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Discussion Paper 9

SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND EXILE IN MEXICO

**Report on a field study among relocated Guatemalan
refugees in south-east Mexico,
August-November 1988**

by

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Preface

The following paper reports on a study on the social dynamics in a planned refugee resettlement scheme in south-eastern Mexico. The study is part of a larger UNRISD project on **Refugees, Returnees and Local Society: Interaction and Livelihood**, which also includes research on self-settled refugees in Mexico, as well as on refugees and returnees in Zambia and Pakistan. The emphasis in this project is on studying the social situation of refugees, including the social differentiation among refugee communities, their strategies for re-establishing normal life, and their interactions with host communities.

The author of this report carried out field research in 1988 among the refugees of the Maya Tecún settlement scheme in Mexico's Yucatán peninsula. These refugees were among the estimated 100,000 people who entered Mexico from Guatemala in 1982-1983, fleeing the Guatemalan "pacification" programme that left up to 70,000 people dead and 700,000 more displaced. They were originally sheltered in temporary camps set up along the Mexican-Guatemalan border and provided with relief supplies from the Mexican government and international agencies. However, by 1983 it had become clear that the approximately 46,000 refugees in these camps would not be repatriated in the near future, and the Mexican government, along with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), implemented longer term strategies to deal with the refugee population. One such strategy was the establishment of settlements, like that at Maya Tecún, as part of an effort to encourage self-sufficiency among the refugees, and to reduce their dependence on relief supplies. The refugees were provided with land and with opportunities for wage employment, and the relief supplies provided to them were curtailed significantly.

This paper describes the composition of the refugee population, and provides an overview of the events that resulted in their settlement at Maya Tecún, and the conditions under which they live. It goes on to analyse the process by which this initially dependent community is being transformed, perforce, into a self-sufficient one. The author discusses both the factors that entered into the decision on the part of the host country to resettle the refugees and the economic and social strains that emerged in the refugee community as a result of this policy. An important part of his analysis is a discussion of the interactions between the refugees, the surrounding Mexican population, and the refugee program administrators.

Stepputat's emphasis on social analysis has proved to be a very valuable one in the refugee context. His thorough exploration of the internal organization within the refugee community, as well as the social dynamics of the refugees' economic integration into the regional economy and the growing economic differentiation among them, enables him to uncover reasons for organizational successes and failures, and reveals some of the important, though seldom recognized, dilemmas of resettlement facing refugee populations.

His approach also provides a means for better understanding group and individual behaviour in the refugee setting. For instance, he argues that the lack of a tradition of communal farming in many communities hindered several carefully planned agricultural schemes, and that the desire to avoid government control over their production led many refugees to lease land from neighboring Mexicans rather than participate in the agricultural projects organized on their behalf. Among the reasons Stepputat discovered for a surprising resistance among the Maya Tecún refugees towards resettlement to a seemingly more attractive site were a reluctance to disturb, once again, their social environment; an uncertainty, originating in their experience in Guatemala, over future land ownership rights; and a wish to remain a visible refugee population, rather than to be integrated into the Mexican society, as a form of political protest and expression.

Future UNRISD work on refugees, returnees, and local society will help to broaden the picture presented in this paper to include other communities in Mexico, as well as in Africa and Asia. It will continue to emphasize social dynamics but will explore other settings, including different kinds of host-refugee relationships, and in self-settled rather than scheme-settled refugee communities.

Dharam Ghai
Director

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1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to describe and analyse the situation of Guatemalan refugees living in the Yucatán peninsula in south-east Mexico. The refugees arrived in Mexico in 1981-83, but the Mexican government decided to move them to the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo (Q.Roo) in 1984. Funded by UNHCR, the Mexican Commission for Assistance to Refugees (COMAR) has established five settlements, and the two organizations in co-operation have launched a programme designed to help the refugees to become self-sufficient.

