SETTLEMENT CHANGE IN SPANISH AMERICA: THE DYNAMICS OF *CONGREGACIÓN* IN THE CUCHUMATÁN HIGHLANDS OF GUATEMALA, 1541–1821

W. GEORGE LOVELL

Queen's University

To facilitate the conversion of Indians to Christianity and to create centralized pools of exploitable labour, the policy of *congregación* in Spanish America aimed at producing an orderly pattern of nucleated settlement that contrasted greatly with the predominantly random and scattered arrangement of pre-Hispanic times. Although the imprint of *congregación* persists to this day, the operation of the policy in the Cuchumatán highlands of Guatemala was not without its failures and frustrations. A review of mid-sixteenth-century *congregación*, and of the reasons behind the subsequent process of settlement dispersal in the Cuchumatán region, forms the focus of discussion.

Afin de faciliter la conversion au christianisme des Indiens, et dans le dessin de regrouper et de centraliser la main-d'œuvre exploitable, la politique de la *congregación* dans l'Amérique hispanique visait à produire un modèle ordonné de repeuplement nucléé. Cela contrastait fortement avec la distribution sans ordre des populations clairsemées de l'époque pré-hispanique. Quoique des traces de la *congregación* persistent encore aujourd'hui, cette politique ne se réalisa pas sans un certain nombre d'échecs et de frustrations dans les Altos Cuchumatanes du Guatemala. Notre discussion se centre sur une revue de la *congregación* du milieu du seizième siècle, et traite les raisons qui motivèrent le processus de la dispersion subséquente de la population dans cette région.

'We came here to serve God and the King, and also to get rich' (Bernal Díaz del Castillo, 1492–1584). This remark of Díaz's may not embrace all the motives that best explain the pattern of Spanish conquest and colonization in the New World, but it reflects an awareness of three important forces that shaped the fabric of life in the American colonies of Spain: the church, the state, and the ambition of individuals to attain wealth. Collectively, these forces were responsible for executing a primary objective of Spanish imperial desires: the transfer, establishment, and cultivation of what Foster has called 'the Spanish way of life.' The Spanish quest for empire, in which an integrated philosophy about God, sovereign, state, and man dictated every action and deed, aimed at nothing less than the creation in the New World of a utopia modelled on Spanish principles of religion, government, and culture.[1] The failure to create such a utopia in the islands of the Caribbean served only to increase the desire of Spain to achieve its goal on the American mainland. By the early 1540s, when the military subjugation of most of the Indian peoples of Mexico and Central America had been successfully accomplished, Spain had already over fifty years' experience as an imperial nation. During this time, two major attempts were made to design codes of legislation for the administration of Spanish possessions in the New World. In both the Laws of Burgos of 1512 and the New Laws of 1542, Spanish ideals of order, unity, and just government were foremost. One important means of attempting to satisfy these ends was a policy of forced settlement referred to in the literature as *congregación* or *reducción*.[2]

It is the purpose of this paper to review the operation of *congregación*, and its overall successes and failures, in a remote area of Central America known as the Cuchumatán highlands, today the north-western part of Guatemala (Figure 1). After a detailed

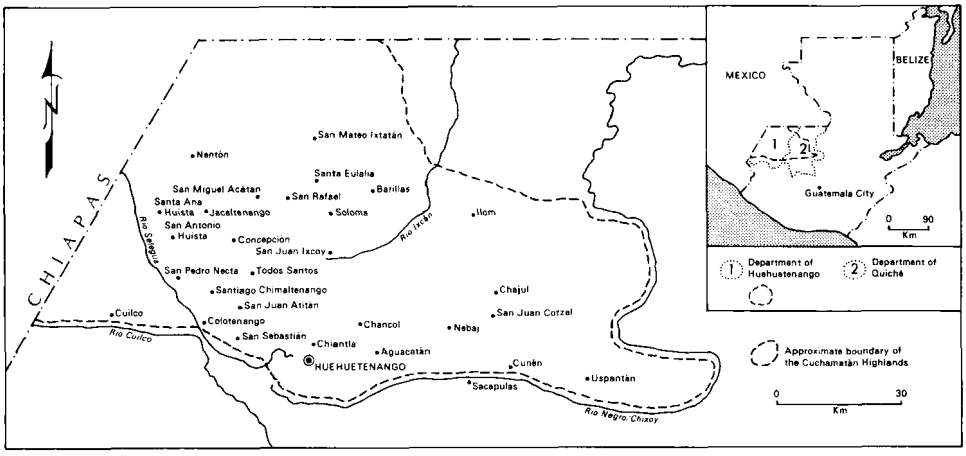

FIGURE 1. The Cuchumatán highlands of Guatemala: location and principal settlements.

presentation of the Cuchumatán evidence, an attempt is made to compare briefly the dynamics of population movement in this region with other parts of Spanish America. It will be demonstrated that Farriss's hypothesis about the lowland Maya of colonial Yucatán – that 'whenever the forces of integration weakened, the Maya would drift back into their preferred pattern of scattered settlement'[3] – seems also to hold for the highland Maya of the Cuchumatanes under Spanish colonial rule.

THE REGIONAL SETTING

The Cuchumatán highlands of Guatemala are the most massive and spectacular non-volcanic region of all Central America. Rugged, isolated, and limited in their resource endowment, the Cuchumatanes were regarded for most of the colonial period as an economic backwater. The region was administered civilly by imperial Spain either as the *corregimiento* (1547–1678) or the *alcaldía mayor* (1678–1785) of Totonicapán and Huehuetenango, with the jurisdiction later referred to as the *partido* of Huehuetenango (1786) corresponding in approximate extent to the area known today as the Cuchumatán highlands. For purposes of ecclesiastical administration, the region was divided into eight parishes comprising about forty towns or *congregaciones* (Figure 2).

