higher than in Ejido Benito Juárez, apparently driven up by speculation around the rumored (but highly doubtful) arrival of irrigation water from the south.

Although the buyer is considered rich by *ejidatarios* of Francisco Sarabia, his 200 or so assembled hectares hardly make him a land baron. It will enable him to sustain a herd of perhaps 30 cows. Under ideal conditions these 30 will gross somewhere around \$10,000-\$12,000 annual income. A parcel and herd of that size wouldn't be considered worth owning in, say, Texas, where with that income the rancher would be eligible for food stamps.

In Ejido San Bernardo, another *ejido ganadero* some 70 miles to the north, sales have taken place, but only internally. The buyers are residents with long-

term reputations as more affluent and influential in local matters. The sellers tend to be those with reputations as low lifes, drunkards, and ne'er-do-wells. The sales represent what most social observers would consider a preliminary shakeout. The real jockeying for *hacendado* status is not even at the conscious level yet. Some of the sales are illegal, since not all *socios* have received their certificates of possession. Still, community social pressure will undoubtedly serve to enforce the premature sales agreements once the formalities of privatization have been completed.⁴⁴

Numerous sales have also taken place in Ejido Tecoripa, an *ejido ganadero* some 200 miles northwest of the southern *ejidos*. Most of these transactions have been internal, with *socios* seeking to expand their holdings beyond the 27 ha. allocated to each. Predictions that Búrquez and I made in 1998 that Procede would lead to consolidation among some *ejidatarios* and a vast proliferation of fences, have been borne out (Yetman and Búrquez 1998). In that community, a nascent class structure appears to be coalescing as a result of privatization, a phenomenon previously obscured by the enforced paper equality of the inalienable pre-1992 *ejido* lands.

Sales in *ejidos agrícolas* are more complex. Prices for *ejido* parcels eligible for irrigation are substantially higher than those dedicated to pasture, for which raising crops is practically impossible. (In the southern coastal areas where most of the *ejidos* mentioned in this article are located, rainfall is around 350 mm [14 inches] per year, insufficient for rainfed crops, for which roughly 500 mm is minimally essential.) *Ejidatarios* from Ejido Manuel Caudillo own rights to 5 hectares of irrigated land each, with the promise of an additional 10 ha. of irrigable land if and when irrigation water becomes available.⁴⁵ Some *ejidatarios* (fewer than 10 percent in early 2000) have sold their parcels for an average of about 200,000 pesos (\$25,000 U.S.) per parcel, or roughly \$2,000 U.S. per acre.⁴⁶ Once again, sales have been within the *ejido*. While most of the *ejidatarios* of Manuel Caudillo lease out their lands to commercial agricultural interests, it appears that *socios* are for the present unwilling to sell their parcels outright. They prefer instead to continue to lease them or, in a very few cases, work them themselves. With adequate credit, machinery, and management, these parcels can be profitable indeed.⁴⁷ This sort of leasing, though, defeats the purpose of the creation of *ejidos*, which were a response to the rallying cry of the revolution, "Land to the tiller." Privatization only legitimizes a practice that made a sham of Article 27 in the first place.

Data from my interviews and reports from *ejidos* in the region show that leasing and renting of parcels with irrigation rights have increased now that the practice is legal. It may be that the *ejidatarios* initially are renting out their parcels in the hope that they may one day be able to work them themselves. A local newspaper reports that

Some are opting to rent their parcels, hoping to pay off their debts to Banrural. Meanwhile they have other jobs and are

awaiting a new planting season and hoping that the bank will extend them credit. Those who sell their parcels do so to seek work and a better way of life elsewhere. Most of the *ejidatarios* hope for a change in government agricultural policy that will make farming their parcel profitable. But for now the costs of production and the commodity prices are so distant that profits are impossible. ("Ejido No Desaparecerá, Pese a Rentismo 2000." Translation mine.)