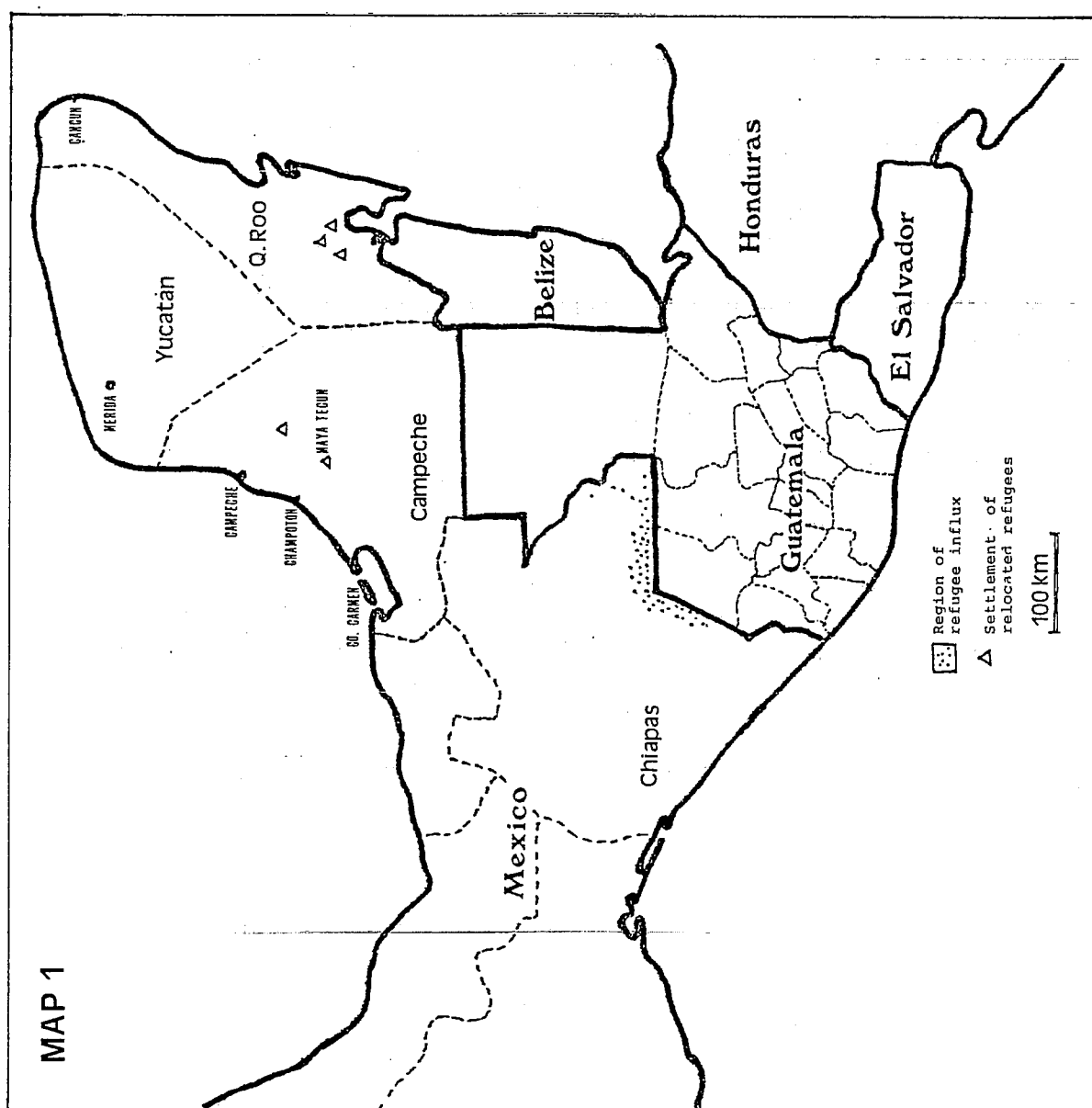
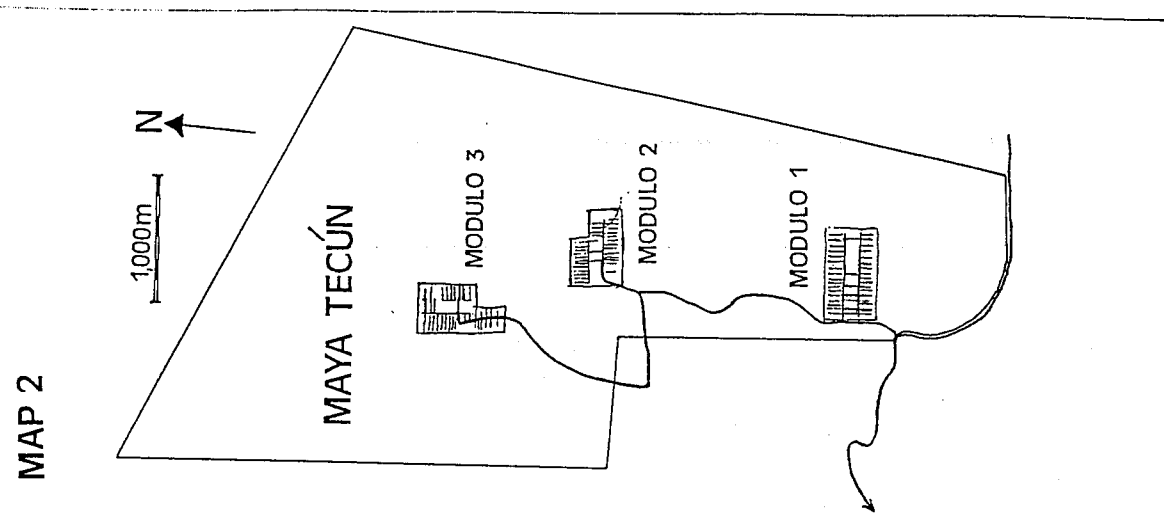
The increasingly prolonged character of refugee situations in the contemporary world has forced international relief organizations to consider the transition from emergency relief to self-sufficiency. Central America provides one example, and the Yucatán settlements are the first in the region to undertake a programme for self-sufficiency. Hence, it is important to learn from this experience.

This report is a preliminary analysis of interviews, observations, and statistical data which I collected during my fieldwork from August to November 1988 in the Maya Tecún settlement in the state of Campeche. The report provides a brief description of the 6,800 inhabitants: their backgrounds and experience; their present organization; and their responses to the programme for self-sufficiency. The programme is akin to other Mexican development schemes, but the responses of the refugees are shaped by the necessary and existential choice between repatriation and local integration.

The refugees constitute an important piece in the complicated political jigsaw puzzle of Central America. Therefore, many interested parties communicate their views on the situation to the refugees. Broadcast news from government, rebel and other transmitters in Florida, Cuba, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua reach the refugees. And UNHCR delivers letters and tapes from the refugees' relatives in Guatemala begging the refugees to return. (This noteworthy service by UNHCR provides an important channel of communication between the refugees and UNHCR officials.)

When I first presented myself to the representatives of the Guatemalans in Maya Tecún I was greeted with many questions and expressions, such as: "How is the situation in Guatemala right now? Is it possible to return to our villages? Do you know the plans of UNHCR for the next year? We fear that they are going to leave us orphans. We're merely sheltered here..."

These very common expressions illustrate the preoccupations that distinguish the inhabitants of Maya Tecún from the Mexican peasants in the neighbouring villages: the feeling of suspension, the doubts, and the lack of information on which to base decisions, or, more accurately, the lack of confidence in these bits of information. In the report, several



extracts from interviews illustrate this lack of confidence, and Chapter 10 details the refugees' decision-making problems.

The ambience of a refugee settlement is saturated by rumours, myths, dreams, threats, promises, doubts, and distrust. My own presence in Maya Tecún produced a perfect example of this ambience: after I had spent a few days in the settlement, the rumour went around: "The *gringo* is here in order to list families who want to leave for Canada with him". Canada has delivered a significant part of the food supplies through the World Food Programme, and the Canadians once offered resettlement opportunities to the refugees (migration policies have now changed). After I had stayed three months in Maya Tecún, refugees still presented their firm decision on resettlement in Canada to me: "We are 10 families who have decided to follow you to Canada....".

These introductory remarks must be borne in mind when reading the following report. Many of the problems commented on here are similar to the problems of development and income-generating projects elsewhere in Latin America, Africa, or Asia. But it makes a difference to be a refugee! To outsiders, the difference may be difficult to understand, but the refugees' own metaphors and common expressions offer some ideas about their own interpretations of their reality. Throughout the report such metaphors and common expressions are translated and indicated by quotation marks, and where necessary, their meaning is explained. Hopefully, this will help to show how the condition of exile influences a programme for self-sufficiency.

2. Maya Tecún: the Population

The refugee settlement, Maya Tecún, is located in the state of Campeche, one and a half hours drive from the state capital, Campeche (see map 1). The region is sparsely populated and dominated by agricultural production on private farms and in *ejidos*, state-organized peasant communities which cultivate national lands. Apart from the railway-town and *ejido*, Carrillo Puerto, which has 4,000 inhabitants, the neighbouring *ejidos* range from 100 to 1,000 inhabitants. The 7,000 Guatemalan refugees who built Maya Tecún in co-operation with COMAR in 1984-85 duplicated the population density of the microregion; the nearest large town, Champotón (20,000 inhabitants) is located 40 kilometres away.