At the time of the Spanish conquest (1525–30) possibly as many as 260,000 people inhabited the Cuchumatanes. A small but powerful élite (priests and ruling lineage heads) resided in fortified settlements known as *tinamit*, while the common majority lived scattered across the surrounding countryside, close to their fields, in tiny hamlets called *amag*.[4] By 1670, the native population had plummeted to its post-conquest nadir of around 16,000, a catastrophic collapse brought about principally by the inadvertent transfer of hitherto unknown Old World diseases to defenceless New World recipients.[5]

CONGREGACIÓN AS A SPANISH COLONIAL POLICY

Congregación involved the gathering together of dispersed Indian communities of often no more than a few families into larger, more centralized towns and villages. This

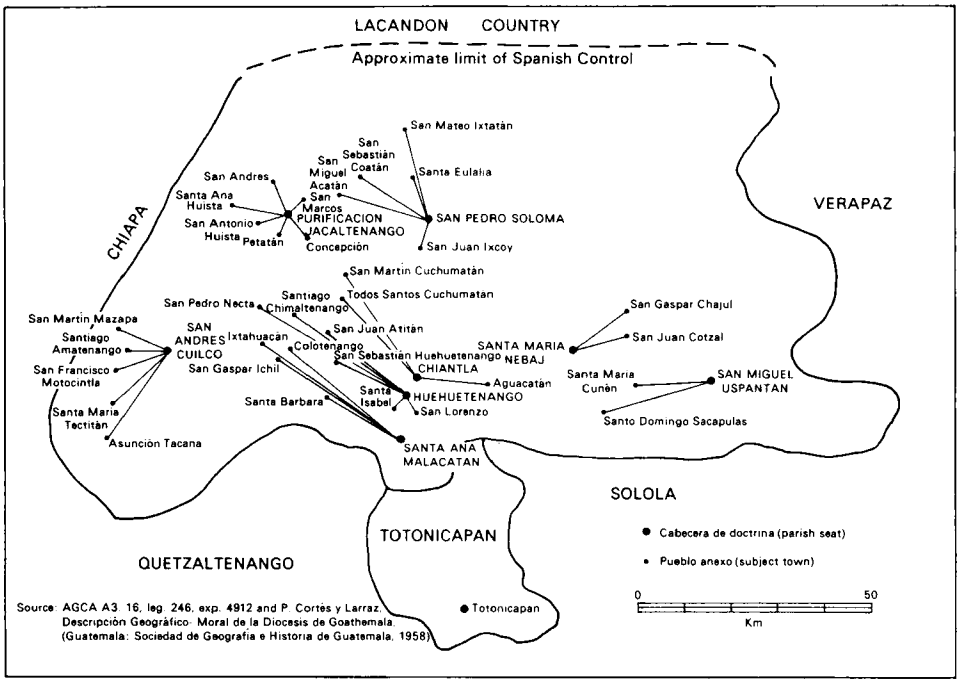

FIGURE 2. Ecclesiastical administration of the Cuchumatán highlands (Partido de Huehuetenango).

'congregation' or 'reduction' of formerly scattered settlements was allegedly undertaken with the primary objective of facilitating the Indians' instruction in Christianity by the evangelizing missionaries. At the same time, it promoted the task of civil and fiscal administration by making easier the organization of such matters as the enumeration of the native population, the payment of tribute, and the control of labour. Initially, however, the spiritual aspect of *congregación* was emphasized, first in the Laws of Burgos and later in the *Recopilación de las leyes de Indias*:

> With great care and particular attention we have always attempted to impose the most convenient means of instructing the Indians in the Holy Catholic Faith and the evangelical law, causing them to forget their ancient erroneous rites and ceremonies and to live in concert and order; and, so that this might be brought about, those of our Council of Indies have met together several times with other religious persons ...and they, with the desire of promoting the service of God, and ours, resolved that the Indians should be reduced to villages and not be allowed to live divided and separated in the mountains and wildernesses, where they are deprived of all spiritual and temporal comforts, the aid of our ministers, and those other things which human necessities oblige men to give one to another; therefore ... the viceroys, presidents, and governors are charged and ordered to execute the reduction, settlement, and indoctrination of the Indians.[6]

The Spanish Crown called for the initiation of *congregación* in Guatemala as early as 1540,[7] but the royal order was not implemented for several years, mainly because of the authoritarian hold exercised by the *adelantado*, Pedro de Alvarado. The title *adelantado*, conferred on Alvarado by Charles v in 1527, gave him a wide range of powers, none of which he was reluctant to use.[8] From about 1530 until his death in 1541, Alvarado ruled and exploited Guatemala as if it were his personal fief; he was simply too preoccupied with

wielding power and financing ambitious projects to foster the growth of systematic and responsible government.[9] It was not until after Alvarado's death, and the dismantling of his impressive private estate, that the authorities of the Crown in Guatemala considered it expedient to proceed with the policy of *congregación*.

Toward the end of the 1540s, by order of Licenciado Juan Rogel, *congregación* was initiated throughout the highlands of Guatemala.[10] The process was enthusiastically led by Bishop Marroquín and the Dominican missionaries, who saw *congregación* as the beginning of the 'spiritual conquest.' Normally, they first approached the local Indian leaders (*caciques* and *principales*), whose approval of the site selected for the new settlement was frequently a key factor in persuading the common majority to move there from their old homes in the mountains. Some Indian families migrated willingly, on the advice and entreaties of their leaders; others left reluctantly, only after the threat of forceful eviction.