From these preliminary findings we may conclude that at least in Mexico's north, the feared concentration of landholdings by *outsiders* has yet to pose a major threat to lands once held by *ejidos*. Assembling of parcels and concentration among fewer hands within *ejidos* is a different story, however, and appears to be a common occurrence. In many cases (the exact number is impossible to determine because of the absence of required public reporting) the sales are illegal, or, perhaps extra-legal, since the requisite paper work for binding sales does not exist. In Ejido Tecoripa we discovered that sales took place even prior to the approval of *Procede* by the *ejido*. Apparently internal social pressure is sufficient to guarantee the permanence of the sale in the absence of official documents. In the near future proper documents will assure the legality of these sales.

Is there any evidence that the emerging larger parcels will result in better land management, as apologists for *ejido* reform had foreseen? I have found no evidence that management will differ in any detail. Placing responsibility on individuals rather than the community has not transformed management objectives. The goal of the new buyers of parcels from ranching *ejidos* is the same as that of the previous owners: to run the maximum number of cattle on a parcel, to see that every edible snippet of greenery is converted into livestock feed. Indeed, the privatization in Tecoripa has seen a bewildering proliferation of fences as former common lands become private property. The same appears to be true in Ejido Benito Juárez. The new strands of wire make easy passage through former common lands nearly impossible without endless opening and closing of gates.⁴⁸ This may sound unimportant to those who live in cities, but for cowboys who must drive cattle to water twice a day through a series of gates that must be opened and closed, it is a dreary complication of an already difficult way of life. As an old Mexican saying goes, "*Cuando vino alambre, vino el hambre*" (When barbed wire came, hunger came with it). In the case of Tecoripa, the ecological state of the *ejido* will probably be worse with privatization than prior to it.

Discussion

The evolution of land tenure under the revised Article 27 (i.e., the velocity at which land concentrates in fewer hands and a rural class society emerges) involves several variables in addition to cash available for transactions. These

include parcel topography, soil quality, local rainfall, the presence or lack of infrastructure such as irrigation canals, roads, and wells, the amount and extent of government subsidies, intra- and inter-familial social connections, commodity prices, and favoritism, to name a few.⁴⁹ Ideological factors may be operating as well, but ideology decreases in ardor the closer one gets to the ground. What really matters to potential buyers of parcels is how acquisition of another *ejidatario*'s parcel would fit into individual expansion plans, not whether it was good for the *ejido* or done in the spirit of free enterprise or personal responsibility. Alberto Búrquez and I discovered in Tecoripa that once the commitment to privatization had been endorsed by the *ejido* membership, changes in personal ideology could occur quickly. Some of the strongest proponents of the previous *ejido* system and opponents of the so-called reform were quick to capitalize on opportunities to expand their personal holdings if they could conjure up the resources so to do. They were akin to many liberal Americans who found investing in the stock market distasteful until they succumbed to the lure of quick profits and became operators in the system. I speculate that this ideological flexibility will be different in *ejidos* in southern and central Mexico, where *ejidatarios* share centuries of ancestral occupation of *ejido* lands. Long-held attitudes toward land tenancy resist quick modification by profit margins. This may explain the reluctance to sell newly documented parcels by *ejidatarios* in a traditional community in Puebla (Gómez Carpinteiro 1998, 128). To gain an accurate picture of land sales and draw conclusions, it will be necessary to monitor sales throughout the Republic for the next decade or so.

It may be that outsiders hoping to acquire larger holdings have sampled the land acquisition opportunities within ranching *ejidos* and have found the available parcels too small or too limited in access to be worth acquiring. A twenty-hectare parcel of eroded and overgrazed land far from infrastructure and without water is hardly a juicy plum for either speculator or empire-builder. A cadre of potential purchasers may be lurking, awaiting sufficient concentration of parcels within *ejidos* to make purchase of larger parcels practicable. One *ejidatario* with whom I spoke has joined his parcel with those of two of his sons, and has acquired two more, giving him a total of more than 100 ha., much of it adjoining and relatively well-watered. If his acquisitions continue, his parcel may attract the notice of potential extra-*ejido* buyers. We will have to wait a good while before any trend in this direction is detectable, however. If sales begin to occur in significant numbers, they will constitute a vindication of the worst fears of opponents of the new land reform. It is what neoliberals hope for and what agrarianists dread.

