

THE "CACIQUE" OF K'ANKUJK'

*A Study of Leadership and Social Change in Highland Chiapas, Mexico.**

By Henning SIVERTS
University of Bergen.

INTRODUCTION

In an earlier treatment of politics and leadership in Highland Chiapas, it was argued that a certain type of Indian leader is likely to emerge when problems of communication are present in the dealings which take place between Spanish speaking representatives of the Mexican administration and the Indian speaking tribal authorities (Siverts 1964). This form of leadership is based on non-traditional sources of authority and involves, among other things, the acquisition of fluency in the Spanish language, literacy, and a knowledge of *Ladino* (non-Indian) culture generally.

Indians who possess this knowledge are usually younger men who have had an opportunity to attend State or Federal schools, established in the recent past. These men form a literate 'elite'. Their rise to prominence and power may be attributed to a steady (and may be increasing) demand for the service of

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reliable interpreters and intermediaries. Considering the high percentage of monolingualism (60% - 80%) in this area and given the setting of Ladino-Indian political contest and contention, it is not unlikely that great importance be attached to bilingualism and administrative "know-how".

The present essay describes the life history of one such native "broker" who started his political career precisely as an interpreter; and who succeeded in building up a personal power position to the extent that he became the paramount chief (*cacique*) of the Tzeltal speaking K'ankujk' tribe.¹ In order to achieve this remarkable feat, our man sometimes acted as an innovator; and during the process he became instrumental in changing temporarily or permanently certain features of Kan-kujk' political organization.

The main purpose of this paper is to explain in terms of social restrictions, choices and strategies how such a success was made possible. In the course of analysis I hope to throw some light on the general problem of social change, as well as contribute somewhat to the scanty ethnographic literature on the Cancuqueros (v. Bibliography).

My treatment falls into three parts. In the first I shall present an outline of K'ankujk' ethnography with particular emphasis on those aspects of the organizational framework that may be said to form the setting in which our political leader is active. Since we are dealing with process and change, it is obvious that the ethnographic time should be given some consideration. Generally the setting is supposed to represent features of K'ankujk' society some 60 - 70 years ago, i.e. with regard to those particular traits which are supposed to have changed as a result of our man's activities, we will set the time back as far as his early childhood. Description will be in the present tense. The second part surveys the activities of Miguel Ordóñez in chronological order, exposing his strategy in relation to the

¹ Phonemic transcription for Tzeltal is applied in most instances (cf. Slocum 1948). Place names and personal names are transcribed according to the alphabet which has been devised for the use in Indian Schools (cf. Slocum 1953), e.g. K'ankujk' (i.e. /k'ankuhk'/), Oxchujk' (i.e. /ʔosčuhk'/). However, certain names on peoples and other local terms are rendered in their ordinary Spanish spelling, e.g. *Cancuquero* (Indian from "Cancuc" — i.e. K'ankuhk'), *cacique* and *ladino*. Local terms, except Ladino (which is treated as an English word), are italicized throughout.

restrictions presented by the framework. By way of summary and conclusion (Part III) I suggest the possibility that the K'ankujk' case may profitably be viewed in the light of the concept of 'social entrepreneurship' which was introduced in anthropological discussions by Belshaw (1955) and more recently explored with great force by Barth and his associates (1963).

I

THE SETTING

Introductory

The Cancuqueros, numbering some 4000, are a typically Highland Maya people and share many cultural traditions with their close neighbors, the Tenejapanescos and Oxchuqueros.² But while these latter pueblos are connected with the city of San Cristóbal by means of dry season roads and regular truck traffic, K'ankujk' can only be reached by foot or on muleback over steep and rugged trails.

The K'ankujk' main village (*cabecera*) is situated about 70 kilometers northwest of San Cristóbal Las Casas, the geopolitical center of the Highland area. The *cabecera*, which is the ceremonial and governmental center of the Cancuqueros, comprises a square with the church on its east side and the town hall (*cabildo*) on the west side. The surrounding village consists of thatched-roofed huts with walls of standing poles lashed together; a number of houses are mud-plastered.

Like a medieval fortress on its mound the ceremonial center may be eyed hours away where it proudly rests on a terracelike extension of the eastern mountain range, which, at this point projects out into the Chacté valley. From the village one has a

² Field work among the Cancuqueros, conducted off and on from November 1961 to April 1962, was supported by a grant from the Norwegian Research Council.

Besides my own material, I have made extensive use of the accurate and sensitive report written by Calixta Guiteras Holmes in 1946, based on field work carried out in 1945 (v. Bibliography). I have included a number of footnotes, highly relevant to the argument, which are verbatim quotations from her manuscript.

perfect view of the whole tribal territory, including the main valley with its long slopes as well as the tributary valleys, minor hills and ridges.