The physical setting was an important consideration in the selection of sites for *congregaciones*. A great many pre-Hispanic settlements were located on remote hilltops, surrounded by ravines and gullies, where they were established during turbulent times, more with a view to defence than orderly, peaceful living. The civil and religious authorities responsible for establishing *congregaciones* usually favoured accessible valley sites, so the process of resettlement often involved considerable population movement. Yet if a native settlement exhibited site features compatible with the Spanish criteria of open space, access to water, and proximity to agricultural land or to enterprises involving the need for Indian labour, then *congregaciones* would be established on or close to these existing settlements. Chiantla and Huehuetenango, for example, were Spanish towns found near the ancient Mam capital of Zaculeu. It was frequently possible to establish *congregaciones* in which a Catholic church was built on top of, or adjacent to, a native ceremonial complex, thus giving Spanish power over the Indians a strong and overt symbolic expression.[11]

Once gathered at the new town site, the Indians would plant the surrounding land as *milpa*, or cornland. While the corn matured, a start was made on various projects. The first priority was the erection of a church, the size of which depended on the number of Indian families comprising the *congregación*. Thereafter, attention was turned to constructing a house for the local priest, to laying out a plaza in front of the church, and to allocating space around the plaza for such buildings as a town hall, a jail, and sleeping quarters where visitors could spend the night. Streets were laid out in a regular grid pattern, running north-south and east-west.

By the mid-sixteenth century, a semblance of order had been imposed on the general pattern of Indian settlement. In Spanish eyes it stood in sharp contrast to the chaos of the dispersed pattern of settlement of pre-conquest times.[12] And yet, from the outset, the process of *congregación* was instrumental in creating a dichotomy in the general pattern of native landholding. As early as 1532, a *cédula real* declared that 'the Indians shall continue to possess their lands, both arable tracts and grazing lands, so that they do not lack what is necessary.'[13] All *congregaciones*, by law, were entitled to an *ejido*, an area of communal land not cultivated but used for grazing, hunting, and the gathering of water, firewood, and various products of the forest.[14] In addition to farming land in the vicinity of a *congregación*, Indian groups often continued to cultivate the lands of their abandoned, but never forgotten, mountain homes.[15] The strong attachment of displaced Indian families to their ancestral lands was ultimately to modify the pattern of Spanish-imposed settlement in many parts of highland Guatemala.

CONGREGACIÓN IN THE CUCHUMATAN HIGHLANDS

In compliance with an order issued by Licenciado Pedro Ramíerez de Quiñones, one of the Crown's most diligent officers in Guatemala, *congregación* was begun toward the end of the 1540s throughout the Cuchumatanes. The isolation and ruggedness of much of the Cuchumatán region made *congregación* difficult, but the majority of present-day towns originated as formal centres of settlement in this period.

Much of the information concerning the founding of these settlements comes from Antonio de Remesal, a Dominican friar who wrote the first colonial history of Guatemala between 1615 and 1617, following a period of study and work in the colony.[16] Some of his observations on the operation of *congregación* are worth quoting at length. The town of Aguacatán, for example, 'was congregated from a number of hamlets scattered all over the mountains by friar Pedro de Angulo, friar Juan de Torres, and other Dominican missionaries who used to preach throughout these Cuchumatán highlands.'[17] According to Remesal, *congregaciones* were established in the Cuchumatanes by the Dominicans before ecclesiastical administration of much of the region was handed over to another religious order, the Mercedarian friars of Nuestra Señora de la Merced:

> The Dominicans not only gave the Mercedarians jurisdiction over Indians in the City [of Guatemala]; they were also given jurisdiction over Indians outside [the capital] in the towns of Quiché and Zacapula [Sacapulas]. All that is nowadays [ca 1615] administered by the [Mercedarian] monastery of Xacaltenango [Jacaltenango] was formerly under control of the Dominicans. Friar Pedro de Angulo and friar Juan de Torres, along with other Dominicans, were responsible for the hard work of bringing together Indian families of many different tongues who lived in scattered, outlying hamlets ... The town of Yantla [Chiantla] which lies at the foot of the mountains belonged to the [Dominican] Order ... The towns of these mountains, as far as Escuytenango in the district of Comitlán [Comitán], including Cuchumatlán [Todos Santos Cuchumatán], Güegüetenango [Huehuetenango], San Martín, Petatán, [and] Güista [San Antonio and Santa Ana Huista] ... were, without doubt, congregated by the Dominican fathers who built in them houses and churches that are still standing today.[18]

Remesal recorded particularly detailed information concerning *congregación* in the Ixil country of the eastern Cuchumatanes, including the names of settlements that furnished populations for the *congregaciones* at Chajul, Nebaj, and San Juan Cotzal:

> To Chaul [Chajul] in the sierra of Zacapulas were brought the settlements of Huyl, Boob, Ylom, Honcab, Chaxá, Aguazap, Huiz, and four others, all of which were associated with smaller, dependent settlements; this was undertaken at the request of the [Dominican] fathers who founded the monastery [of Sacapulas] and by order of Licenciado Pedro Ramírez de Quiñones ... To Aguacatlán [Aguacatán] and Nebá [Nebaj] were brought together the settlements of Vacá, Chel, Zalchil, Cuchil, and many others upward of twelve in number. To Cozal [San Juan Cotzal] were brought together Namá, Chicui, Temal, Caquilax, and many others ... The town of Cunén was also formed by congregating many smaller settlements.[19]

That Remesal recorded the names of outlying settlements brought together to form *congregaciones* is of special interest, not least because some of the 'cleared' settlements are still in existence today. Once gathered at a new town site, the various native peoples collectively comprising the *congregación* often preserved their autochthonous identity by functioning as individual sub-communities known as *parcialidades*. Traditionally, these were social and territorial units of great antiquity, organized as patrilineal clans or localized kin groups and generally associated with a particular area of land.[20]