What has become of *ejidatarios* who sold their parcels? Did they leave the *ejido* and move to cities? Did they become a part of the thousands seeking illegally to cross the border into the United States? Consider, for example Massey's terse summary of the dynamics of immigration:

In the context of a globalizing economy, the entry of markets and capital-intensive production technologies into peripheral regions disrupts existing social and economic arrangements and brings about the displacement of people from customary livelihoods, creating a mobile population of workers who actively search for new ways of earning income, managing risk, and acquiring capital. In the short run, international migration does not stem from a lack of economic development, but from development itself. (Massey 1999, 304)

While Massey's analysis sums up the dynamics of migration in parts of Mexico, I have no reason to believe that sales of *ejido* lands in Sonora have affected *ejidatarios* sufficiently to induce a new cycle of migration (*Procuraduría Agraria* 2000, personal communication). Interviews I have conducted in *ejidos* show that some *ejidatarios* already work in the United States, with or without papers, so if they were to sell their parcels, sales would have no effect on numbers of immigrants. Many Sonoran *ejidatarios* work seasonally outside the *ejido*, so if they were to leave permanently, their demographic effect would also be difficult to determine. It is probably too early to decide if privatization will result in greater pressure on former *ejidatarios* to migrate from the *ejido*. If *ejidatarios* obtain full title for their parcels in greater numbers, it may signal a desire to sell to outsiders.

Still, my findings in Sonora indicate that displaced or unemployed rural Sonorans tend to migrate to Sonoran cities rather than directly to the United States. This trend probably dates to the 1950s when the potential drain on the Sonoran workforce by the Bracero Program (1942-1964) became so severe that in 1955 the Sonoran government proposed to make it illegal for Sonorans to work as *braceros*.⁵⁰ They established a compromise policy that to qualify to be *braceros*, Sonoran workers had to work a specified period of time as day laborers in Sonora. In so doing, Sonoran villagers may have developed regional relations with villages in labor-short areas in the more prosperous western portion of the state. In 1957, in spite of its common border with Arizona, Sonora did not rank among the top eight states contributing to the immigrant pool (García y Griego 1989).⁵¹ Given this history and the patterns the peculiarly Sonoran policy may have established, a Sonoran case study may not constitute a representative sample of national trends in migration.

Some analysts believe that the *ejido* reforms of 1992 were carried out with the assumption (never stated in public) that illegal migration to the United States would act as a safety valve for displaced *ejidatarios*, whose numbers were expected to be significant (Cornelius and Myhre 1998, 6). Newly-elected President Vicente Fox has indicated that he will support migration to the United States, apparently overtly (as opposed to the covert support from the PRI). Fox appears to be an enthusiastic supporter of free trade and of open borders as well. Mexico

may well become a more organized “sender society” as Massey puts it, with the government assisting and promoting emigration to the United States. After all, free trade is free trade.

The preliminary data from my survey suggest that any increase in migration due to sale of *ejido* parcels in Sonora will occur in tiny increments, if at all. This matches what Cornelius (1998) found in Jalisco in 1995. Since most *ejidatarios* already have other sources of employment and the poorest ones, those most inclined to sell, are already marginalized, it is hard to see that internal buying and selling will result in abandonment of *ejidos* by those who have sold. If outsiders begin to purchase *ejido* parcels, this will create new dynamics and may begin to produce an impetus for migration, whether to the larger cities or to the United States.