The refugees inhabit three sections, or *modulos*: gridded, camp-like villages with a school, a clinic, shops, a supplementary feeding centre, and warehouses in the central service area. The villages are located 2 kilometres from each other in an area which the Mexican government has placed at the disposal of the refugees (see map 2).

Table 1 shows the sex and age distribution of the refugee population of Maya Tecún, compared with the averages of Mexican and Guatemalan rural populations. The proportion of children is larger than average,

a fact that might be due to the large number of orphans (the 1986 birth rate among Campeche refugees was slightly lower than the rural Guatemala birth rate in 1985: 4.0 per cent against 4.1 per cent. See sources in table 1). The distribution of the population suggests that the refugee flow was the result of conditions of generalized violence rather than selective political persecution. The latter situation would have included a refugee population of predominantly male adults as selective persecution in Guatemala was directed at leaders of popular organizations such as unions and co-operatives.

The ethnic and religious composition of the refugee population is rather complex. Apart from the *ladinos* - Spanish-speaking people of mixed Spanish and Indian descent, who perceive themselves as non-Indians - seven different Maya-Indian groups can be distinguished in the settlement. Although some of the ethnic groups belong to the same language groupings (e.g. Mam, Kanjobal, Chuj and Jacalteca of the Mam language group), they do not understand each other. Hence, Spanish is the common language, despite the fact that one third of the population does not speak Spanish. The ethnic groups, their share of the refugee population, and the proportion of inhabitants who do not speak Spanish is listed in table 2. This table is based on the 1986 state government census of the refugee population of Campeche. The data which I have drawn from this census, represent 81 per cent of the Maya Tecún population as at mid-1988.

Table 1
**Population of Maya Tecún by sex and age (1986) as compared
with rural Mexico and rural Guatemala (1980) (in %)**

	Male	Female	0-14	15-64	65 +
Maya Tecún	51.5	48.5	53.6	43.7	2.7
Rural Guatemala	50.7	49.3	47.3	50.0	2.7
Rural Mexico	51.5	48.5	49.8	46.7	3.5

(Sources: COMAR, 1987 and United Nations Demographic Yearbook, 1986)

Similarly, table 2 lists the religious affiliations of the refugees. While the majority are Roman-Catholic (70 per cent), the non-Catholic sects and churches are gaining momentum. Among the Chuj and the *ladinos* in the settlement, for example, the non-Catholics make up the majority. In the census, most non-Catholic households have labelled themselves "Evangelics", but a number of them, nevertheless, belong to such communities as the Pentecostals, the Presbyterians, the Sabbatists, and other Protestant communities.

Table 2

The ethnic groups of the Maya Tecún inhabitants, their language, and the religious affiliations of the households (1986)

	% of inhabitants	% non- Spanish	% Catholics	% Evangelics	% Jehovah's Witnesses
Kanjobal	29.5	31	77	21	-
Mam	24.0	27	59	38	-
Kekchí	21.3	64	87	12	0
Chuj	6.5	34	43	54	-
Quiché	5.4	19	91	9	-
Jacalteca	1.4	9	*	*	-
Cackchiquel	0.6	3	*	*	-
Ladino	11.1	0	44	30	22
Total	99.8	33	70	25	2

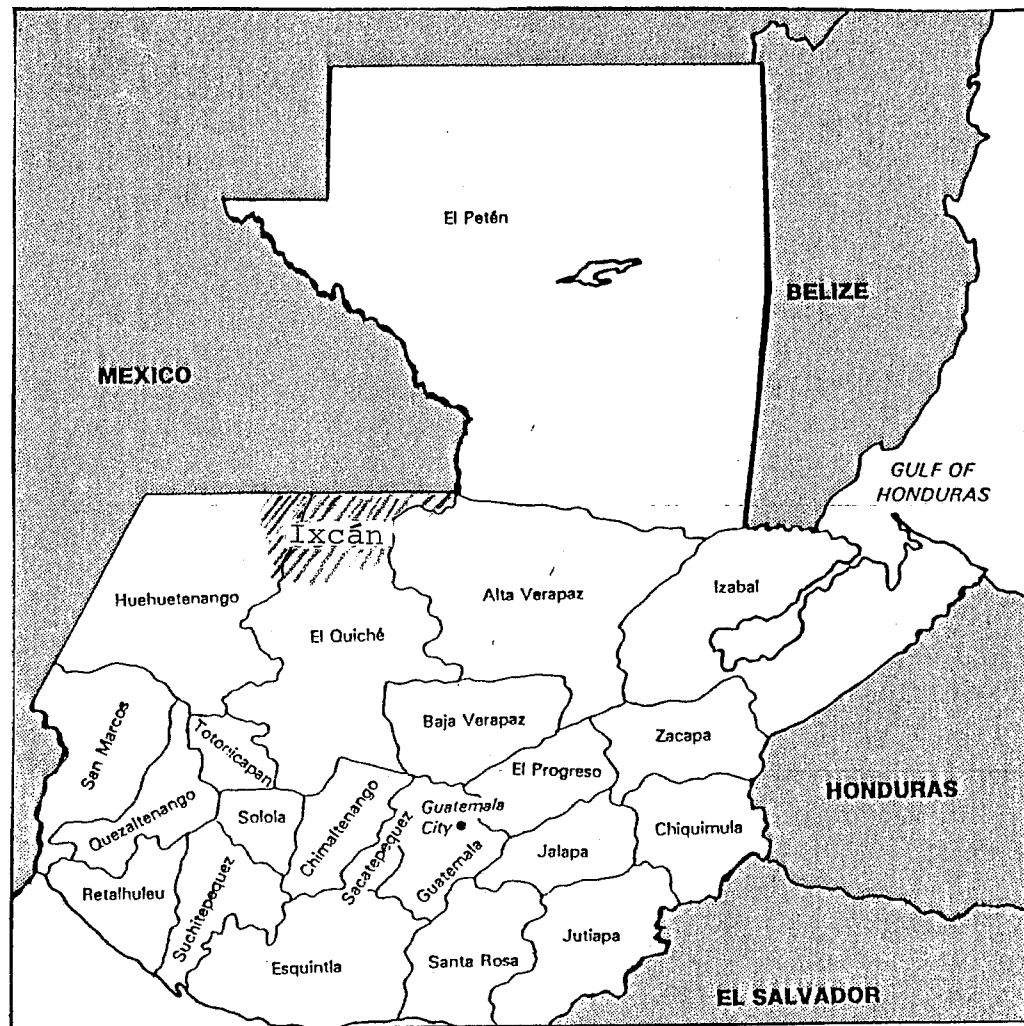
(2% of the households are registered as atheists).