Although the Spaniards found it difficult to distinguish between *parcialidades* and to grasp the complex distinctions operating within them, the Indians were always acutely aware of the differences both between and within their traditional social affiliations. After being moved to a *congregación*, Indian communities continued to uphold aboriginal patterns of social discrimination. Far from being homogeneous entities, many a *congregación* was a mosaic of small social groups that touched but that often did not interpenetrate. Numerous *congregaciones* in the Cuchumatán region were organized internally along these lines, that is, with several 'cleared' communities functioning in the Spanish-established centres as *parcialidades*. Thus Ylom [Ilom] and Honcab [Oncap or Onkap], settlements recorded by Remesal as forming part of the *congregación* of Chajul, existed within the *congregación* as separate *parcialidades*. Similarly, Zalchil [Salquil] and Cuchil, settlements recorded by Remesal as forming part of the *congregación* of Nebaj, also survived within that *congregación* as distinguishable *parcialidades*.

Between 1664 and 1678, when assessing how much tribute should be paid by the Indians of Chajul and Nebaj, the Spanish authorities arranged that payment should be made not by town but by *parcialidad*. Ilom was assessed at 48 tribute payers, Oncap at 9½, Salquil at 17, and Cuchil at 26½.[21] The towns of Aguacatán, Cunén, San Juan Cotzal, and Sacapulas, all identified by Remesal as having been formed by congregating several smaller settlements, likewise were assessed for tribute individually by *parcialidad*. Thus, over a century after *congregación* was first implemented, the small social groups that comprised a settlement still retained a sense of their pre-conquest individuality.

The town of Sacapulas is a good example of a heterogeneous *congregación* where ancient social divisions were long maintained. According to Captain Martín Alfonso Tovilla, the governor of nearby Verapaz who visited Sacapulas in the early seventeenth century, the town had been formed originally by congregating six different Indian communities: 'The town of Sacapulas is divided into six *parcialidades*, each of which comprises a unit known as a *calpul*, because when the missionaries [first] brought them together, as each had only a small population, they brought four or five to each town in order to make a larger [settlement], and in this way each *parcialidad* maintained the name of the place it came from. And the lands that [the *parcialidades*] possessed [in the abandoned places] they still cultivate today in order to grow corn and other bodily needs.'[22]

The testimony of Tovilla is confirmed by an official of the Crown, Andrés Henríquez, who reported, in 1786, that the *parcialidad* known as Magdalena, 'like the other five of this town, was, and were, small settlements that were brought together by royal order to form the town of Sacapulas.'[23] In the tribute lists compiled for the years 1664–78, five *parcialidades* are recorded, three of which were known by their native names (Tulteca, Uchabaha, and Aucanil) and two by Spanish names (San Francisco and Magdalena).[24] By the close of the eighteenth century, the *parcialidades* of Sacapulas still clung to their aboriginal identities, but were generally all known by Spanish names: Magdalena, San Sebastián, Santiago, San Pedro, Santo Tomás, and San Francisco.[25] The preservation of pre-conquest identity within the *congregación* is illustrated also by the fact that Indian land in the Sacapulas area was held traditionally by *parcialidad*. When a lengthy conflict occurred toward the end of the eighteenth century over land rights and boundaries, the disputes were not contested primarily between Indians and Spaniards but between rival *parcialidades*.[26]

Autochthonous identity within *congregaciones* was therefore maintained throughout the

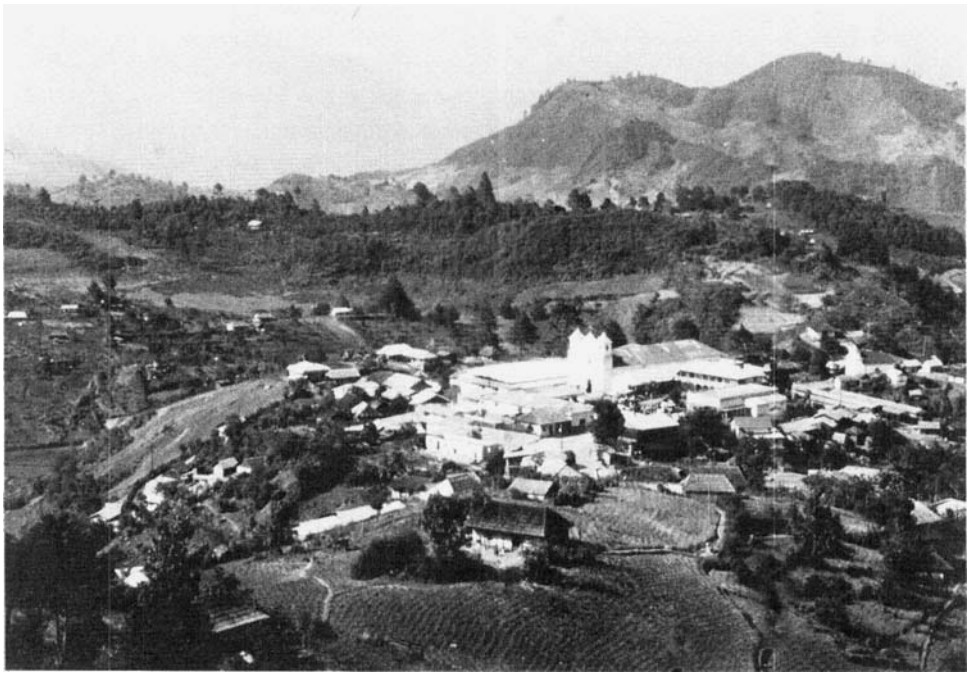

FIGURE 3. The Kanjobal township of Santa Eulalia, founded as a *congregación* in the remote northwestern reaches of the Cuchumatán highlands in the mid-sixteenth century.