I hypothesized above that Salinas’s primary motive in promoting privatization of *ejidos* was his adherence to the doctrines of the free market and his desire to remove impediments to opening markets in Mexico. For Mexico to emerge from its underdeveloped state its economy would have to be freed, unshackled, de-governmented, neoliberalized—in a word, globalized. *Ejidos*, Mexico’s economic dinosaur, would have to be drastically altered—privatized to permit the onward march toward a global economy.

Has privatization of *ejidos* achieved this goal? The answer is, somewhat, as there are now many more certified parcels awaiting willing buyers and sellers inside the *ejidos*. Eight years after the *ejido* reforms became official, clear title to parcels has not been granted in numbers sufficient to provide a gauge for new market activity. Still, whatever the trend reveals in the coming decade, there seems no reason to believe that significant improvement will be made in Mexico’s economic development as a result of the changes. The hoped-for transformation of production will be a long time in coming, for it is difficult to conceive how privatization will unleash new forces of productivity. Parcels of irrigated land leased illegally to commercial growers under the old regime will hardly see enhanced productivity merely because of a rule change. Increased sales of land do not generate wealth. As a friend of mine once said, you can’t build an economy by shining each others’ shoes.

Nor is there any hint of purification under the new system. The old forms of corruption may have been altered, but corruption’s creativity knows no boundaries where it is a national pastime and is usually unaffected by public or private ownership. The withering away of corruption hoped for by advocates of neoliberalism seems a chimera.⁵² The loss by the PRI of the 2000 presidential election and its decline in control of the Mexican Congress will wreak havoc with the traditional network of patronage within the social sector, undoubtedly crippling the PRI’s traditional ability to offer substantial economic favors in turn for electoral support. Perhaps with the decline of this network a corresponding decline in corruption will occur.

In notifying his nation that he was about to alter Mexico’s social sector irrevocably, Carlos Salinas stated “The *ejido* will remain, but we will promote its

transformation" (Moguel 1998, 18). Indeed, after viewing the mixed results of *ejido* privatization, we can be certain that the social sector will hardly disappear, even with a strong majority of the nation's *ejidos* electing to privatize their parcels. There will remain many millions of hectares under *ejido* control, and certainly a majority of Mexico's three million *ejidatarios* will retain their status, including both those who rejected the *Procede*, those who accepted but decline to obtain clear title to their lands, and those who may have title, but still retain rights to common lands. The Mexican government is left with a sizeable remnant of collectively owned lands no less fiscally demanding than prior to the Salinas reforms of 1992. Unless the Fox administration chooses simply to jettison all public responsibility to *ejidos* (and their potential bloc of votes), Salinas's polite accommodation to the ideology of globalization may have left Mexico hardly less socialist than before. The still large and collectivist social sector will continue to constitute a public rejection of neoliberalism. Mexico's land reform struggles are far from over.

Notes

1. *Ejidos* are lands collectively owned by a group of individuals certified by the government. *Comunidades* are (usually) communally-owned lands of indigenous people, many of whom trace their occupancy to prior to the Conquest. The distinction between the two types of collective ownings is for the most part derived from the history of occupancy of the land. For further discussion see Yetman (1998). This paper will discuss *ejidos* only.

2. The *ejidos* are located in central and southern Sonora. They are Benito Juárez, Francisco Serabia, Juan Escutia, Manuel Caudillo, Melchor Ocampo, San Bernardino, San José de Pimas, and Tecoripa.

3. *Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales* (Program of certification of *ejido* rights).

4. For example, the populist and popular Maximiliano "Machi" López in Sonora in 1953. See Calderón Valdés (1985) V, 191. See also the charismatic Rubén Jaramillo in Morelos in 1962 at the instigation of President López Mateos (Krauze 1998, 642).