* The sample is too small.

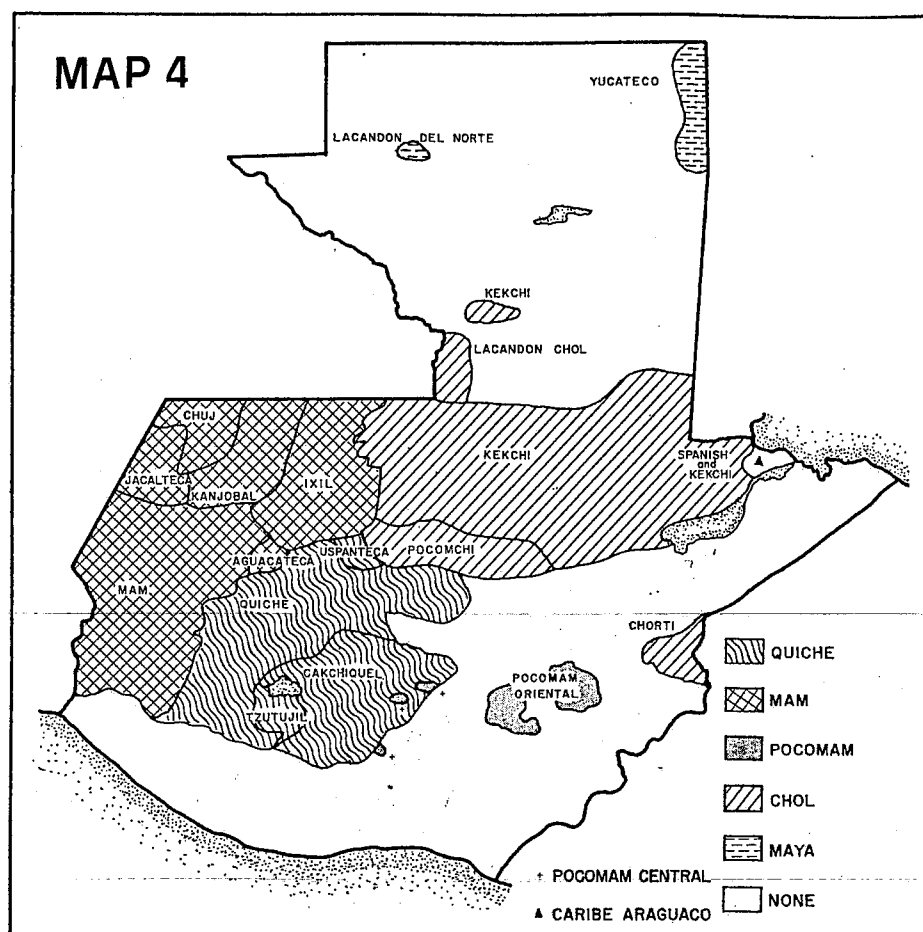
Geographically, the majority of the Guatemalan refugees come from Huehuetenango and Quiché in north-west Guatemala (see map 3). Some *ladinos* from the northern department of Peten have sought refuge in Mexico too, but they are not present in Maya Tecún. Map 4 shows the traditional distribution of the ethnic groups in question: (1) Mam, Kanjобal, Chuj and Jacalteca in the north-western highlands; (2) Quiché and Cackchiquel in the central highlands; and 3) Kekchí on the northern slopes of the central highlands.

In the area of origin in Guatemala, the departments of Huehuetenango and Quiché, the population is dominated by *indigenas*: indigenous people, who make up 66 per cent and 85 per cent of these departments, but as the *ladinos* mainly inhabit the larger towns, the percentages of *indigenas* in the rural municipalities range from 90 to 99 per cent (CEIDEC, 1988, p.93). In spite of a long history of economic and political domination, integration in the market economy, extraction of forced labour, expropriation of farming lands and so forth, these highland communities have maintained social coherence and a high degree of cultural autonomy until the present decades.

In the Guatemalan context, the region of Huehuetenango, northern Quiché and Alta Verapaz is marginal - in geographical as well as economic terms - to the Central Highlands (Guatemala City and Quetzaltenango) and the south coast, where agro-business, industry and financial institutions are concentrated.



The economic life in Huehuetenango and Quiché is dominated by agricultural production - mainly corn, beans, wheat and potatoes - on plots of an average size of 1 to 1.5 hectare of poor land. The land is typically family property, which is subdivided through heritage, but leasing is widespread as well. As the holdings do not provide subsistence, seasonal migration is the rule. The Mam, Kanjobal, Chuj and Jacalteca go to the coffee plantations in southern Mexico, or to the plantations in the south of Guatemala. The Quiché and Cackchiquel go to the south, while the Kekchí work at coffee plantations in Alta Verapaz or at banana plantations on the Atlantic coast (see map 3). Other activities are retail commerce, food gathering in the woods (Kekchí) and crafts production for local and regional markets.



Ethnic groups in Guatemala (from Nash, 1969)

While ordinary problems are "small problems" (*problemillas*), the refugees in Maya Tecún have labelled the events that led to their flight as "the problem in order to understand the experience and present situation of the refugees".

Since the land reform of the Arbenz government was brought to an end - and reversed - by the CIA-backed military coup in 1954, there have been no attempts to solve the land problems and the problems of a very limited national market by means of a redistribution of land. Hence, land has been the "sore spot", *la llaga*, of the poor in the highlands, who have "spent much time wandering in the search of land" (as stated by one of the refugees).

As an alternative to land reforms, the governments have given priority to colonization projects in the sparsely populated lowlands of Peten and the north of Huehuetenango, Quiché and Alta Verapaz. During the economic boom of the 1960s, brought about by increasing agro-exports, North American investments, the Central American Common Market, and the initiatives of the Alliance for Progress, the government sought a modernization of the peasant communities (the Alliance for Progress was an inter-American development plan initiated by the United States in the wake of the Cuban Revolution). Credit schemes, fertilizers,

3. Background

co-operatives, transport systems and tourism reached hitherto neglected parts of the highlands. Many of the projects failed in the 1970s, when markets contracted and prices - especially for fertilizers - went up. Nevertheless, the projects created expectations concerning material improvements as well as aspirations to political influence among the indigenous population (Arias, 1988).