Subsistence

Subsistence is based on maize and bean cultivation. The fields are prepared by the slash and burn technique. In addition to the staples, squash, fruits and vegetables are grown. While small quantities of corn and fruits are brought to the local Sunday market for sale, the basic cash crop is chile. Dried chile is, for the most part, carried in net bags to the market in San Cristóbal, but a smaller amount is locally sold to Ladino dealers. Cotton is still grown in K'ankujk', but does not count as a cash crop. Pigs are raised for sale and sold to travelling merchants.

Settlement Pattern

At least some 700 Indians live permanently in the main village.³ Of these quite a few families possess a second house close to their farming lands, i.e. in one of the many hamlets (*parajes*) which are dispersed all over the tribal area. The majority of the population inhabits these small sub-communities where life goes on largely independent of events and activities which take place in the *cabecera* and the outside world.

To the main settlement people come in large numbers occasionally for Sunday markets and the tribal fiestas and ceremonies.

This pattern differs somewhat from that of Oxchujk' where few Indians apart from the tribal authorities keep a house in the ceremonial center; and even these Indians return more or less regularly, during their term of office, to their respective *parajes* to take care of their families and tend the corn fields (Siverts 1960).⁴

³ This figure is a rough estimate. Mrs. Guiteras Holmes took a census of the village center in 1945, counting 174 houses of which 133, comprising 508 persons, were inhabited when the census was taken (1946:8). In 1962 the figure for the entire population, including all the hamlets, was stated to be 3800 by the Ladino secretary.

⁴ According to the typology of settlement patterns suggested by Sol Tax (1937), K'ankujk' would be termed 'intermediate' ('Type III').

Ladino-Indio and Local Community vs. National Society.

Why so few Oxchuqueros should prefer to stay in their ceremonial center and so many Cancuqueros choose to stick to it, is a question that demands attention, since the two situations seem rather similar in other respects.

The two pueblos are dissimilar, however, with regard to ethnic composition: Oxchujk' exemplifies the Ladino-dominated Indian *cabecera* while K'ankujk' is one of the tribal areas where conspicuously few Ladinos are ever seen. For many years circumstances have not been strikingly favorable to Ladino settlement and exploitation within the K'ankujk' district: so far no Ladino has been given permission by the Indian authorities to purchase even a house site. The four Ladino families which, at the present time, are dwelling in the village center, are under the obligation to renew annually their residence permit. The contract leaves them right to erect a shack and a sunshade for the purpose of retail trade, muleteering and pigtrading. In addition to these traders, three Ladino officials have their residence in the village: the Municipal Agent, the Fiscal Agent of the State, and the schoolteacher.

The Indians of K'ankujk' have so far succeeded in preventing Ladinos from settling down on a permanent basis which may have encouraged a continuous Indian settlement in the tribal center.⁵ Likewise the Cancuqueros have managed to reduce ethnic contact to a minimum, the implication of which is a relatively high percentage of monolingualism and a widespread ignorance of Ladino culture and Mexican administration generally.

But in order to retain this state of affairs and its concomitant autonomy, administrative business and political negotiations must be maintained and perhaps even intensified. Consequently, the tribal leaders will seek ways of dealing with the Mexican authorities which are thought to maximize ethnic identity and integration (i.e. organizational *status quo*) and minimize Ladino influence and power (privileges and administrative decisions). One natural solution would be, within the framework of the tribal political organization, to provide for the constant presence of loyal personnel which command the technical expertise

⁵ Variations in settlement pattern and their relation to ecological, demographic and political factors are discussed in Siverts 1965a.

requisite for successful diplomacy. But, as we shall presently see, the formal political and administrative organization of K'ankujk' does not comprise institutionalized diplomacy.

Outline of K'ankujk' Tribal Organization

Ethnic identification is a question of membership in corporate kin groups. The Cancuqueros are shareholders in estates: they have usufruct to tracts of land owned by patrilineal descent groups, very similar in form to those described for Oxchujk' (Siverts 1960). These corporations are recognizable through their names and location within the tribal territory. Only very few of these names are of Spanish origin; most of them are Indian (Tzeltal) plant and animal names. Claims to membership and hence corporate rights (*jus in rem*) are legally based on name and residence only. In practice sons live in their fathers' homes and will get their shares of the state as soon as their own families of procreation have grown to the size which seems incompatible with the continued maintenance of a single domestic unit of production and consumption.

Such a landowning, patrilineal corporation I have chosen to call *clan* for short.⁶

Clans are organized in larger constellations: each clan appears as a unit in two different kinds of combinations or groupings. This are:

1) The exogamous union or "club", which is a clan cluster with a common name and acknowledged common origin, expressed among other things in myths (Guiteras Holmes 1947). There are three such "clan brotherhoods" or *phratries* today, viz. *č'ihk'*, *čeheb*, and *?ihk'a*.

