English summary of

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Transformationen. Sozialer Wandel im indianischen Mittelamerika

Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1995.

Can regularities in the historical process be established and expressed in an explanatory model? Or is social change of a chaotic nature, driven by cascades of events with no discernible patterns and recurrent motives? Classic grand theory in the social sciences was leaning towards the first position and has obviously failed in coming to terms with its promises of explanation and prediction. The contrary position is nowadays the dominant one, big theory being replaced by thick description of unique historical trajectories — sometimes spiced with allusions to chaos and bifurcation theory, sometimes celebrating the role of "ordinary men" and "ordinary women" in historical process. In the social sciences as well as in history, the "return of the narrative" dominates the headlines of journal articles. With this study, I want to cultivate the garden in between the two trees. Taking the example of Indian Central America between the 17th and 20th centuries, I try to show that there are indeed patterns of history that can be expressed in a model of social change. This model cannot be, however, a general theory of the evolution of mankind, but is limited by space and time, bound by the specifities of a certain social and cultural environment and a certain epoch.

The *first chapter* is meant to familiarise the reader with the specifities of the Indian regions of Mexico and Guatemala. It gives an impression of the manifold processes of change that we find at the village level, documented by dozens of ethnographic studies and restudies in probably the most densely researched area of the anthropological world. The number of village studies published since the thirties must now be well go into the hundreds, and several excellent ethno-historical monographies focussing on the local or regional level have been published since the eighties.

Creating a model of at least some of the well-documented individual cases of social

transformation represents a challenge for comparative social science, one which has held me since I returned from my field research in Mexico during the eighties. As soon as I realised that my description of San Juan Mazatlán, were I passed my initiation rite as an anthropologist, was merely going to add one drop to a sea of ethnographies not navigated by a comparative project, I decided to change my research agenda — and to cease to be an ethnographer looking at the world through the eyes of "his" or "her" village. This personal ambition is, however, only one side of the story. The other is that Indian Mesoamerica, because of the richness of the empirical literature produced on it, represents probably one of the hardest testing grounds for a comparative analysis on the micro-level level and therefore invites us to further develop, or indeed revitalise, the project of a comparative social anthropology that has been neglected, if not sometimes forgotten, under the impact of post-modern constructivism. Thus, the hidden agenda of this book is to show that anthropology can indeed help understanding why people in x are doing things differently then they do it in y — instead of just reflecting on how writing or speaking on x doing things differently then y is discursively establishing (or constructing, or reifying) a difference between x and y.

Such a comparative project needs a precisely defined object if it is to avoid fuzziness and loose generalisations. I shall look at two areas of village life more specifically. First, changes in the hierarchy of politico-religious offices, the so-called "cargo system"; in many cases, the costly saints' days had to be provided for by individual families if the head of the family subsequently wanted to take up the highest political posts. Since this system of prestige economy was fascinating for anthropologists, it has received the most attention in the literature and conformingly I will term it the "classical system". Many villages ceased several decades ago to celebrate these saints days, and the cargo system no longer contains religious and political posts; others have never integrated civil and religious offices in a single hierarchy; in yet others individual families were not chosen as "party financers", but rather the financial burden of serving the saints was shared equally by all.

Second, I will look at the ethnic distinction between Ladinos[1] and Indios. Some regions and communities have lost their Indian identity, and the peasant population considers itself part of the Mestizo nation, who in turn recognise them as such. Other groups have remained *indígenas* with

varying levels of differentiation being emphasized: in some cases, neighbouring communities continue to be regarded as ethnically different, that is people with different *costumbres* who are to be kept at arm's length; in other regions the category of "we" is taken to include those who speak the same Indian language; in yet other regions, the main level of ethnic differentiation is even more inclusive, between *indios* and *ladinos*.

The *second chapter* discusses some of the earlier attempts to explain these changes in Indian social structure. These were based on modernisation and acculturation theory, dependency theory, Neo-Marxism, cultural ecology or functional theory, world-system's school or on the theory of rational choice. I have already discussed these models in another book, and shall therefore address only the most important points here. The critique is intended to provide an outline of the empirical and conceptual problems incurred in creating a comparative model of social change.