During the second half of the 1970s, popular movements flourished in Guatemala, while the *indigenas* of the highlands entered the national political scene for the first time. Alongside the labour and peasant unions, the Christian base communities played an important role in the organization of these movements. Until the 1950s, the traditional local power élites still influenced the indigenous highland communities through the *cofradías*, the religious-political organizations, which institutionalized the syncretic beliefs of these communities (see for example Tax and Hinshaw, 1969). The heads of the *cofradías* opposed any change that would pose a threat to their power monopoly.

In order to challenge this monopoly, indigenous merchants formed an alliance - *Acción Católica* (AC) - with the Catholic Church. Through the training of lay-priests - the *catequistas* - Christian base communities were set up in many areas. As conditions changed for the communities during the 1950s and 1960s, new questions arose among the indigenous population. *Acción Católica* and the Christian communities, which represented a modern Catholic interpretation of the world, were sensitive to these questions and gained importance (Arias, 1988). In the economic sphere, AC organized co-operatives, which threatened the traditional power structure in the highlands. By 1976 there were 510 co-operatives comprising 132,000 participants (Plant, 1978, p.87).

The organizational work of AC was reinforced by foreign priests and religious missions such as the North American Maryknoll Fathers and the Sacred Heart Fathers from Spain, who worked in Huehuetenango and Quiché. For historical reasons the Catholic institutions in Guatemala have been very weak in this century. Following the 1954 coup, therefore, the Guatemalan government invited foreign priests and missionaries to work in the Guatemalan countryside. In the 1960s the missions mentioned above came to follow the same lines of action as the AC did (Berryman, 1984). The Christian Democratic Party, founded in 1955, also supported these modernizing forces in order to establish a power base in the countryside.

For an interpretation of the violent events of 1978-82, I will refer to Carol Smith (1984). In her view, the indigenous population had succeeded in developing new strategies for the integration into the market economy. Through these strategies they resisted proletarianization and even became less dependent on migratory labour on the plantations. Alongside this increasing economic autonomy, they developed their political autonomy through grass-roots organizations that protested against land scarcity, discrimination, drafting, repression and rising prices (Arias, 1988).

This view does not conflict with the refugees' own interpretation of their experiences: "It was like a dream. Conditions improved. The peasants earned a little money, they could buy shoes. They learned how to grow coffee. Until then only the rich people knew how to grow coffee, so they didn't like it. They made a law, that obliged the peasants to sell to the rich at low prices. It was then the trouble began. It was a dream." (Extract from interview.)

According to Carol Smith, the increasing repression from 1978 onwards was in part a response to the labour shortage on the plantations, which had been brought about by the changes within the communities (p. 219). Another factor was that the guerilla movements had gained strength and increased their activities from 1975. During counter-insurgency programmes, numerous union leaders, priests, *catequistas* and potential popular leaders disappeared and were killed. Popular resistance grew, the organizations were radicalized and the guerilla recruited members from the indigenous groups.

In 1981-82, the Lucas García government changed the strategy in order to end the conflict which, at that time, had spread to the whole country. The army systematically raided more than 400 villages, burned the crops, and massacred the villagers more or less at random. As Carol Smith and Arturo Arenas observed, the targets were not those regions that were most affected by guerilla attacks, but the regions of successful mass organization, collectives and colonization project

This "pacification" - the official label on the first phase of the counter-insurgency programme - left up to 70,000 dead, while more than 200,000 sought refuge in the neighbouring countries. Up to 500,000 became internally displaced persons (Gatehouse, 1986).

The colonization of Ixcán is an important case of modernization, in which the interests of the Catholic missions, the government and poor peasants from the highlands, melted together in a moment of the late 1960s and early 1970s. An estimated three quarters of the refugee families in Maya Tecún lived in "our Holy Land Ixcán" before they came to Mexico, and the name of "Ixcán" brings about myths, visions, and memories among the refugees.

Ixcán is the name of the inaccessible, tropical lowlands in the north of Quiché and the north-east of Huehuetenango, between the Rivers Ixcán and Chixoy. Ixcán forms part of the Northern Transversal Strip, which the government designated for colonization in the 1960s (see map 3).

Generals, colonels, and large landholders acquired most of the land. The land was supposed to be fertile and possibly contained oil, but the lack of infrastructure and labour complicated its exploitation. This is probably why it was possible for different missions to acquire extensive lands in Ixcán, where they organized co-operatives of highland

4. The Case of Ixcán

5. Becoming Refugees: the M e x i c a n Response

peasants: the Maryknoll Fathers organized Mam, Chuj, Kanjobal, and Jacaltecas from Huehuetenango, and the Sacred Heart Fathers organized Quichés (from Quiché). The *Acción Católica* worked among Kekchís, who were driven out of Alta Verapaz by expanding coffee plantations. Three minor, and poor, co-operatives were organized by peasants themselves, without the assistance or initiative of religious organizations

In the late 1970s, Ixcán became a stronghold of the guerilla movement, EGP (the "Poor Peoples Army"). The government army repressed the population heavily, until finally, in 1981-82, they burned the newly settled villages and drove out the inhabitants. These were scattered in the jungle, where some of them still - in 1989 - remain in mobile "communities of resistance". Many sought refuge in Mexico, while others have returned to the forced reconstruction of "model villages" under heavy army control. The zone is still one of conflict, and several villages remain to be opened for the reconstruction.

Some of those who fled reached Mexico within a few hours. Others, living further away from the frontier, reached Mexico within three days, while others arrived after having spent 6, 12 or 18 months hiding in small groups "under the foliage" (*bajo el monte*) in the jungle. Reportedly they spent a tough time there, sleeping in the mud, eating roots, and sneaking back to their fields to get corn. These refugees arrived in very bad shape, when they finally gave up/got out.

The refugees set up camps within 2-5 kilometres from the border. The local host population received them well, provided them with food, exchanged food for work, and bought whatever the refugees had to sell (albeit at very low prices). In spite of the miserable health conditions, the refugees soon won fame for their ability to organize the camps and to receive and integrate newcomers (Aguayo, 1985; Manz, 1986; and OXFAM representatives, personal communication).

The refugees started to arrive in 1981. By 1983 UNHCR had registered 46,000 refugees living in 89 camps and settlements along 200 kilometres of border, reaching from populated areas in the west, to inaccessible jungle in the east (see map 3). Furthermore, an estimated 50,000 Guatemalans sought refuge in the coffee-producing region of Tapachula (near the Pacific Coast), where Guatemalans traditionally seek seasonal occupation. Neither the international community nor the Mexican state registered or assisted these Guatemalans, who merely stayed in Mexico when their three months working permit expired.