colonial period by such practices as paying tribute and holding land by *parcialidad*. In the case of Aguacatán, deep-rooted social discrimination has persisted to the present. Remesal noted that Aguacatán 'was congregated from a number of hamlets scattered all over the mountains' in the mid-sixteenth century,[27] and the *parcialidad* of Aguacatán is distinguished from the neighbouring *parcialidad* of Chalchitán in the archival documents.[28] Even today, a distinction can be made between the Aguacatecos living to the west of the town square and the Chalchitecos living to the east, chiefly on the ground of dialect, styles of dress, and ceremonial patterns.[29]

REGIONAL ADJUSTMENTS TO CONGREGACIÓN

In its initial stages, and despite the marked survival of pre-Columbian social identity, the process of *congregación* in the Cuchumatán highlands may be regarded as an operation that seems to have satisfied several imperial objectives. Like most colonial ventures, however, it was not without its failures, frustrations, and long-term modifications.

A particularly problematical experiment characterized the founding of Santa Eulalia, a town in the far northwestern reaches of the Cuchumantanes (Figure 3). The first attempts to settle there had to be abandoned because Paiconop, the site originally chosen for the *congregación*, was too easily attacked by hostile Lacandón Indians from the Usumacinta lowlands to the north. The settlement was therefore moved to its present, more defensible site 2 km to the southwest, but only after a church and other structures had already been built

at Paiconop. Lancandón raids up into this part of the Cuchumatán country persisted throughout the colonial period, despite numerous attempts to subjugate this especially troublesome Indian group.[30] Toward the end of the seventeenth century, Fuentes y Guzmán declared that anyone making the trip from Santa Eulalia to San Mateo Ixtatán did so 'with imminent risk from the Lacandón enemy who invade the mountains to rob and harass our poor Indians.'[31] In response to this situation, two peacekeeping forces were established, one at San Mateo and another at Santa Eulalia, to protect the northern frontier territory of the Cuchumantanes to the west of the Ixcán river.

The Ixil *congregaciones* in the northern Cuchumatán frontier to the east of the Ixcán river also suffered from Lacandón attack. The area around Ilom was especially vulnerable, which was probably one of the main reasons behind the Spaniards' decision to abandon the town after initially building a church there.[32] The Indians of Ilom were ordered to resettle in Chajul and in Santa Eulalia, the former receiving the Ilom church altar, the latter the Ilom church bells.[33] Chajul was also attacked several times, but, unlike Ilom, it was never officially abandoned.[34] The Ilom area itself was gradually repopulated, some Ixiles apparently preferring to return to their ancestral lands, even at the risk of Lacandón raids. The rationale of *congregación*, with its promise of safety and protection from infidel invaders, to say nothing of its promise of life hereafter, often amounted to very little in the face of the intense mystical bond linking an Indian community to its land, an attachment little understood or reckoned with on the part of the Spaniards.

Throughout the colonial period a combination of other factors and events diminished the centripetal influence of *congregación*. Since many Indians were congregated involuntarily in the first instance, it was often difficult for the Spanish authorities to keep them tied to a new town site. They frequently fled to surrounding rural areas to escape the constant exploitation to which they were subjected in a *congregación*. In the seclusion of their old homes in the mountains, they were free of such compulsory demands as paying tribute, providing labour, working on local roads or the parish church, and serving as human carriers.[35] The refuge of the mountains was also sought whenever sickness and pestilence struck a *congregación*, often resulting in massive and widespread abandonment.[36]

The isolation and limited economic potential of the Cuchumatanes likewise had a weakening impact on *congregación*. Due chiefly to a scarcity of Indian labour and a lack of entrepreneurial opportunity, Spanish Central America is generally thought to have been economically depressed for much of the seventeenth century.[37] Even prior to the onset of depression around 1635, Spanish exploitation of the natural resources of Guatemala had concentrated either on the cacao-rich Pacific lowlands or on the fertile *tierra templada* to the south and east of the capital city of Santiago, where indigo could be grown and cattle raised. The highlands of the *tierra fría* to the north and west of Santiago – remote, rugged, and of little economic importance – were much less attractive to materially minded Spaniards. The governor of the southern province of Zapotitlán probably spoke for a good many enterprising but frustrated Spaniards when he declared, in 1570, that 'neither in the highlands of Jacaltenango, nor in those of Huehuetenango is there any cacao ... the land there being poor and unfruitful, good only for raising corn and chickens.'[38] As a result of such appraisals, Spanish interest in northwestern Guatemala, after conquest had been completed and *congregación* initiated, was never as intense as in other parts of Central America. This attitude certainly seems to have prevailed during the economically depressed years of the seventeenth century and, to a lesser extent, throughout the eighteenth century and up to the end of Spanish rule in Guatemala in 1821.

The consequences of this relative lack of interest were far-reaching. The Indian peoples to the north and west of Santiago were not so ignored by their Spanish masters that their communities bred a physical form of rebellion. Instead, the Indians cultivated a subtle, passive resistance to the European invaders by reverting, in the course of the seventeenth century, to many of their former ways. It was not a return to life as it was led before the conquest, but rather a synthesis of those elements of European culture that the Indians had accepted and the elements of pre-Columbian culture that they had maintained. Neither 'Indian' nor 'Spanish,' this synthesis spawned a culture of refuge referred to by MacLeod as 'conquest peasant.'[39] It also came to develop several characteristics in direct conflict with Spanish precepts concerning native well-being.