In conclusion I argue that social change has to be analysed with the help of a processual model, i.e. with conceptual tools that allow to explain the emergence and transformation of different social forms — such as cargo systems and ethnic classifications — through the actions of individuals. Such a generative approach should replace the usual typological models analysing social change as a sequence of different types of social structures (folk to urban, caste to class, internal colonialism to capitalism, peasant to capitalist mode of production through various forms of "articulation", etc.). Another pitfall to be avoided is the rationalist fallacy of decision making theory, where social change is either completely externalised (change in the opportunity structures) or miraculised (spontaneous inventions). We can, however, still learn a lot from the late Eric Wolf's analysis of social change in Indian Mesoamerica. He described different types of peasant communities and analysed the transition from one type to another as adaptations to changing socio-economic environments, and thus avoided a teleological and uni-directional approach. However, the conceptual apparatus of his "cultural ecology" has to be modernized and de-collectivised, as Eric Wolf himself acknowledged in his later writings: We have to look for an analysis that transcends the functionalist tradition of looking at village communities as closely integrated, egalitarian entities and as a single actors in

processes of "adaptation".

To present a conceptual framework that overcomes these various difficulties is the main goal of the remaining parts of the second chapter. The theory I develop is basically constructed around the terminology introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, in distinguishing between a distribution of economic, political, and cultural resources (different forms of capital) making up a three-dimensional social space; a habitus — composed of a series of cognitive "schemes" such as described by scheme theory — tailored to specific positions within this space through processes of internalisation and adaptation; and different institutionally organised fields of social practices generated by these habitual dispositions. The aggregation of social practices in turn represents the distribution of resources at a certain point in time, i.e. the structure of the social space. In this way, an analytical full circle can be established from structure to action and back to structure again, as the following graphic shows.

Graphic 1

The cycle of reproduction and transformation
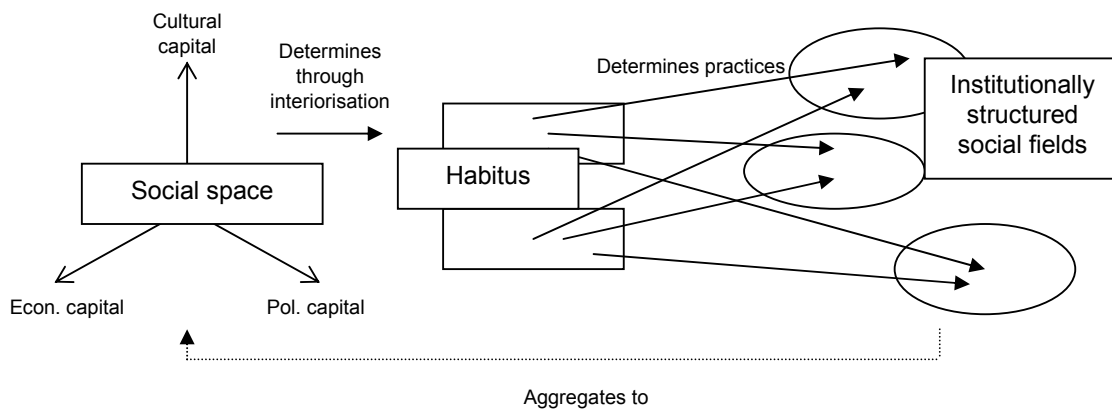
This model was originally designed to explain mechanisms of reproduction in a Western class society. I will add several important modifications, especially with regard to the concept of habitus, in order to avoid an overly static view of society and the notion of "false consciousness" that Bourdieu's original concept implies.

The idea of a cultural compromise, that I will develop in some detail, will serve this purpose. A cultural compromise emerges when the different actors have enough interests — determined by their position in social space — in common to negotiate a shared understanding of the social world, i.e. a language in which the different points of views can be expressed. The ideal of the solidary Indian community united against a hostile and insecure outside world represents just one example of such a cultural compromise.