The Mexican policy towards the Guatemalan refugees has been ambiguous and alternating throughout the 1980s. The whole issue is very delicate since the Mexican government has to balance internal as well as external political contradictions. The relations with Guatemala have

historically been troublesome, and Mexico's position between the violent conflict in Central America and the side-taking government of the United States leaves little room for manoeuvre. Furthermore, migration policy is a central issue in the ongoing negotiations between Mexico and her neighbour to the north. According to Sergio Aguayo (1985) several other points must be kept in mind in order to analyse and understand the situation of the Guatemalan (and other Central American) refugees in Mexico:

- (a) Mexico is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention on Refugees and does not recognize the refugee status. Nevertheless, in 1980, the Government set up the Mexican Commission for Assistance to Refugees (*Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*, COMAR) to take care of the increasing number of Central Americans who sought political asylum in Mexico. Mexico is a signatory to several inter-American conventions on political asylum (the first one dating back to 1823), but the protection offered is limited. The government offers asylum solely to individuals who can prove political persecution (Loecher, 1986). Hence, the influx "en masse" of Guatemalan refugees, who feared for their lives, created confusion. There was no room for them within the legislation.
- (b) COMAR is an inter-ministerial organization that incorporates the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the Ministry of Work (MW). While the MHA - in charge of the migration authorities - has taken a very restrictive stance towards the refugees, the MFA has been in favour of a gentler policy. The latter is very concerned about the image of Mexico and is in favour of Mexico playing a leading, mediating role in the Central American conflict. The lack of consensus on refugee politics among the ministries logically affects the work of COMAR.

Mexican policy towards the Guatemalan refugees can be divided into three phases:

- (a) **Before November 1982**, the migration authorities harassed the refugees, and many of them were returned or deported (at least 2,000 in 1981). By February 1982, the UNHCR had recognized the Guatemalans as refugees in need of protection and granted an emergency programme to be implemented by COMAR. Mexico permitted a permanent UNHCR representation in the country, but its position was, and to some degree still is, ambiguous: Mexico is not a signatory to the Convention, and Mexicans are very sensitive about their sovereignty. Austerity in the camps characterized this phase.
- (b) **In November 1982**, the MHA publicly recognized the existence of foreigners in Mexico who had fled their country; it was "clearly established" that these persons "would not be returned or deported" (as cited in Aguayo, 1985). Supplies became more abundant and regular, and the 46,000 refugees received an FM 8 visa, which is permission to stay within 50 kilometres of the border.

In 1983 Guatemalan army incursions into Mexican territory were frequent. Refugees were shot and kidnapped. During that year the Mexican government realized that the presence of the refugees in Mexico would not be limited to a short period of time and that they would have to find durable solutions (Aguayo and O'Dogherty, 1986). Relocation of the refugees was considered as an alternative to the given situation.

- (c) On the 30th of April 1984 the Chupadero camp was attacked and six refugees were killed. The Mexican President immediately announced that the government had decided to relocate the refugees to the provinces of Quintana Roo and Campeche (see map 1) in order to guarantee their safety and to ease the troublesome logistics (COMAR was using aircraft and boats to bring in supplies to some of the remote camps). Among the unofficial reasons for relocating the refugees is the tense social and political situation in Chiapas, where land is scarce, unequally distributed, and a highly disputed resource. Furthermore, in Chiapas, the Church and several peasant organizations which had developed links to the refugee communities were in opposition to the ruling party, PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), while those in Campeche and Quintana Roo were known to be in favour of it.

The refugees themselves were reluctant to relocate despite the promised land and work opportunities. They were afraid of the unfamiliar surroundings (Campeche is a very hot and dry lowland region), afraid of being unable to go home, and afraid of the consequences of another uprooting process. By this time the camps were well established and well organized entities. The refugees had built schools and clinics, and the appointed promoters of education and health had been trained by the Catholic Church. Hence, many refugees resisted relocation. Incidents of confrontation and the use of various forms of coercion were reported. Some refugees fled the camps. The authorities changed their approach and started to convince the refugees through dialogue. The situation normalized and relocation took shape. By the end of 1984, 17,000 refugees were living in Campeche and Quintana Roo.

The relocation, however, seems to have been premature in terms of organization and infrastructural preparations. Four years later (1988), the realities of the relocation were still a recurring issue in the refugees' introduction of themselves to visitors: the promises, the harsh conditions of the transfer itself, the long weeks of waiting in giant granaries, the poor quality of the land in the new camps, the inadequate infrastructure, and the frustrations of broken promises. The relocation also influenced the future spirit of the new settlements. In the opinions of the refugees, COMAR had taken full responsibility for the welfare of the refugees by relocating them. The fact that the Mexican government decided to be the sole assistance-implementing organization in the Yucatán settlements accentuated this responsibility.

6. The Policy of "Self-sufficiency"

To the Executive Committee of UNHCR the Mexican government explained the relocation of the Guatemalan refugees in terms of the necessity of a "shift from the emergency stage to one of lasting and stable solutions" (Gonzales, 1984). As neither voluntary repatriation nor re-settlement in a third country were likely, the Mexican government had chosen to facilitate "self-sufficiency and the eventual integration" of the refugees in Mexico (ibid.).

In the overall programme for the Guatemalan refugees in Campeche ("*Programa Multiannual*") COMAR states that the gradual integration should "respect the cultural values of [the region] and of the refugee community" (COMAR, 1987). Socio-economic integration is the vehicle for self-sufficiency. In COMAR terms, "self-sufficiency" equals a situation that permits the withdrawal of relief assistance. This objective will be achieved through (a) programmes that lead to "economic autonomy" and "a level of living which is similar to that of the local population" and (b) the gradual transfer of community services to the refugee community itself and to the corresponding Mexican state institutions (COMAR, 1987).

The following indicates how COMAR and UNHCR have planned the self-sufficiency process for the refugees in Maya Tecún, Campeche where the majority of the refugees are peasants. Their main policy has been a combination of subsistence farming and seasonal wage-labour:

- (a) The government has assigned 1,276 hectares to be cultivated by the refugees as long as they stay in Mexico. Only 10 per cent of this area is considered suitable for cultivation (COMAR, 1987). The refugees cultivate 25 per cent of it which gives an average of 0.2 hectare per household. The minimum requirement is, however, estimated to be 1 to 2 hectares for the subsistence needs of an average-sized household in the region. COMAR has rented additional lands for the Maya Tecún refugees but (unlike the refugees in the settlements in Quintana Roo) they have never had enough land to cover their subsistence. In 1988 COMAR rented about 500 hectares.

The refugees are supposed to grow corn and beans for their own consumption, and fruit and vegetables for consumption and sale. The poor quality of the land, however, has prevented these latter crops from being grown in Maya Tecún.