5. From 1946 to 1964 Mexico under presidents Miguel Alemán, Ruiz Cortines, and Adolfo López Mateos adhered to a policy of import substitution—including imposing high tariffs on imports in order to stimulate and protect national industries. While they did not object to private ownership of the nation's major industries, they adhered to a policy of sharp restrictions on foreign investment, an anathema to advocates of free trade. The attempts at destabilization of Mexico's government by Standard Oil during the Cárdenas administration (1934-1940) were fresh in their memories. While they decried the populist, quasi-socialist bent of Cárdenas, all felt it important politically frequently to raise the specter of foreign domination of Mexico's industrial economy. Beginning with the administration of Gustavo Díaz-Ordaz (1964-1970), a gradual relaxation of rigid adherence to import substitution set in. Miguel de la Madrid's (1982-1988) term in office saw invitations for foreign investors growing sweeter, while import restrictions relaxed. By the time that Salinas took office, Mexico was clearly on the verge of adopting free trade as its official policy.

6. Sheridan (1988) while studying an agrarian community in northwest Sonora in the 1970s, heard private landowners refer to *comuneros* (similar to *ejidatarios*) as "Bolsheviks."

7. This does not apply to *maquiladoras* or assembly plant productions. These operations should not be viewed as investments in the Mexican economy, but rather as appendages of foreign operations adding value by attaching Mexican labor to a product.

8. For a description of the dynamics of this remarkable turn of events see Krauze 1997, 357-362. Article 27 described the *ejido*, detailed the rights of the peasantry, defined the *latifundia* and mandated their expropriation, and placed strict limits on the amount of land individual Mexicans could own.

9. Few estates were expropriated in the state of Sonora. Because of Cárdenas's delicate relationship with the military, he felt he dared not raise the wrath of Sonoran militarists, who were highly influential in the armed forces. Consequently the creation of *ejidos* came relatively late to Sonora. See Hamilton (1982) for an instructive account of how Cárdenas was limited in his options by military threats at home and from abroad.

10. 1 hectare (ha.) equals 2.47 acres.

11. During the presidential campaign of 2000, numerous reports of such vote-buying surfaced in Sonora, affecting several sectors with which I had contact. Myriad violations were reported around the Republic. Vicente Fox, the victorious candidate of the PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional) was not in any position to make such offers, for he lacked both an enthusiastic party mechanism for delivering on promises and funds to buy votes. How he will deal with the *ejido* sector, previously loyal to the PRI and hostile to the PAN (which has strong historical ties to the landed oligarchy and the Church, which opposed Article 27), will make for interesting viewing.

12. Until 2000, the PRI had never lost a presidential election since its formation in the late 1920s and, until 1998, had never failed to enjoy a majority of Mexico's congress.

13. A pristine but arid mountain range, the Sierra Bacha, paralleling the Sea of Cortés, was made into an *ejido* in the 1960s. Not a single permanent water source exists within the range and the only residents were transient fishermen who camped along the coast. Sierra Bacha was the first Sonoran *ejido* to privatize under Procede. The *ejido* rights were sold to one buyer, an entrepreneur who turned the range into a private bighorn sheep hunting preserve.

14. *Ejido* Buaysiacobe in southern Sonora was made up of nearly 800 hectares of prime farmland with ample irrigation water. Each *ejidatario* was allocated 10 ha. *Ejidatarios* routinely and illegally leased their lands to commercial agricultural enterprises, sometimes working as day laborers on their own land. An *ejidatario* informed me that he leased to a commercial grower and spent the payment on beer and taxis.

15. For excellent summaries of Banrural's hegemony over *ejidos*, see Fox (1992, 92-99) and Myhre (1998, 39-56).

16. Otero (1998) and Baitenmann (1998) contain different (but complementary) perspectives on systemic *ejido* corruption.

17. Yet one author warned that ecological catastrophe, including the extinction of many rare and endangered species was inevitable with privatization (Pérez Castañeda 1998, 66).

18. During our research on the process of *ejido* privatization in Sonora, Alberto Búrquez repeatedly spoke with *ejidatarios* who had worked illegally in the United States or who had family members who had worked there illegally. They also explained how other *ejidatarios* would sign their names as attending monthly meetings of the general assembly.