How can we now conceptualise social and cultural change? They result from transformations in the distribution of resources among individuals (the structure of the social space). According to the new mix of resources at their disposal, individuals develop new sets of strategic practices — generated, however, by relatively stable, but by no means "cemented" habitual schemes. Depending on the exact nature of the change in the balance of power, the practices of a certain group of individuals become generalised and existing cultural compromises are being transformed — according to the new constellation of forces that also redistributes the capacity of making ones own view of the social world plausible for others. The new economic, political, and symbolic practices aggregate in their intended and non-intended consequences to a structure of resource distribution that again differs from the "original" one. At any point in this cycle of reproduction and transformation we can identify "sources" of change: in the process of aggregation (accumulation of non-intended consequences), in the determination of habitus through structure (new resources at disposal of individuals), and in the structuring of social practices through habitus (innovation).

In *chapter three* this conceptual skeleton is fleshed out in order to "make it work" for a better understanding of social change in Indian peasant communities. "Fleshing out" means aiming at a precise description of the structure of social space, of habitual dispositions, and of the different sets of practices in various social fields that characterize Indian peasant communities. This model has, evidently enough, to be located in time and space. I choose the ideal type community of the thirties and forties of this century, the "classic" Indian community of early ethnographic writing. Social stratification — long underestimated in the functionalist literature due to the prevalence of the image of the egalitarian community — is one of the main features of these communities. I