The women traditionally take care of the important production that is located in the solar, the garden surrounding the house (fruit, vegetables, poultry, etc). In Maya Tecún, each family has the use of 200-300 m² around the house, compared with the 2,000-5,000 m² that is typical in the region. This obviously limits the opportunities for self-sufficiency and the occupation of the women.

In addition, COMAR has introduced various small-scale projects, such as beekeeping and raising of poultry and pigs. A veterinarian takes care of supervision and technical assistance.

- (b) The Mexican government changed the migratory status of the relocated refugees to an FM3 visa, which permits them to engage in wage-labour in the province of residence, i.e. Campeche, where they find work as day-labourers in agriculture and construction.
- (c) COMAR and UNHCR have introduced and supported non-agricultural income-generating projects on a small scale basis, such as handicraft production and workshops for carpentry and tailoring. COMAR and UNHCR have supplied tools, machinery, electricity, training and materials for a start. Furthermore, a certain amount of money has been assigned for any refugee-initiated projects.

The above model for helping the refugees to become self-sufficient is very similar to the integrated rural development schemes that have been implemented in Mexico since 1975. As in those schemes, one agency supervises and coordinates the efforts of various other subordinated state institutions. In Maya Tecún, for example, COMAR is responsible for the work of the Mexican Institute for Social Security (IMSS), which runs the clinics and the malaria campaign in the settlement.

7. The Internal Organization

In Chiapas, the refugees were told to form groups and elect representatives in order to facilitate the distribution of goods and the communication with COMAR and other relief organizations. During the process of relocation previously established groups were broken up, but in Campeche, the refugees soon re-established the system. Some groups continued, and new ones were formed as refugees from different camps in Chiapas were brought together in Campeche. Members of the same group live together in a neighbourhood and group membership - to some extent - expresses a sense of belonging.

The appendix lists the *modulos*, the names of the groups (most often the name of the place of origin of their members), the proportion of the most important ethnic group, and the percentage of Catholics and Evangelics in each group. Twenty to 100 households make up a group. Sometimes religion, place of origin and ethnic group correspond, but figures show that many groups are of complex composition. The three sections differ very much in their composition as well as in their way of handling the situation.

Modulo 1 is the most heterogeneous and divided section and has gained a reputation as an unorganized unit with no internal communication. Except for the Kekchí, all other ethnic groups are present. Of the three sections this one has the largest percentage of *ladinos* (20 per cent) and non-Catholics (41 per cent), and people from the Maryknoll Fathers' cooperatives in Ixcán Grande live side by side with other colonizers from Ixcán, and with peasants with no co-operative experience who lived close to the Mexican border in Huehuetenango. Many of the groups bear the names of the former Chiapas camps: Puerto Rico, Loma Bonita, Carmen Xan (the group of Jehova's Witnesses), and Delicias.

The latter group soon divided into five groups because of its previous size and internal disagreements (one of the groups is called "30 de Abril" in remembrance of the attack on the Chupadero camp in 1984).

The Kekchí and the Quiché dominate *modulo* 2, which has gained a reputation as the best organized section, and has become the centre for meetings and celebrations in the settlement. The people lived formerly in the colonizations of "Zona Reina", the Quiché part of Ixcán, and in Chiapas they arrived at the same site. In comparison with the other groups, the Kekchí groups are very homogeneous. Two thirds do not speak Spanish, and the Kekchí were unknown to most of the other refugees when they arrived in Mexico. The last group, bearing the name of the Chiapas camp, Vicente Guerrero, is akin to some of the groups in *modulo* 1 (*ladinos* with no cooperative experience).

There are almost no *ladinos* in *modulo* 3, which is dominated by Kanjobal and Mam from the cooperatives of the Maryknoll Fathers in Ixcán (Mayalan, Los Angeles, IV Pueblo, Xalbal). In Maya Tecún, Mam and Kanjobal seem to segregate, and there is a tendency towards a splitting up of Catholics and non-Catholics (most of the latter are Mam, and they concentrate in Mayalan II and Angeles II).

The groups are not fixed entities. Member households and individuals move around when strife arises, and the young couples do not automatically find a dwelling in the area of their parents' groups. Most of the people with whom I have spoken do have family and normally they live as close to each other as possible. In other instances the relocation has scattered families in different settlements.

In each *modulo* the group representatives elect a general representative, who meets with them each afternoon in order to convey information from COMAR and to discuss the tasks for the next day. Different committees take care of the organization and the carrying out of the tasks - distribution of goods, construction and maintenance work, and so forth. The groups have to appoint members of the committees, as well as promoters of health and education. "Promoters" are non-professionals who receive a minimum training in the fields of health care, curing or teaching. It seems to be the Diocese of San Cristobal that introduced and supported the idea of "promotion" among the refugees in Chiapas (IGE, 1986). Until 1986, the representatives handled disputes and punishment of refugees who offended internal regulations. Since 1986, the refugees in each *modulo* have elected a mayor, the *alcalde*, who has taken over these tasks.

In times of no conflict the representatives are seldom identical with the leaders. In some groups young men are appointed as representatives in order to train them in organizational tasks, and in other groups the appointment is seen as a punishment; the office is time-consuming and the representatives are caught in between COMAR and the refugees. The groups and the representatives are not the only networks in the settlement. They overlies and interact with other networks. The former

8. Transforming a Mode of Relief

leaders (presidents of the co-operatives, for example) are still in power, but they act in the background; they have their people, sometimes in different groups, and they have their own networks. The *catequistas* make up another important network. They meet every Saturday with the local nuns in order to plan the Sunday Mass and to discuss the text in relation to their present situation. They have much authority and act as resource-persons among the refugees.

Other networks are related to the home towns in the Guatemalan highland that the refugees left 15 to 20 years ago. For example, the Kanjobales from San Miguel de Acatán in Huehuetenango, the Miguelenos, get together each year to organize the celebration of their Saint, Michael, a fiesta in which the whole settlement participates.

The mode of relief

When the refugees first came to Maya Tecún, the migration authorities were in control of the access to the site. Maya Tecún was a camp and the refugees officially needed permission to leave. During the first couple of months the refugees had no such permission. All male adults were working, clearing the land, building houses, schools, clinics and roads, establishing the water supply and so forth.

When the workshops for carpentry and tailoring were set up, the groups appointed workers for them. The workers were supposed to be trained while they produced furniture for the schools, clinics, churches and offices, and uniforms and other clothes for the refugee community (COMAR, 1986).