One of the features of the 'conquest peasant' way of life was a process of *decongregación*, in which a more dispersed form of settlement was favoured as Spanish authority over the Indians grew progressively weaker, particularly in isolated regions such as the Cuchumatanes, far removed from the seat of power at Santiago. As early as 1579, several Indian families at Chajul were recorded as living far beyond the *congregación* and, as they were uncounted, were not paying tribute. The governor of the Cuchumatán region, Francisco Díaz del Castillo, was ordered by the Crown to rectify the situation.[40] Later, at the end of the seventeenth century, Fuentes y Guzmán recorded that 'wild and uncivilized' Indians were living in the mountains surrounding the town of San Juan Atitán, and that some forty families at San Mateo Ixtatán were living fourteen leagues distant from the *congregación*, at a site named Asantih.[41]

Another characteristic, which caused extreme distress to the Spanish authorities, was the revival, and explicit practice, of aspects of pre-Christian religion.[42] This trend was particularly marked in the more inaccessible parts of the Cuchumatanes. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, there were complaints of 'idolatory' and 'acts of barbarism' at both San Juan Atitán and San Mateo Ixtatán. At the latter town the Indians had erected 'a shrine which was located in the same place as the ancient sacrificial altar of the times of paganism and barbarity,' a 'sacrilege' for which they were flogged and enslaved.[43] In 1797, the governor of Huehuetenango, Francisco Xavier de Aguirre, found and destroyed, two leagues distant from the town of Concepción, 'the pagan shrine where the Indians go to offer sacrifices and prayers to the devil.'[44] The strongest statement of widespread religious non-conformity among the Indians of the Cuchumatanes comes from Archbishop Cortés y Larraz, who claimed in the late eighteenth century that the Christianity of the Indians 'is nothing more than appearance and hypocrisy.'[45] The refusal of the native peoples of the Cuchumatán highlands to abandon their pre-Christian rituals and ceremonies persisted throughout the nineteenth century and has survived to the present.[46]

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence presented here suggests that the primary thrust of settlement nucleation in the Cuchumatán highlands of Guatemala soon yielded to a prolonged period of settlement dispersal, following a pattern that has been documented elsewhere in Spanish America. Farriss, for example, presents the process as a general proposition for colonial Yucatán, maintaining that 'the Maya, like most people who practise labor-efficient forms of extensive agriculture, found (and still find) dispersed settlement most convenient for farming.'[47] García Bernal and Cook and Borah have likewise recorded significant *congregación* abandonment in Yucatán from the mid-sixteenth century on.[48] According to Gerhard, the

process was so advanced by the late eighteenth century that 'the settlement pattern was perhaps not greatly unlike that of preconquest times, with peasant houses scattered about and many cabeceras relatively deserted except during market days and religious festivals.'[49] Watson notes a similar process of recurrent fugitivism in the town-country relations of the Chol community of Tila in Chiapas.[50] And despite a completely different environmental and cultural context, Spalding has demonstrated that Indian *congregaciones* in the Peruvian Andes also suffered the same fate, frequently disintegrating into 'administrative fictions' with few full-time residents.[51]

Thus, viewed both in the context of the entire period of Spanish rule in Guatemala, and in the context of the lofty objectives sought by the mother country, the process of *congregación* or *reducción* in the Cuchumatán highlands cannot be considered an unqualified success. Certainly, the imprint of *congregación* on the cultural landscape was both enduring and profound; even today, the mid-sixteenth-century 'congregations,' dominated by churches towering over and above most surrounding buildings, are a conspicuous settlement feature of the Cuchumatán landscape (Figure 3). Yet the majority of the region's Indian population, roughly three out of every four persons, now live not in nucleated centres but in dispersed communities scattered about the countryside, leaving Ladinos, or persons of mixed Spanish and Indian descent, as the dominant town-dwelling group. The key to this present pattern of settlement lies in an understanding of the colonial experience of the Cuchumatán peoples, of which *congregación*, and later *decongregación*, are important parts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their constructive criticism of earlier drafts of this paper, thanks are extended to John F. Bergmann, Ruth Gruhn, and David C. Johnson of the University of Alberta, and also to two anonymous referees. The research upon which the paper is based was made possible by the financial support of the Killam Program and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 G.M. Foster, *Culture and Conquest: America's Spanish Heritage* (New York: Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, No. 27, 1960), p. 2.

2 For a general discussion of *congregación* and its consequences in colonial Guatemala, see M.J. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520–1720* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 120–42; H. de Jesus Cabezas, *Las Reducciones Indígenas en Guatemala durante el siglo XVI* (Guatemala: Universidad de San Carlos, 1974); and S. Martínez Peláez, *La Patria del Criollo: Ensayo de Interpretación de la Realiadad Colonial Guatemalteca* (San José: Editorial Universitaria, 1975), pp. 443–60. More specific studies, relating primarily to Mexico, against which the Cuchumatán experience can be measured, include: L.B. Simpson, *Studies in the Administration of the Indians in New Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Ibero-Americana No. 7, 1934); H.F. Cline, 'Civil congregations of the Indians in New Spain, 1598–1606,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 29 (1949), pp. 349–69; P. Gerhard, 'Congregaciones de Indios en la Nueva España antes de 1570,' *Historia Mexicana*, 26 (1977), pp. 347–95; and R. Mario Salmón, 'Tarahumara resistance to mission congregation in northern New Spain, 1580–1710,' *Ethnohistory*, 24 (1977), pp. 379–93.

3 N.M. Farriss, 'Nucleation versus dispersal: the dynamics of population movement in colonial Yucatán,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 58 (1978), p. 188.