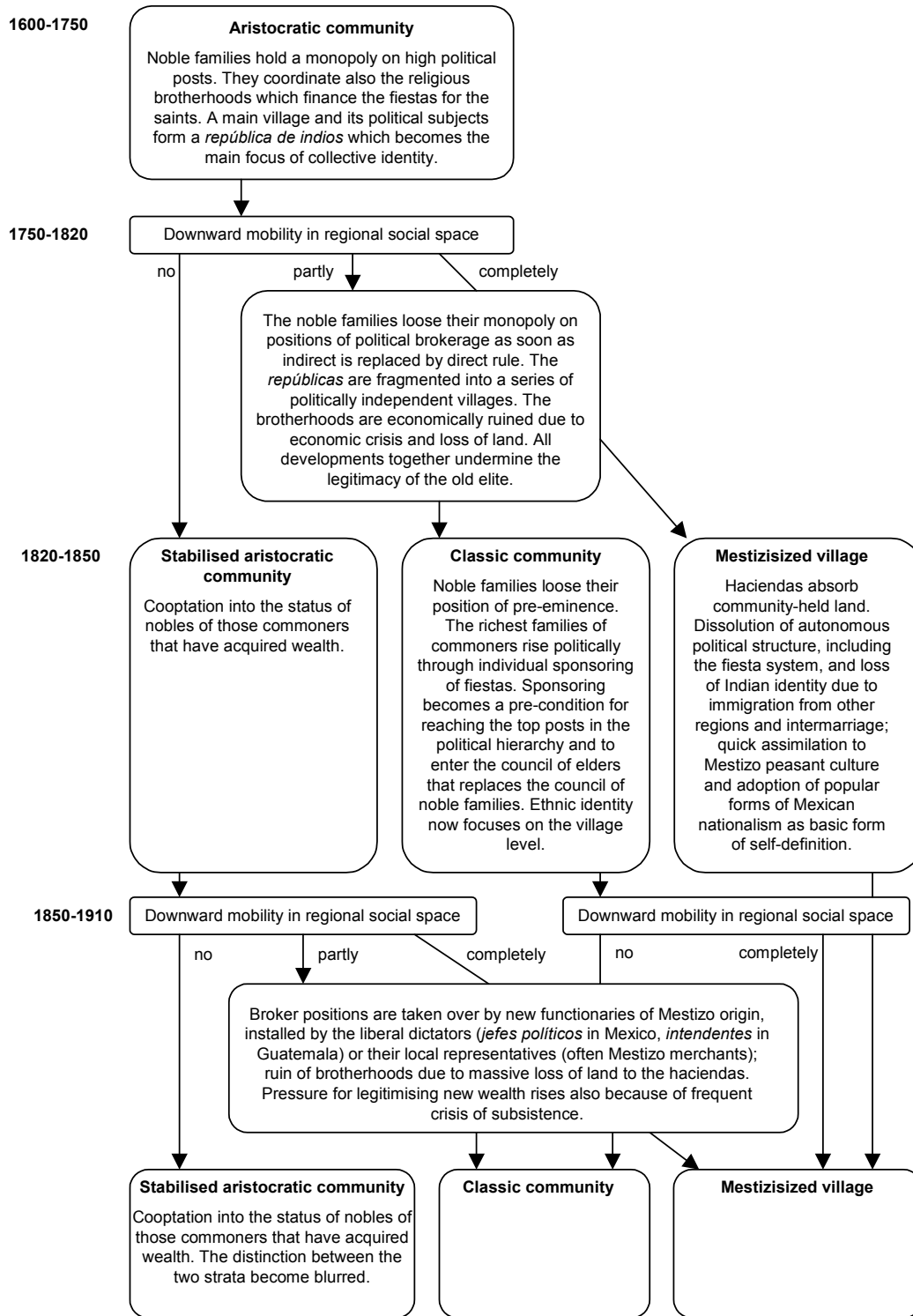
distinguish between a strata of subsistence producers, and a strata of peasants and merchants able of accumulating capital. I then show, mainly by reviewing the literature on peasant economic behaviour, including the Neo-Chayanovian literature, that there are indeed two different sets of habitual dispositions, two different schemes for cognition and action that correspond to these two groupings in the social space of the village. The "image of the limited good", a hotly debated concept of George Foster, is reinterpreted as representing the characteristic cognitive scheme of subsistence farmers. Risk aversion strategies and strategies of utility maximisation, such as described by Chayanov, are two other characteristic of the peasant's habitus. I then show how on the symbolic field different notions and ideals of communitarian solidarity emerge from these habitual dispositions. The classic Indian community, such as described by the early ethnographers, comes very close to a realisation of the ideal of an solidary, inward-looking community produced by the habitual dispositions of subsistence peasants. It represents a certain cultural compromise between them and the local elites, where the latter have to take the expectations of solidarity of the former seriously. The reduction of the horizon of identity to the boundaries of the village and the emergence of the "classic" form of cargo-systems, where the local elite has to sponsor expensive fiestas in order to be eligible for the highest political posts at the village level, are the two main characteristics of these communities.