2) The ceremonial and administrative association of clans, which is a dual division of the tribe, cutting the population in two halves or *moieties*. These are called *?alan kolehibal* and *?ahk'ol kolehibal*. According to Guiteras Holmes, 54 clans belong to *?ahk'ol* and 38 to *?alan* (1947:6).⁷

⁶ 'Linaje' (lineage) is the term adopted by Mrs. Guiteras Holmes for this group, a usage I believe ought to be avoided in order to preclude confusion with the African type of ramifying lineage systems.

⁷ There exist spatial divisions by the names *?alan* ('below') and *?ahk'ol*

The clans are distributed among phratries and moieties in the following manner (ibid):

<i>Phratries</i>	<i>Moiety I</i> <i>?ahk'ol</i>	<i>Moiety II</i> <i>?alan</i>
A. <i>č'ihk'</i>	19 clans	14 clans
B. <i>čeheb</i>	13 clans	18 clans
C. <i>?ihk'a</i>	22 clans	6 clans

In addition to these groupings, clans are spatially arranged. They form organized neighborhoods or sub-communities. These settlements may consist of clans associated with both the two moieties and more than one phratry. Such a neighborhood or hamlet I have referred to above as a *paraje*.

Moieties and phratries provide the organizational basis for selection and nomination of administrative personnel and political leaders. The tribal government is composed of two identical bodies of offices, representing the two moieties. Within each moiety representatives from the three phratries alternate.

Offices (*cargos*, Tz.: *?at'el*) are divided into several categories: besides a clearcut distinction between junior and senior offices, i.e. between executives and decision makers, there is a vertical separation of ritually important sponsorship offices and the 'civil servants'. A man alternates between these two kinds of offices during his whole career until he reaches the peak late in life when he 'retires' as a *principal* (Tz.: *rensipal*) and most respected man. A *principal* may, however, be called upon to serve on a four years' term as *cabildo de justicia* and member of the 'board of leading *principales*', which is the decision making body.⁸

Two of the previously mentioned Ladino officials (the *Agente* and *Fiscal*) are in a sense included in this organizational

('above'), but membership in the moieties seldom corresponds to present territorial distribution of individuals.

⁸ For a detailed description of similar office hierarchies, v. Nash 1958, Siverts 1960 & 1965a. In a forthcoming publication I will describe the various offices met in K'ankujk' and the manner of recruitment.

framework. They represent the outside world, not as diplomats but as the legal representatives of the Mexican constitution and administrative divisions. They act on behalf of the municipality government (*Ayuntamiento Constitucional*) in Ocosingo which is the town on which K'ankujk', in the capacity of 'subject community' (*Agencia Municipal*) is dependent.

While the township of Ocosingo has administrative jurisdiction over a large area of which K'ankujk' and other Indian 'subject communities' form parts, both San Cristóbal Las Casas and the State capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, make their impact on internal political matters through administrative decisions concerning the Highland area or the whole State; and letters and documents circulate almost daily between K'ankujk' and the three centers mentioned.

Since the limits of jurisdiction are illdefined at all levels, rivalries seem inevitable, which is expressed by the fact that Indian authorities, on their own account, send delegations directly to the Governor in Tuxtla in order to obtain a favor or lodge a complaint against the municipality administration.

The Indian authorities act as the tribal government and represent the Cancuqueros as a corporation. They also form a judicial body or court; and as such makes inquiries, arrest and imprisonment suspects. Serious cases are, however, liable to be handed over to the Mexican administration, i.e. the local Ladino Agent in the first place. Another question is whether practice accord with theory; which it usually does not, so even cases of manslaughter may not be recorded at all. Likewise, in dealings concerning the tribe vis-à-vis the municipality, the Agent is supposed to formulate the final versions of decisions or claims made by the Indian leaders. Actually there exist few subjects on which the Ladino Agent could not try to make his influence felt.

Still there is one particular field of activity which is exempt from his immediate interest, and in which he seldom intervenes, viz., ceremonial life. The fiesta calendar and all what it involves of organizing and supervision like e.g. the nomination of sponsorship candidates, is exclusively the concern of the *cabildos de justicia*.

Neighborhoods are, at the period under consideration, represented by locally residing old men and *principales* who enjoy

a certain amount of respect due to age, experience and previous tribal service. They are "wise men" and act as informal "headmen" of their respective clans. In contrast young men have little saying in local affairs; although in certain places representatives of the younger generation, who have acquired a rudimentary knowledge of the Spanish language and Ladino way of life, act as interpreters and go-betweens; and as such they have made themselves useful and hence more respected than their age-mates. Some of these men are emerging as spokesmen and embryonic leaders. Indeed, a few are even called *caciques*.⁹ Such "strongmen" are usually eloquent and forceful speakers who have already started their tribal service in the lower echelons. Their knowledge of a foreign language enhance their importance and thus provide the political platform of negotiation and mediation.