4 W.G. Lovell, 'The Cuchumatán Highlands of Guatemala on the eve of the Spanish conquest,' *Katunob: A Newsletter-Bulletin of Mesoamerican Anthropology*, 11, No. 4 (1979), pp. 1–41.

5 W.G. Lovell, 'Collapse and recovery: a demographic profile of the Cuchumatán Highlands of Guatemala,' in R.M. Carmack, J. Early, and C. Lutz (eds.), *The Historical Demography of Highland Guatemala* (Albany, NY; SUNY Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, 1982), pp. 103–20.

6 Libro VI, Título III, *Recopilación de las leyes de Indias*, translated in Simpson, op. cit., p. 43.
7 B.N. Colby and P.L. van den Berghe, *Ixil Country: A Plural Society in Highland Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 44, and T.T. Veblen, 'The Ecological, Cultural, and Historical Bases of Forest Preservation in Totonicapán, Guatemala,' unpublished PH D dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1975, p. 338.
8 J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain (1469–1716)* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1976), p. 59, defines *adelantado* as 'a hereditary title granted by medieval Castilian kings and conferring upon its holder special military powers and the rights of government over a frontier province.'
9 W.L. Sherman, 'A conqueror's wealth: notes on the estate of Pedro de Alvarado,' *The Americas*, 26 (1969), pp. 199–213, and T.T. Veblen, 'Native population decline in Totonicapán, Guatemala,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 67 (1977), p. 492.
10 A. Recinos and D. Goetz (translators), *The Annals of the Cakchiquels* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), p. 136. The Cakchiquel chronicle states: 'In the fifth month of the sixth year after the beginning of our instruction in the world of Our Lord God [that is, in July 1548] the houses were grouped together by order of the lord Juan Roser. Then the people came from the caves and the ravines.'
11 O. LaFarge, *Santa Eulalia: The Religion of a Cuchumatán Indian Town* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. ix.
12 A. de Remesal, *Historia General de las Indias Occidentales y Particular de la Gobernación de Chiapa y Guatemala* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1964–6), Vol. II, pp. 177–80; F. de Paula García Peláez, *Memorias para la Historia del Antiguo Reino de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Biblioteca Goathemala, 1968), Vol. I, p. 163; MacLeod, op. cit., pp. 120–3; and S. Martínez Peláez, op. cit., pp. 443–60.
13 From *Recopilación de las leyes de Indias*, cited in W.B. Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 67.
14 Simpson, op. cit., p. 44.
15 Veblen, op. cit., p. 339.
16 R.M. Carmack, *Quichean Civilization: The Ethnohistoric, Ethnographic and Archaeological Sources* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 178–80, contains a succinct review of Remesal's contribution.
17 Remesal, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 259. Aguacatán exists today as the *cabecera* (principal settlement) of the *municipio* (township) of the same name.
18 Remesal, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 243–4. Jacaltenango, Chiantla, Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Huehuetenango, San Antonio Huista, and Santa Ana Huista exist today as *cabeceras* of their respective *municipios*. San Martín is an *aldea* (village) of the *municipio* of Todos Santos Cuchumatán and Petatán is an *aldea* of the *municipio* of Concepción.
19 Remesal, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 178–9. Chajul, Nebaj, San Juan Cotzal, and Cunén exist today as *cabeceras* of their respective *municipios*. Some of the smaller settlements that furnished populations for the *congregaciones* in the Ixil country also still exist. For example, Ylom (now Ilom) and Chel are *aldeas* of the *municipio* of Chajul; Huyl (now Juil) and Chaxá are *caseríos* (hamlets) of the same *municipio*. Namá is a *caserío* of the *municipio* of San Juan Cotzal. And Zachil (now Salquil) is an *aldea* of the *municipio* of Nebaj.
20 MacLeod, op. cit., p. 29.
21 Archivo General de Centroamérica (AGCA), Guatemala City, A3.16, *legajo* 1601, *expediente* 26391.
22 M. Tovilla, *Relación Histórica Descriptiva de las Provincias de la Verapaz y de la del Manché* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1960), p. 218.
23 AGCA, A1, *leg.* 6037, *exp.* 53258.
24 AGCA, A3.16, *leg.* 1601, *exp.* 26391. The *parcialidad* known as Tulteca was probably comprised of the descendants of the Tlaxcalan auxiliaries who apparently settled in Sacapulas when the wars of conquest were over. They were likely attracted by the possibility of controlling the important salt springs in the area as a reward for the military assistance they gave to the Spaniards. See Carmack, op. cit., pp. 37–9.
25 AGCA, A1, *leg.* 6037, *exp.* 53258, and A1, *leg.* 6040, *exp.* 53305. Carmack, op. cit., p. 208, has correlated the *parcialidad* of Santiago with the Canil lineage 'who came from Tula.' The *parcialidad* Santo Tomás was associated with the Lamaquib lineage; see Carmack, op. cit., p. 60 and AGCA, A1, *leg.* 5979, *exp.* 52356.
26 Carmack, op. cit., pp. 206–9, offers a summary of the disputes. Conflict over land rights and boundaries is discussed at greater length in W.G. Lovell, 'Landholding in Spanish Central America: patterns of ownership and activity in the Cuchumatán Highlands of Guatemala (1563–1821),' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (in press).
27 Remesal, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 259.
28 For example, Aguacatán and Chalchitán are assessed separately in the tribute list of 1677; see AGCA, A3.16, *leg.* 1601, *exp.* 26391.
29 H. McArthur and L. McArthur, 'Aguacatec,' in M. Mayers (ed.), *The Languages of Guatemala* (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1966), p. 140. A. Recinos, *Monografía del Departamento de Huehuetenango* (Guatemala: Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1954), p. 75, actually refers to 'el doble pueblo de Aguacatán y Chalchitán' (the 'twin' town of Aguacatán and Chalchitán).