This "classic" Indian community represents, however, only one possible type of rural social structure in Mesoamerica, as the *exposée* in chapter two has shown. The model will therefore be dynamised in subsequent chapters in order to show under which historical conditions the emergence of such communities is to be expected and under which one observes their transformation into other types of Indian communities. The basic hypothesis is that the balance of power between the two social classes depends on the relations between the community and the wider society. There is an economic, a political, and a cultural aspect of this relation, and I discuss in *chapter four* a whole series of models that tried to systematize these different structures. From central place theory, such as applied to Guatemala by Carol Smith and others, I take different forms of market relationships. From the rural sociology literature a typology of land distributions will be derived (from minifundist peasants working on neighbouring haciendas

to farming communities within an equal pattern of regional land distribution). On the political level I distinguish, based on the literature on *caciquismo* and political clientelism, between more or less monopolised forms of political communication linking villages and the centres of regional power and between a more or less hierarchical political structure. Similar distinctions are then made with regard to the distribution of cultural capital. A broad historical overview from the 17th to the late 20th centuries shows under which historical circumstances and in which periods which form of economic, political, and cultural distribution of resources prevailed. In order to make these different developments more easy to describe and to compare their effects on the village level, these transformations are described as "movements" of an individual village in the three-dimensional social space.

The following two chapters then analyse in quite some detail what effects these different "movements" had with regard to the balance of power between the two social classes on the village level; how this transformation of the social space led to new interpretations of the ideal of the solidary community and — on the political field — to new types of cargo systems. I thus try to understand under which precise conditions — described as specific movements in regional social space — the "classic community" analysed in chapter three emerges and under which it is transformed in which way. *Chapter five* describes these structural transformations up to independence, while *chapter six* brings us up to the early nineties of the last (i.e. the 20th) century. The following two schemes give an overview of chapter five and six. They show that this model is not unidirectional or teleological, but allows for different paths of historical developments, depending on how the integration of the village into regional social structures evolved over time. The two schemes are, evidently enough, not self-explanatory, but are meant to illustrate the mode of reasoning that will be used in these two main chapters of the book.

Graphic 2
Two transformation models

1600-1750

Aristocratic community

Noble families hold a monopoly on high political posts. They coordinate also the religious brotherhoods which finance the fiestas for the saints. A main village and its political subjects form a *república de indios* which becomes the main focus of collective identity.

1750-1820

Downward mobility in regional social space

no   partly   completely

The noble families loose their monopoly on positions of political brokerage as soon as indirect is replaced by direct rule. The *repúblicas* are fragmented into a series of politically independent villages. The brotherhoods are economically ruined due to economic crisis and loss of land. All developments together undermine the legitimacy of the old elite.

1820-1850

Stabilised aristocratic community

Cooptation into the status of nobles of those commoners that have acquired wealth.

Classic community

Noble families loose their position of pre-eminence. The richest families of commoners rise politically through individual sponsoring of fiestas. Sponsoring becomes a pre-condition for reaching the top posts in the political hierarchy and to enter the council of elders that replaces the council of noble families. Ethnic identity now focuses on the village level.

Mestizisized village

Haciendas absorb community-held land. Dissolution of autonomous political structure, including the fiesta system, and loss of Indian identity due to immigration from other regions and intermarriage; quick assimilation to Mestizo peasant culture and adoption of popular forms of Mexican nationalism as basic form of self-definition.

1850-1910

Downward mobility in regional social space

Downward mobility in regional social space

no   partly   completely   no   completely

Broker positions are taken over by new functionaries of Mestizo origin, installed by the liberal dictators (*jefes políticos* in Mexico, *intendentes* in Guatemala) or their local representatives (often Mestizo merchants); ruin of brotherhoods due to massive loss of land to the haciendas. Pressure for legitimising new wealth rises also because of frequent crisis of subsistence.

Stabilised aristocratic community

Cooptation into the status of nobles of those commoners that have acquired wealth. The distinction between the two strata become blurred.

Classic community

Mestizisized village

"classic" community

↓

Positional change in social space

Upward mobility in land distribution and politics ↙ no ↓ down ↓ Upward mobility in trade hierarchy

1910-1930

| New agrarian elite monopolises broker positions; legitimation through land gains | Continuity of the old agragrian elite | Proletarianization of the subsistence oriented stratum; they de-legitimize the agrarian elite by converting to Protestanism or orthodox Catholicism | Emergence of a trade-bourgeoisie which ceases to support the old arrangement by conversion |

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

1930-1990

Agrarista community	Stabilised "classic" community	Pluralised Indian community
New political elite depends on relations with regional powerholders; agrarian laws and revolutionary discourse new elements of the cultural compromise; cargo-system is abandoned and political life secularised; self-definition as an Indian community is abandoned.	New middlemen are integrated into the old order and become members of the council of elders; cargo-system is modified in order to accommodate demographic and economic change; political opponents, such as members of Protestant sects, are expelled; the local municipality remains the main focus of Indian identity.	Disempowerment of the council of elders; introduction of collectively financed fiestas organised by committees; highest political posts, dissociated from previous sponsoring of fiestas, are controlled by new commercial elite; factionalism mirrors political cleavages along party lines on the national level; the national state becomes the focus of expectations of solidarity; ideology of development and progress central elements of the new cultural compromise. The children of the commercial elite enter the institutions of higher education and become the social basis of Indian nationalist movements.