Summary and Analysis of Setting

K'ankujk' is a fairly isolated community, protected from the outside world by its relative inaccessibility. This may leave K'ankujk' a less desirable community for permanent settlement on the part of Ladinos; though we know that this geographical factor has not effectively prevented foreigners from trying to settle down in the village center. Their failure is at least partly a result of Indian measures taken to counteract any move which, to the Cancuqueros, seems directed against their sovereignty: experience from other communities (i.e. Oxchujk' and Tenejapa) indicates that settlement by Ladinos may involve infiltration and partial loss of political control.

Traditional *milpa* type agriculture (slash and burn) is the main economic pursuit. Although farming conditions are far more favorable in K'ankujk' than in Oxchujk', surplus is strictly limited (cf. Siverts 1965b). Corn may be sold locally in very small amounts, and this sale will serve to even out seasonal

⁹ From Pineda's account (1888) we know that both K'ankujk' and Oxchujk', and later Chamula, could muster large armies headed by native "*generales*" who emerged during periods of general disturbance and uproar as temporary warlords. These 'generals' were informal leaders, forceful 'chiefs,' whose shortlived claim to power was based on certain personality characteristics and abilities judged highly important for the task at hand. However, this might be in ethnographic detail, we may safely state that some sort of *cacicazgo* (*cacique*-ship) was a well-known phenomenon in tribal life.

and/or individual variations in production. Most of the surplus production of corn is consumed by the landless Ladino merchants who live in the village center on temporary terms. These same Ladinos buy the pigs and the chile. Neither pigs nor chile are products which lend themselves easily to commercialized enterprises under the present circumstances:—

In order to specialize in domestic animals like pigs, a considerable corn supply is needed; and a concentration on the cultivation of chile would require larger tracts of arable land as well as a complimentary, intensified corn production to be profitable. The reason for this is that poor communications make it necessary to continue cultivation of the staple product in the same locality as the cash crop. Likewise, unsatisfactory connections between site of production and market reduce the probability that even an Indian of exceptional imagination should feel attracted to start an economic enterprise of an agricultural nature.

Communications, though admittedly an important restriction on certain kinds of economic activities, are obviously not a sufficient condition to block completely any such attempt, unless other factors operate in the same general direction. If for instance corn production could be raised 50% by investing only 50% more seed and 25% more work, distance and bad roads would have been less restrictive. However, the present system of land allocation does not encourage individual enterprises which involve the encroachment upon the shareholders' rights in the total state, the clan-territory; and it seems obvious that the basic premise of such a corporation is status equality among its members, which implies equal shares and similar ways of exploiting their allotted plots.

Isolation and clan-usufruct combined would therefore produce a restrictive situation as far as agricultural production and closely related enterprises are concerned, but the same two factors may turn out to be less restrictive on activities of a different nature. Isolation by itself, has, as we have noticed, certain effects on inter-ethnic communications which, in their turn, may offer "openings" for gifted politicians who, incidentally, are able to muster the "know-how" or expertise considered necessary to fill the gap.

Successful exploitation of such an opening or opportunity depends on how these particular skills and social claims are

related to it; and the K'ankujk' framework of organization determines the ways and means by which an individual may legitimately utilize his special knowledge. For example: bilingualism cannot be converted directly into traditional authority positions since, in K'ankujk', power and privileges are attained through a successful passing of a rigid hierarchy of *cargos*, none of which is defined with reference to language training and alphabetization. In fact, the only knowledge needed to complete a typical K'ankujk' career is the art of performing at the big ceremonies. Otherwise, age and experience parallel the moving from one step on the ladder to the next; and age is an important requirement for informal leadership on the local level, i.e. "headmen" for clans.

However, precisely at the local level, a special "know-how" as bilingualism may, under certain circumstances, be acknowledged as an alternative qualification to age. Hence a younger man may add a number of years to his age by acting as interpreter, and consequently he is often addressed as "respected old man" (*mamtik*). But the word *cacique* is also frequently heard, and this term may have come into more general use due to the discrepancy between the physical appearance and the role played by the young interpreters. Also, lack of unambiguous criteria with regard to age and the exact amount of "know-how", imply competition between pretenders to this kind of leadership. By the same token, incipient rallying of supporters will take place.

At the tribal level, interpreters are called upon when occasion arises; but, as already indicated, they cannot make direct use of their expertise to obtain privileges. Even a *cacique* is not *ipso facto* a tribal authority, a decision maker. If he wants a power position he will have to start from the beginning and expose himself to the additional expenses and troubles which a political career involves; and such a career inevitable imposes upon a man to act as "sponsor" (*kaptan*) for a tribal ceremony, i.e. he has to give a feast of merit whereby money, liquour and food are converted into ceremonial prestige which is a prerequisite to reach the next higher 'civil servant' post in the hierarchy.