19. For example, one extended family owns 1200 ha. of prime irrigated land in La Costa de Hermosillo Irrigation District. The Constitution limits land ownership to 100 ha. of irrigated land. Division of the farm among relatives makes the holdings legal. Such *latifundias* could be broken up and distributed among *ejidos*, with considerable popular support, but no recent Mexican president had the stomach for such controversy or the political storm it would create among the landed elite of northwest Mexico.

20. See, for instance, the discussion of the various factions within the Salinas administration in Cornelius and Myhre (1998, 4-10).

21. The sad history of Sonoran *ejidos* who chose to remain collective or independent of the government is related in Calderón Valdés (1985) V, 187-191.

22. I spoke with a cowboy *ejidatario* from the state of Jalisco on his parcel in the rugged Sierra San Luis of northeastern Sonora. He revealed that in the 1980s he had been selected from a list to become an *ejidatario*, joining six other men and their families from various origins. None had known the others previously.

23. Research that Jeff Banister, Alberto Búrquez, and I carried out revealed that relatively few Sonoran *ejidatarios* can trace more than a couple of generation of residence on their *ejidos*. Many, especially in southern Sonora (apart from *ejidos* organized around Mayo villages), arrived in the last three decades. It is important to remember that Mexico has greater regional cultural variation than does the United States, with even greater regional biases.

24. Apparently the new Federation Election Institute prevented such widespread fraud in the 2000 presidential election.

25. For different, but related reasons, Salinas is still widely believed to have been involved in the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, his chosen successor as president (his brother Raúl has been incarcerated for his role in an unrelated murder of a public official). The catastrophic devaluation of late-1994 is widely attributed to Salinas's economic policies, including his promotion of NAFTA. Whatever the truth of these beliefs, Salinas is saddled with the public's perception of him as the author of misery for millions of Mexicans.

26. According to officials of the Procuraduría Agraria in Sonora, virtually no *ejidatarios* in Sonora had received *dominio pleno*, that is, full private ownership of their parcel. In 1995 only 3 of 36,7789 parcels in Oaxaca were fully titled (Stephen 1998, 126.)

27. Gómez Carpinteiro (1998, 128-130) observed the Procede operations in an *ejido agrícola* in Puebla, in south-central Mexico. He observed, as did Búrquez and I, that if it achieved nothing else, Procede provided *ejidatarios* with an opportunity to clean up complex, tangled and sometimes festering issues of boundaries, debts, inheritance, obligations, and succession.

28. A different set of rules and regulations applied to *ejidos* affected by urban areas since distinctive conditions arose in these situations. See Jones and Ward (1998) and Martínez Rascón (1998).

29. Nuijten (1995) addressed the ideology of the *Procede* officials and their interactions with *ejidos* and *ejidatarios* in rural Jalisco.

30. Not much credit, though. The bulk of *ejido* parcels in the north without irrigation water had little market value. A 10 ha. pasture chronically overgrazed, as most are, would probably bring less than a thousand dollars in credit. Since agricultural chemicals, inputs, and machinery are more expensive in Mexico than in the United States, it is obvious that an *ejidatario* would not be able to collateralize much with his or her land.

31. A typical *ejido* has 100-200 *socios* and only the village church has seating for more than a dozen or so people. Churches are generally not available for public meetings, so the meetings tend to be held outdoors.

32. The actual increase in property tax revenues was minimal. In *Ejido Tecoripa* the average tax was estimated to be less than \$5 U.S. (see Yetman and Búrquez 1998). If all *ejidatarios* were to privatize, their combined property tax would be less than \$1,000 U.S.

33. A sustained study of the relationship of parcel size to productivity by Netting (1993) led to the opposite conclusion: the world's most productive farmers are smallholders. Large parcel size tends to be negatively correlated with productivity per unit of human labor. Earlier studies by Pimental and Pimental (1975) arrived at the same conclusion.