I shall use this transformation model to explain and compare processes of social change at the local level over the last 200 years. It allows to identify a general pattern behind all these historic variations and to trace them back — through the metaphor of movements through the "three-dimensional social space" — to a few factors. Several dozen case studies can be interpreted with the help of this model — some well, others less well. The two chapters represent the empirical core of the book and contain in-depth discussions of a wide range of ethnographic and ethno-historical work. Sometimes, my interpretation goes *à rebours* with regard to the one of the author, and I therefore have to make my view plausible through a careful re-lecture, sometimes between the lines, of the ethnographic or ethno-historical text. The following list gives an

overview of the cases interpreted in the light of this model.

Table 1

List of case studies

Pluralised Indian communities in the 20th century Mexico and Guatemala

Panajachel (Western Guatemala) .... Tax, Hinshaw

Santiago Atitlán (Western Guatemala) .... Wasserstrom

San Pedro la Laguna (Western Guatemala) .... Paul

San Pedro Sacatepequez (Western Guatemala) .... Smith

Teotitlán del Camino (Oaxaca) .... Stephen

Tzintzuntzan (Michoacán) .... Lewis

Teopixca (Puebla) .... Chamoux

Agrarist revolutionary communities in 19th and 20th century Mexico

Huasteca .... Schryer

Naranja (Michoacán) .... Friedrich

Lowland communities of Chiapas .... Deverre

Altos de Jalisco in the early 19th century .... Taylor

Buaysiacobe (Sonora) .... O'Connor

Several villages in the Sierra of Michoacán .... Carrasco

Proletarised communities

Chimaltenango (Western Guatemala) .... Wagley, Watanabe

San Miguel Ixtahuacán (Western Guatemala) .... Smith

Stabilised classical communities in the 20th century

Chamula (Chiapas) .... Wasserstrom, Pozas, Collier

Chichicastenango (Western Guatemala) .... Gruhn

Chinautla (Western Guatemala) .... Reina

Hueyapán (Morelos) .... Friedlander

Ihuatzio (Michoacán) .... van Zantwijk

Zinacantán (Chiapas) .... Wasserstrom, Collier, Cancian

San Franscisco Atotonilco, Xilocuautla (Puebla) .... Chamoux

The concluding *seventh chapter* brings us back to the discussions on whether a theory of social change is possible. I first argue that contrary to how it appears, the model of social transformations in Indian Mesoamerica is not a new version of a dependency theory making (under-)developments in the peripheries dependent on the changing "needs" of the developed centres of economic and political power. The movements in the "three-dimensional social space" are actually not the "cause" of historic events, but should be interpreted as the cumulative consequences of the actions by all members of society. In this sense, they are not "external"

variables determining change at the village level, but part of an "internal" cycle of reproduction and transformation. I then give some hints on how one could proceed to a full explanation of social change by making this aspect of the analytical "full circle" explicit, i.e. by showing how individual social practices aggregate into changes in the structure of the encompassing social space.

Finally, I discuss the possibility of generalising the model developed in this book. Can it be expanded in order to explain other developments in other regions of the world at other times? I will show, referring to the literature on the relation between history and social theory, that such an extension is not possible because every non-teleological, non-linear model of historical change necessarily has to introduce the specifities of time and place. There are, to play with a metaphor of Marshall Sahlins, only islands of regularity that can be discovered, or, more precisely, reconstructed through comparative research. The islands are sometimes smaller, sometimes bigger, depending on the scope of the perspective (from local to global) and the size of the units of comparison (individuals or entire societies). The sea, without which no piece of land becomes an island, remains.

This is, however, an epistemological problem and not a theoretical one. We cannot focus on all historical developments at one and the same time, although all of them could in principal (although not in practice because of lack of data, etc.) be the object of a theory of social change. Thus, the model represented here cannot be expanded beyond Indian Mesoamerica between 1680 and 1990; but the methodology used to construct it — the general transformation model with its analytical circle going from social space, to habitus, to social practices, and back again to social space — may fruitfully applied to other regions and times. Social change is, in conclusion, not a topic we should give as burial objects to the old modernist theories on the linear progress of mankind. What is happening here and there to different people at different places is not entirely unique and specific, only accessible through thick description. There are patterns and motives of change that a comparative social analysis can discover in the fabric of history.