Such an investment is the concern of the incumbent, his immediate family and the network of relatives in which he happens to find himself. Not only is an individual dependent upon his relatives for their material support and cooperation, his

nomination is the result of compromising between his superiors who, by definition, are either "clan-brothers", "phratry-companions", "moiety-brothers" or affinals. In other words: A man's position and his exercise of authority is highly restricted by a multiplex network of personal relations and criss-crossing loyalties. There is, therefore, in K'ankujk' society, little room for meaningful social interaction, be it political or economical, outside of the complex framework of ramifying kinship ties with concomitant obligations.

Thus an Indian with political pretensions is subject to principally two kinds of restrictions:

- 1) The channelizing effect of the *cargo*-alternation system (i.e. "sponsorship" vs. "civil service").
- 2) Restraints brought about by overlapping social entities and involute social relations.

In contrast, the Ladino merchant and Mexican official operate within the tribal territory without even considering these restrictions. Their sources of power and the sanctions governing their actions are partly to be found outside the domain of the Cancuqueros; which is the main reason why relations between Ladino and Indian tend to be problematic.

II

THE CAREER OF MIGUEL ORDOÑEZ

In 1962 Miguel Ordóñez gave a party celebrating his 60th anniversary, which was a rather unusual event in a society where people seldom keep record of their own age and never give birthday parties.

However, Miguel is a rather unusual man. Already at the time Mrs. Guiteras Holmes did her field work in 1945, Miguel was recognized as *the* political leader of K'ankujk' with a *de facto* power surpassing that of the tribal council (*cabildos de justicia*) which he actually controlled. Thus he had managed to reduce its political importance by virtually transforming it to and administrative tool in his hands.

What follows is a short account of some of the major steps in the career of this remarkable man which I consider relevant in

order to understand how and why Miguel became the paramount chief of K'ankujk' with unquestionable authority.

As a young boy Miguel attended the local, Federal school for a period of about 7 months, which apparently was sufficient time to acquire a preliminary acquaintance with the Spanish language and the art of writing and reading. According to our previous analysis of the setting, the youngster had "added years to his age" by this successful result of a spell of instruction, or in more generalized terms: Miguel had acquired an asset in the form of expertise.

At the age of 14, his expertise was put to good use by the Ladino agent (José Llave) who appointed Miguel assistant clerk (*juez de registro civil*). As far as I know, Miguel received no salary for his service; but while he saved the agent for a lot of tedious work keeping track of births, marriages and deaths, Miguel himself accumulated experience in bureaucratic procedures. At the same time he got an extra opportunity to practice the Spanish Language. In sum: Miguel converted expertise into a "clerk" position which in its turn aided him in gaining additional "know-how".

From this time on Miguel was frequently asked to act as interpreter and assist his fellow tribesmen in their dealings with Mexican authorities. Even the tribal leaders sought his advice and called upon him to stand by in all matters concerning taxes and their delivery. He was asked to go along with Indian deputations all the way to Tuxtla in order to act as interpreter in negotiations with the Governor and his administration.¹⁰ It was said about Miguel that he became an expert negotiator. Informants told Mrs. Guiteras Holmes (1946 that not only did he act as interpreter, but he also served as ambassador and attorney general. In other words: Miguel had become the intermediary between the tribal leaders and the Ladino administration. He was now the key person, the one everybody had to consult in cases where Mexican "law and order" was involved.

Still a young boy of 16-17 years he was appointed "clerk" (*escribano*) - "in order to serve my pueblo" as he himself expressed it to Mrs. Guiteras Holmes (1946: 72). However, in

¹⁰ Miguel told Mrs. Guiteras Holmes that he took 22 trips to Tuxtla Gutierrez, which in those days meant 5 days trip on foot each way and 3 days stay in the State capital (1946:72).

taking on him the role as interpreter and accepting offices which emphasized precisely this outlandish nature of his expertise and tasks, he exposed himself to sanctions of principally two different kinds:—

1) The *caciques* would identify Miguel as a competitor and try to stop him by all means. It is reasonable to think that he was considered exceptionally dangerous since he had started his career on the tribal level where he had received official recognition by the Indian and Ladino authorities alike.

2) In performing duties which put him outside the routine activities and ordinary career of most Cancuqueros, Miguel would be subject to suspicion for grim motives, witchcraft or of being a renegade and a Ladino servant.

In order to tackle these dilemmas, Miguel chose to follow a strategy of paradoxes:

Dilemma (1) had to do with men of essentially his own caliber and experience (though much older), striving for a non-routinized power positions based on a non-traditional platform; and Miguel permitted himself to launch a rather non-conventional campaign against his opponents: he gathered a group of young friends around him, and shortly afterwards emerged as leader for a gang of gun-men, ready to exterminate the *caciques*. At that time there seem to have existed two powerful and feared *caciques*, one in each moiety. Marcos Santis Lul of the *?ahk'ol* moiety was soon forced to flee the pueblo for never to return. Lorenzo Martínez Nuhk'ul of the *?alan* moiety was slain with machete.