34. An *ejidatario* in Tecoripa warned me that *Procede* marked the end of *ejidos* in Mexico. The government was getting out of the *ejido* business, he thought. He said this with some regret, but with a stoic acceptance. He was not a whiner. Pérez Castañeda (1998:71-72) argues this point strenuously, but on purely theoretical grounds. He offers no figures of actual sales to bolster his contention.

35. Mexico's Constitution, including a key provision in Article 27, specifically repudiates the *latifundia* (landed estate) by imposing acreage limitations on landowners. These proscriptions, however, are easily evaded by a variety of ruses and have not prevented a rural aristocracy from perpetuating economic and political power in rural Mexico, although surely not in the degree existing prior to 1917.

36. Indeed, it was the extreme concentration of land in the hands of *hacendados* (owners of landed estates) in Mexico that gave rise to Zapata's revolution in the south of Mexico and (to a lesser extent) to Pancho Villa's in the north. For a detailed discussion and class analysis of the pre-revolutionary conditions in the South see Womack (1970).

37. Sonora's most infamous example of foreign intervention this century occurred in 1906 when a strike broke out in the American-owned and operated mine at Cananea, Sonora. The mine owner, American William C. Greene, asked Sonoran governor Rafael Izábal to order Arizona Rangers into Mexico to subdue the strikers. Gov. Izábal obediently complied and the Rangers arrived in Cananea, sixty miles inside Mexican territory, serving as a combination of foreign troops and hired strikebreakers. The Rangers remained in Mexico for no more than a few hours, but their mere presence highlighted Mexico's loss of sovereignty in the presence of such heavy foreign influence (Almada 1990).

38. According to INEGI officials there are 28,058 *ejidos* in Mexico. These had 95,106,066 ha of land distributed among 3,070,906 *ejidatarios*. In Sonora, there are 890 *ejidos* that have 5,967,803 ha of communal land, and 758,926 of individually managed land. In 1988 there were 73,711 *ejidatarios*. Of these 33,775 had individual land parcels (INEGI, personal communication 2000).

39. Many *ejidos* were split by disagreements over parcel boundaries. Even worse, numerous disagreements arose over the decades among *ejidos* concerning the correct boundaries of *ejidos*. In some cases violence broke out as *ejidatarios* from competing *ejidos* battled each other. See, for example, Greenberg (1989) and Gómez Carpinteiro (1998, 136).

40. In addition the government (the Secretary of Agrarian Reform, SRA) simultaneously faced 6,400 unresolved boundary questions, 2,000 applications for *ejido* expansions, and 3,600 judicial findings in favor of *ejidos* that had (as of 1997) not been finally dealt with. The SRA also had pending the adjudication of 41,000 colony lots and 575 applications claiming 14 million hectares of federal lands. (Pérez Castañeda 1998, 49-52). Given the slowness with which each of these proceedings had to be addressed (often official surveys were lacking and informal documents and oral testimony had to be painstakingly recorded), plus the millions of individual parcels to be surveyed, the task seemed an impossible burden for any government, much less one trying to put on a front of neoliberal inclinations. The army of scribes, notaries, court reporters, engineers, advocates, historians, witnesses and bureaucrats required simply to handle the paperwork would tax even the ancient Chinese or Russian systems. The volume of paper needed to complete the task would probably endanger entire forests.

41. Gómez Carpinteiro (1998) interviewed 29 *ejidatarios* in an *ejido* in (apparently) 1995 in the state of Puebla after they had approved *Procede* and received certificates to their lots. None of them indicated any inclination to sell.

42. *Ejidots* are usually of two types, agricultural (the most common) and ranching (more common in the arid and semi-arid north and northwest). Grazing lands are worth far less than agricultural land.

43. *Ejidatarios* who sell their parcels (certificates) retain rights to use common lands (if any) and their urban lot. The market value of land at Benito Juárez is currently inflated by the rumored arrival of water for irrigation. Were the rumors permanently scotched, the value would probably drop by more than fifty percent. For grazing, the land is only marginally productive.