30 D.Z. Stone, *Some Spanish Entradas, 1524–1695* (New Orleans: Tulane University, Middle American Research Series, No. 4, 1932), pp. 208–96. The efforts of the Spaniards to Christianize the Lacandones and to 'congregate' them into towns had no permanent degree of success; see A.M. Tozzer, 'A Spanish manuscript letter on the Lacandones in the Archive of the Indies at Seville,' *Proceedings of the Eighteenth International Congress of Americanists* (London: 1912), pp. 497–509. La Farge, op. cit., p. 68, states that Lacandón raids into the Cuchumatanes persisted until the early nineteenth century.

31 F.A. de Fuentes y Guzmán, *Recordación Florida* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, Tomo CCLIX, 1972), p. 39.

32 Colby and van den Berghe, op. cit., p. 40.

33 R. Elliot and H. Elliot, 'Ixil,' in Mayers, *Languages of Guatemala*, op. cit., p. 126–7. The decision to resettle Ixil-speaking Indians of Ilom at the Kanjobal-speaking town of Santa Eulalia makes little sense. The distance from Ilom to Santa Eulalia is also twice that from Ilom to Chajul. Yet Ixil-speaking Indians were recorded at Santa Eulalia around the middle of the nineteenth century by Father Baltasar Baldiva, a Spanish missionary priest. Resettlement to Chajul is similarly attested to in the *parcialidad* known as Ilom.

34 F. Termer, *Etnología y Etnografía de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Seminario de Integración Social Guatemalteca, 1957), pp. 7–8; F. Ximénez, *Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala* (Guatemala: Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, 1930), Vol. II, p. 221; and Tovilla, op. cit., p. 209.

35 Martínez Peláez, op. cit., pp. 545–6, and AGCA, A1, *leg.* 6118, *exp.* 56749.

36 See, for example, AGCA, A3.16, *leg.* 249, *exp.* 5036. This document, dated 1804–5, records that the Indians of Soloma and Santa Eulalia abandoned their *congregaciones* for the open countryside around Chemal following an outbreak of typhus. It was initially thought by the Spaniards that the Indians would be better cared for in *congregaciones* in times of crisis, particularly during an outbreak of disease, but *congregación* probably had the opposite effect; communicable diseases spread more easily in nucleated settlements than in dispersed ones. See MacLeod, op. cit., p. 121.

37 MacLeod, op. cit., pp. 231 and 310–29. The argument that the seventeenth century was a time of economic contraction throughout Spanish America, particularly in Mexico, was first advanced by W. Borah, *New Spain's Century of Depression* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, Ibero-Americana No. 35, 1951). This view has been challenged in a number of local and regional studies over the past decade, but the implications for the historiography of Central America are still unclear. In the mean time, MacLeod's interpretation stands as the most developed, intelligible, and plausible one for further investigations into the colonial experience in central America.

38 MacLeod, op. cit., pp. 68–95, 176–203, and 308; and Carmack, op. cit., p. 383.

39 MacLeod, op. cit., pp. 326–7.

40 Elliott and Elliott, op. cit., p. 126.

41 Fuentes y Guzmán, op. cit., pp. 26 and 40. Fuentes y Guzmán claims that, with the help of friar Alonso Paez, he personally went to Asantih and forced the forty families living there back to the *congregación* at San Mateo Ixatán. This was an extremely risky business, as Asantih lay only four leagues from the territory of the Lacandón Indians and was the site suggested by the Spanish authorities for the resettlement of the Lacandones themselves. See Recinos, op. cit., pp. 396–7.

42 C. Gibson, *Spain in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 75, holds that the missionary endeavours of the friars responsible for *congregación* succeeded not in converting the Indians to orthodox Christianity but in creating a 'syncretic' religion that was essentially 'Catholic-Christian in its externals but non-Christian in some of its basic postulates or in its enveloping world view.'

43 Fuentes y Guzmán, op. cit., pp. 26–7, and AGCA, A1, *leg.* 2, *exp.* 23.

44 AGCA, A3.16, *leg.* 255, *exp.* 5719.

45 P. Cortes y Larraz, *Descripción Geográfico-Moral de la Diocesis de Goathemala* (Guatemala: Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, 1958), Vol. II, p. 44.

46 Elliott and Elliott, op. cit., p. 127, cite a Spanish priest, working in the Ixil country in the mid-nineteenth century, as declaring that 'after 300 years of being evangelized, [the Indians] are seen today to be in a worse state than in the first century, marching backwards toward their ancient barbarities, mixed with vices and irreligion of other castes.' For the continuity of pre-Columbian systems of belief in Cuchumatán communities in the twentieth century, see La Farge, op. cit., and M. Oakes, *The Two Crosses of Todos Santos: Survivals of Mayan Religious Ritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

47 Farris, op. cit., p. 216.

48 M.C. Garcia Bernal, *Población y Encomienda en Yucatán bajo los Austrias* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1978), p. 111, and S.F. Cook and W. Borah, *Essays in Population History: Mexico and the Caribbean*, Vol. II (Berkeley , Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 114–20.

49 P. Gerhard, *The Southeast Frontier of New Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 29–30.

50 R.C. Watson and W.G. Lovell, 'Estimating Population Change from Spanish Colonial Sources: Two Examples from Southern Mesoamerica,' paper presented at CUKANZUS 81: An International Conference for Historical Geographers, Toronto, August 1981.

51 Cited in Farriss, op. cit., p. 206.