After this initial victory, two other pretenders appeared on the scene, one called Velasco Oxom and another by the name of Yave, both members of Miguel's own moiety (*?alan*). Several armed encounters took place where some men, said to be friends and supporters of Oxom and Yave were killed.¹¹ Miguel and his men had the upper hand, but hostilities were not brought to an end before Manuel Castellanos, director of Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas, through diplomatic intervention effected an

¹¹ The few homicides which actually occurred seem not to have disrupted daily life any more than the killing which had taken place at other times, associated with witchcraft accusations or for other reasons. Nor were Mexican authorities involved, though, it is true, that Erasto Urbina, then President in San Cristobal Las Casas, once intervened without serious implications (Guiteras Holmes 1946:68), cf. also the Manuel Castellano case below.

arrangement which put Ordóñez in the position of *Presidente* and Oxom as *síndico*. Sitting together in council for one year, "chatting and drinking, they became friends" as Esteban Santis P'in put it (Guiteras Holmes 1946: 69).

These fights were said to be affairs exclusively the concern of *caciques*, and neither the *principales* nor the other authorities interfered or took active part. It is also interesting to note that neither phratry nor moiety affiliations seem to have had any influence on recruitment of the respective groups in opposition.

Data on these encounters and conflicts are naturally somewhat scanty and deficient in detail. It is therefore difficult to evaluate fully the relative merit of the military aspect of the various operations. What emerges from the report given by Guiteras Holmes (1946) and my own bits of information from 1962 is a picture of Miguel as a more inventive strategist than his enemies. It seems like Miguel was able to take his foes by surprise in a large number of cases: he delivered sudden blows with the help of superior force and by means of a more effective control of information.¹² His superiority may be accounted for, however, when we consider the assertions by Miguel himself and other informants that he had access to a standing retinue ready to be put into action any moment the leader saw fit. His personal following numbered at least 20 men who were responsible to the "boss" and only to him. It was said that Miguel always had a body-guard wherever he went¹³ and that his friends alternated in working on his milpa.¹⁴

¹² Miguel himself stated that his victory was due to the fact that he and his men were better armed: "Miguel dice que sus hombres vencieron a los de Oshom porque tenían mejores armas" (Guiteras Holmes 1946:73).

¹³ "Miguel nunca va solo a ninguna parte. Nunca lleva atada a la cintura la red con la botella para el trago: es un Regidor o inclusive el Presidente mismo quien camina junto a él llevando su botella. Miguel explica que no la puede llevar porque lleva su 'Miti-hueso' (Smith and Wesson revolver). Una vez que Miguel me acompaña a un entierro, pocos momentos después vienen 7 hombres, autoridades del cabildo que según él le vienen a buscar y a cuidar." (Guiteras Holmes 1946:73).

¹⁴ "Luego me cuenta (Esteban Santis P'in) cómo Miguel nunca trabaja, que puede quedarse en el pueblo todo el tiempo que quiere porque tiene muchos hombres que limpian su milpa, primero, dice que son 40 hombres, y luego que son 60, y cuando insisto en el número me dice entonces varias veces que son 20. Que Miguel no les paga nada, sólo les da comida. Los recluta de todas partes.

Summing up, we may venture upon the following general statement: Miguel must have accomplished to establish an exclusive relationship with the members of his chosen gang which implied a direct personal tie of "leader-follower" on the one hand and "gangmember" on the other, i.e. to be effective the members of this temporary corporation must have committed themselves to a transaction with Miguel which implied undivided support in return for which they expected or were promised whatever benefits might accrue to them from a successful undertaking. Furthermore, exclusiveness does also, in this context, comprise a reduction of the effect of the underlying network of multiplex and ramifying kinship and friendship, which paradoxically enough, must have constituted the original basis of recruitment.

Dilemma (2) did not require a militant strategy but an active manipulation of symbols. It also involved a question of economic solvency or rather convertibility between Miguel's different spheres of action.

In contrast to his less successful opponents Miguel chose to participate actively in ceremonial life which, above anything, would indicate vis-à-vis his tribesmen where Miguel belonged. But what is even more important, ceremonial participation and ceremonial sponsorship in particular, is a traditional requirement for any social career in K'ankujk'; and in contradistinction to his rivals, Miguel followed a conspicuously typical career involving all the most prestigious sponsorship *cargos*. Undoubtedly he had made deliberate use of his increasing influence in order to obtain some of these offices. According to my own records brought up to date in 1962, the amount of *cargos* of various categories — "civil" as well as "religious" — discharged by Miguel could only be matched by the *principal primero* of ?alan moiety who was then a very old man.