44. San Bernardo lies at the foot of the Sierra Madre and is a distribution center for marihuana and opium raised in the complex of mountains to the east and north. Local intelligence has it that no land sales take place in which drug traffic is not involved. We can assume that few, if any, transactions that take place once the *ejido* dropouts are out of the picture, can be considered as carried out between a willing buyer and willing seller (See Yetman 1995).

45. The availability of water for irrigation is a highly politicized matter. All waters in the region are allocated and ground waters are rapidly being depleted, so surplus water for serving newly opened lands does not exist. Competing *ejidos* and private owners engage in frantic lobbying with the government officials who control the water (from Mexico's National Water Commission of Water) in efforts to persuade them to allocate water to their parcels rather than to others. The assassination of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in 1994 dealt a crippling blow to Sonoran irrigation interests, who assumed that as their favorite son, Sonoran Colosio would cause water to flow north towards Sonora from Sinaloa instead of remaining in Sinaloa where the reservoirs originate. Private groups also finance water conveyance systems, hoping through bribes and other chicanery to influence water delivery decision-makers.

46. This compares with a market value of \$6,000 per acre for irrigated land in Arizona upland desert valleys. The Sonoran fields are capable of 2-3 (sometimes 4) crops per year when water is available, compared with 1-2 in the United States (Gilliland 1999).

47. Usually, though, the credit for machinery and inputs is unavailable, given the unwillingness of Mexican financial institutions to lend to small holders and the high front-end expense of initiating farming on irrigated land. The traditional apology for this lack of credit to the peasantry has been that largeholders are more likely to repay their loans. Such a rationale is suspect, given the high rate of bankruptcy (*carteras vencidas*) and outstanding loans among Sonora's agricultural elite. I visited a privately owned farm in Sonora's La Costa Irrigation District. It consists of more than 1,200 ha. of enormously productive land farmed with the latest and most sophisticated technology. The manager informed me that the family that owned the farm was so deeply in debt that the banks did not seize the farm because it would cover only a small proportion of their indebtedness. The family is also extraordinarily well connected politically. A Banrural official from Ciudad Obregón informed me (rather proudly) that bankruptcy and foreclosure rates for Banrural loans to small holders were lower than the foreclosure rates for loans to commercial operators by Sonoran commercial banks. In 1998 Mexico experienced a crisis of its private banks, many of which threatened bankruptcy unless the federal government bailed them out from massive uncollectable loans. Many of these loans were to commercial agricultural enterprises and were issued without appropriate collateral; often they were "insider" loans. The government established a special agency (FOBAPROA) to bail the banks out. The circumstances were remarkably similar to the savings and loan debacle in the United States a decade earlier. So much for the myth of smaller risks by large private enterprises.

48. *Socios* of Ejido Suaqui Grande in central Sonora voted to divide up all the *ejido*, including the common lands. They made provisions in the survey, however, that guaranteed more or less gate-free access of all parcels to water on the Arroyo Suaqui. No such accommodation was considered in Tecoripa.

49. My colleague Jeff Banister interviewed *ejidatarios* in southern Sonora on this topic in early 2000. One mentioned that potential investors in *ejido* lands newly opened to agriculture had pulled out because of pressure from a former Sonoran governor and high PRI official who wanted the opportunity to go to him and his buddies instead.

50. *Historia* 5:172.

51. The top four states during that period were Guanajuato, Michoacán, Zacatecas, and Jalisco. Guanajuato experienced a particularly devastating drought in 1957, as did Zacatecas and Jalisco. That these states contributed heavily to immigration numbers to the United States, while Sonora, which had apparently experienced seven years of drought, did not, indicates that other factors were affecting Sonora's economy.

52. Baitenmann (1998, 116-118) found in Veracruz *ejidos* that far from decreasing corruption, Procede presented new opportunities for corruption and strengthened anti-democratic proceedings since it weakened the overall internal power of the general assembly.

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