

Milpa Agriculture and Economic Diversification.

Socioeconomic Change in a Maya Peasant Society of Central Quintana Roo, 1900-1990s.

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Abstract [of Ph.D. dissertation]:

The study, based on 18 months of fieldwork (1988-93), is about the Xcacal group in central Quintana Roo. This community of Yucatec-Maya speaking peasants emerged in 1929 within the society of descendants of the Maya rebels who fought the Caste War of Yucatán (1847-1901). Despite the hardship of a prolonged war, the rebel society enjoyed a great degree of self-determination in internal affairs and in their economy. After its defeat in 1901, a slow but irreversible process of economic and cultural change on a village and group level began as a result of the transformation of agrarian structures and the sociocultural system of an isolated - but not homogenous - peasant community. Through economic diversification, this rural economy is shifting from one of production for use to one oriented toward exchange. A basic question raised in the study is how internal and external forces of change interact in the everyday experience and practice of Maya peasant over several decades.

Chapter 1 introduces geographic and historical issues related to the area studied. Next, the theoretical and methodological framework used in data-gathering and analysis follows. Chapter 3 accounts for processes of fission among the rebel Maya; reviews the history of the population and settlements in the area; and traces the formation of the Xcacal group. Then, the scope is narrowed to the Xcacal group and to the state's instruments applied in order to achieve the group's final submission under national rule: the agrarian reform and the introduction of formal education. Chapter 5 is a monographic essay on the history and ethnography of the village of Yaxley. Chapter 6 analyzes the morphology and functions of households as well as the socioeconomic stratification affecting them. Next, both subsistence-oriented (milpa) and market-oriented activities of the production system are described. While in chapter 6 the impact of stratification resulting from the past performance of households is explored, chapter 8 examines how socioeconomic stratification affects present-day household economies. Attention is paid to the mixed subsistence-and-market-oriented production strategies resulting from processes of adaptation to particular constraints and opportunities. This is followed by the conclusion, five appendices and the bibliography.

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