With respect to the solvency aspect, it appears that Miguel besides converting expertise into offices, also had received profit in the form of food, liquor and other valuables which could

Estos hombres nunca son llamados a prestar otros servicios en la Agencia, como por ejemplo: servir de Mayores cargando agua y buscando leña, llevando mensajes a otras partes, yendo como cargadores, o a San Cristóbal cuando desde allá se pide una comisión para cualquier cosa, y me puso por ejemplo los hombres que hace unos días trajeron de esa ciudad unos tubos de hierro que debían llevar a Ocosingo para la canalización del agua." (Guiteras Holmes 1946:70-71).

then be reinvested into ceremonial offices.¹⁵ After his retinue had become established, profit was, in addition, gained in the form of labor. Guiteras Holmes (1946) tells that it was considered a better deal to work for Miguel than serve in the *cabildo* and wait upon the Ladino agent and the Indian authorities.¹⁶

Having solved these dilemmas, Miguel had to face a constant problem of maintenance, i.e. he had put himself in a position of negotiation, but in order to stay put, he would be forced to fulfill his end of the "contract" with his supporters and preferably offer new opportunities.

Already in 1945 Miguel was considered the "strong man" in K'ankujk'. In the thirties he had passed several important ceremonial *cargos* and in 1942 he was appointed *Presidente* for the first time. It is significant that when the office of *suplente de agente* was introduced about 1945, Miguel was the first incumbent. Later, in 1958, when the position of *agente* was separated from the office of secretary, and it was decided that an Indian ought to be considered as candidate, Miguel was appointed.

But it was in the capacity of influential man, the "chief of the Cancuqueros", that he was addressed by outside authorities. It was well known by the Ladino officials in both Ocosingo, San Cristóbal and Tuxtla that if they wanted to deal with the Cancuqueros they had better approach Miguel directly. Guiteras Holmes (1946) gives some illustrations of how representatives, coming to K'ankujk' on different missions, always asked first for Miguel and then, with his permission, started negotiating with the other Indian authorities and with the agent (later secretary).

Even before he had reached the summit and recognized as paramount chief, he had used his increasing influence to help friends and loyal supporters to win power positions and privileges. After his personal position had become established, which followed his entrance into the category of *principal*, Miguel

¹⁵ "Todos regalan trago a Miguel, muchas veces se les ve llegar a su casa portando el obsequio." (Guiteras Holmes 1946:71).

¹⁶ "Tuve la impresión de que trabajar para Ordóñez no era cosa onerosa sino muy al contrario. Esteban habla como si se tratara de una situación de privilegio." (Guiteras Holmes 1946:71).

was free to distribute power positions. However, his personal power must have been formidable already in 1945 when he obviously controlled information to the extent that informants were somewhat reluctant to provide Guiteras Holmes with certain data concerning Miguel and his doings. She tells us that her informants were constantly on the watch in case Miguel or a close friend of his should be around.¹⁷ If he made systematic use of "spies" we do not know, but an example from 1945 shows how Miguel outwitted a rival by the name Peres Ch'ihk' who had not kept entirely to himself that he had "sentenced Miguel to death". Miguel forestalled him by naming him *Presidente* - "in order to supervise him", as it was said (*ibid.*). Guiteras Holmes has a general statement to the same effect:

"the teacher tells me that when Miguel has an enemy or knows of a person whom he wants to keep under his control, he will appoint him to presidency, etc. —to keep him close by" (*ibid.*: 58).

This last point also demonstrates that Miguel seemingly was in a position not only to allocate power positions to followers, but to people who might turn out to be security risks as well.

In 1962 Miguel did not himself occupy a traditional office, but still he was recognized as the "chief" (Tz.: *?ahwal*, Sp.: *cacique*, *jefe*), and he was simply addressed and referred to as *mantik Miguel* ("respected old man" Miguel).

It turned out that while all ordinary offices were filled in the traditional way by nominating candidates from the two moieties respectively and with a regular alternation between phratries, none of the important (and higher) offices, be they ceremonial or "civil", were ever actually filled without a previous consultation with Miguel. In other words: even members of the board of decision makers (*principales primeros* or *cabildos de justicia*) had been placed in their offices through the direct or indirect working of Miguel. In a sense therefore, the *principales* had changed character from a board of decision

¹⁷ "Viviana Terat tiene miedo de hablar de ciertas cosas y aún de confeccionarme una camisa de cancuqueros sin que yo pida permiso para ello a Miguel. Aun cuando se habla de instituciones pasadas, se vigilan los caminos y las puertas de la casa para estar seguros de que nadie lo oye y de que Miguel no entrará." (Guiteras Holmes 1946:73).

makers to a board of high ranking administrators the task of which was to give solemn rubber stamp approbation to decisions announced by Miguel.

Today the question is asked among the tribesmen: Who is going to take over when Miguel is too old to govern?

Rumors are circulating about candidates. If it really is true that people expect somebody to *fill* the *cacicazgo* (the *cacique*-ship) it must mean that Miguel has been responsible for introducing a new *de jure* position. At least some routinization seems to have taken place: people have become accustomed to the headman, Miguel has made it an institution.

III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the presentation of the career of a political leader in the pueblo of K'ankujk', I have tried to show how choices and strategies are related to the restrictions and opportunities offered by a particular social and ecological setting.

My argument may be summarized thus:

Isolation and other marketing problems combined with a devastating subsistence technique and an unflexible system of land allocation constitute a constellation of factors which is likely to limit surplus production and impede certain kinds of economic enterprises.

However, in a social context of ethnic conflict and inherent problems of mutual understanding, one 'niche' or opportunity seems more open for exploitation than others, viz, that of interpreter and intermediary.

Bilingualism and knowledge of bureaucratic procedures will, under such circumstances, become an asset which, in its turn, may be invested in certain restricted undertakings and fields of activity.

Since special service, like helping a man write a letter, is likely to prompt or elicit small gifts in the form of liquor, food and even money, such expertise may be the source of an irregular and moderate income.

Apparently bilingualism and literacy were appreciated by Ladinos and Indians alike; and both categories were willing to offer positions and commissions in order to control or share this expertise.

Hence expertise could be converted into material benefits as well as positions. It turned out that Miguel also was able to acquire additional expertise while discharging his clerk positions and special commissions, the implication of which is a spiral of conversion characterized by the steady accumulation of expertise.

Profit in the form of food, liquor and money can only be consumed or converted into ceremonial prestige, which in its turn may be converted into *de jure* authority or power position. Miguel chose to invest whatever he had on sponsorship offices which would open the gates for traditional 'civil' authority.

However, having started on a platform which was illdefined in the traditional framework, as a source of authority, rivals questioned Miguel's claims to extend his field of influence, which resulted in armed encounters.

Economic as well as political activity take place within the frame of a ramifying kinship network. Crossing loyalties are therefore likely to disfavor corporate actions which require undivided support to one and only one person, unless this person has himself taken precautions to reinforce the "leader-follower" relationship at the sacrifice of the multiplex kinship network. If an organisational innovation is involved in the career of Miguel Ordóñez, it must be exactly at this point.

His gang of "gun-men" and his expertise put Miguel in a position whereby he could check rivals and offer to supporters advantages like e.g. positions, friendship, expert assistance, and small amounts of material benefits. Thus Miguel managed to exploit to the fullest amount the state of dependence on his expert knowledge in which Ladinos and Indians alike found themselves.

In the analysis of this material I have made little use of an explicit terminology, though I have consistently applied words like "enterprise", "restrictions", "assets", etc., which represent concepts and variables in the theoretical model for analysis of "entrepreneurial activities" presented by Fredrik Barth and his associates in 1963. Clearly, the theoretical position expressed and the argument pursued in the present essay

are greatly influenced by the ideas which are formulated in the publication mentioned.¹⁸

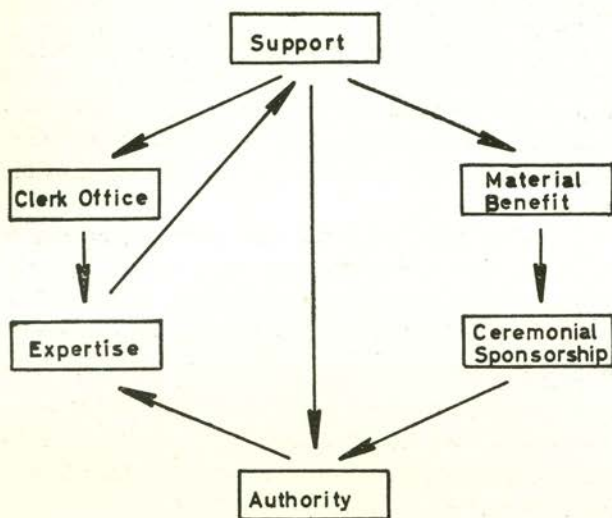


Fig.: Circles of conversion

A diagrammatical representation of the circles or spirals of conversion whereby Miguel Ordóñez has managed to build up a personal power position.

There are essentially three such circles:

(1) The conversion of expertise into generalized support, which is thereupon turned into 'clerk office.'

(2) Generalized support may also be converted directly into generalized authority (power), here: 'gang-leadership.'

(3) From generalized support derives material benefit which is convertible into ceremonial sponsorship and authority, here: 'traditional office' and *principal* status.

However, I feel it necessary to state that this study is not intended as a rigid exercise in the use of the entrepreneurial model, but that it represents a preliminary description and analysis of certain interesting developments in Highland Chiapas which show similarities to situations in other places described in terms of entrepreneurial activity.

¹⁸ Cf. also Belshaw 1955 and Geertz 1963.

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