It was the common view of the refugees that they had to work in exchange for the relief assistance. On the other hand, many refugees were proud of their work of construction and of the collectivity which they had displayed: "We were all working together". They told me that they were not satisfied with the houses which the hired Mexican workers set up. The Guatemalans took over but resented the fact that they did not receive any wages. Apparently, some of the refugees perceived this form of relief as a food-for-work programme, which they knew from Guatemala.

Only the able, male adults were supposed to work for the community in the refugee camp, but everybody was fed and cared for: large as well as small families, orphans and widows as well as able workers. There was, in other words, no direct relation between a household's production and the fulfilment of its physical needs.

Towards self-sufficiency

While "working together" and equal distribution of goods did not cause major problems in the construction phase, things changed when COMAR introduced the self-sufficiency programme in 1985. COMAR

intended to give continuity to the principles of equality and collectivity which were inherent in the previous mode of relief. As the COMAR coordinator put it, the refugees would be self-sufficient when they were "working every day, either for the community or for wages" (Refugees, 1987). Every able male adult, or "worker" (*trabajador*), was to contribute a certain number of working days per month to the community, either in the cultivation of the land, in the projects in the settlement, in works of construction and maintenance, or in community services (as promoters, committee members, representatives or police officers).

The land was divided between the *modulos* who were to cultivate it "en colectivo". COMAR agronomists decided on the techniques and the means of production (including high-yielding seeds, fertilizer and pesticides) and gave instructions to the work committees. The harvest was distributed equally to all households (including widows, promoters, and others who did not directly supply agricultural labor), while COMAR simultaneously cut back the food assistance.

The projects (workshops, livestock breeding, maize mills, a lorry, a grocery, and a bakery, among others) belonged to the entire community or to one of the *modulos*. Each group appointed workers for these projects, which were supposed to commercialize production inside and outside the settlement. The profits would buy fertilizer and other inputs for the communal agricultural production (COMAR, 1986), or would benefit the community in other ways.

Until 1986, when the migration authorities left the camp that afterwards has been labelled a "settlement", wage-labour was controlled by COMAR, which acted as an intermediary between employers and employees. Now this practice has changed and the refugees are free to find their jobs themselves. In order to give equal opportunities for "workers" to leave the settlement and engage in wage-labour, the groups organized a rotation system, in which workers are allowed to stay away from the settlement every second month. Several of the offices are duplicated, for instance by appointing two representatives, who take turns. The promoters of education, who cannot leave the settlement, receive one week's salary each month from COMAR. If a worker does not fulfill his obligations towards the community, the group can decide to punish him by cutting back his food supply or by fining him. In extreme cases, the worker is put in gaol (in the camp) or the group expels him and his household.

In the process of moving from relief distribution to subsistence production, the actions of the refugees have brought about substantial changes in the self-sufficiency programme:

According to COMAR officials (personal communication; and COMAR, 1987) the agricultural production did not succeed very well. The areas are marked by poor soil and deficient rainfall, and fruit and vegetables proved difficult to cultivate. There were also disagreements over the techniques applied, as well as resistance on the part of many

refugees to the collective form of production, since most contemporary Guatemalan peasant communities have no tradition of collective agricultural production. Tensions arose among the refugees, for instance between those that worked hard and those that did not, and between large and small households. Furthermore, many of the refugees did not understand each other, either in terms of language or in terms of actions.

As a result, the land was divided between the groups who have developed different forms of organization and production techniques. At one extreme, some groups continue to cultivate "*en colectivo*", while others, at the other extreme, subdivided the land into individually cultivated plots. In intermediary forms the agricultural workers cultivate part of the group land in common; the workers contribute equal amounts of working hours, or cultivate equal amounts of land in order to feed their promoters.

Almost all the refugees have established their own alternative to the officially promoted and supported form of agricultural production: they rent or borrow land from their Mexican neighbours - private landowners as well as *ejidatarios* - within a radius of 20 kilometres from the settlement. Typically, the refugees clear the land (slash and burn), grow maize and beans for two years, and leave a fenced pasture for the benefit of the local farmer or peasant. Otherwise, they pay for the tenure in cash or kind.

There are three reasons for this: firstly, the authorities have not allocated enough land to the refugees. Secondly, COMAR has to control the production output in order to assess the cut-backs in the relief assistance. The refugees escape this control by cultivating land on their own. Thirdly, the refugees themselves can decide how to cultivate the land they rent outside the settlement scheme.

The projects in the settlement suffered from lack of organization and enthusiasm, lack of experience and, hence, poor quality of the products. Surpluses vanished, and the appointed workers gave up before they had completed their training and disappeared. Apparently they preferred to cultivate rented land or to engage in wage-labour. As a consequence, COMAR changed these projects into "societies", incorporating 10 families or more. Now, most of the projects belong to a single group, or to a limited number of households from different groups, and participation has become voluntary. In the workshops, the members decided to pay the workers in accordance with their production.

The community services have suffered from the transition from relief towards subsistence production. As the agricultural workers had to support the promoters and other refugees in the community services - who made up an average of 20 per cent of the adult males - a contradiction emerged between them. "They're just staying in the shadow" or "they don't do any good" the agricultural workers said. As a result, the groups dismissed half of their health promoters and other community workers.

In conclusion, it has been impossible to apply organizational forms of relief assistance in the productive projects directed towards self-sufficiency. The heterogeneity of the refugees - their different experiences and languages - and the lack of traditions for collective agricultural production have impeded this form of organization. On the other hand, the refugees themselves have brought other organizational forms into play and have sought and generated resources on their own. Through their spontaneous actions they have changed the programme for self-sufficiency.

From 1984 to 1988 the Guatemalan refugees have gradually become more "self-sufficient", in the sense that COMAR and UNHCR have been able to withdraw part of their assistance without provoking major confrontations with the refugees and without receiving outspoken criticism from the international community. In 1986 COMAR and UNHCR began to cut back the food assistance to the refugees. Table 3 lists the food items which show what they received as of April 1985 (Aguayo et al, 1987), and November 1988 (own field work data), to illustrate these cutbacks.

9. Becoming Self-sufficient

Table 3

Food items received per person per week
(in grammes)

	1985	1988
Maize	2,250	0
Beans	750	0
Chicken	230	*
Milk powder	200	0
Rice	150	280
Sugar	190	175
Eggs	150	150 for children < 10
Potatoes, carrots, banana, cabbage, onion, and soup	**	0

* From October to December, 1988, two weekly cans of chicken in jelly per family appeared on the menu. Some refugees ascribed the appearance to my presence in the settlement. Rather it was an "end-of-the-year contribution" from the World Food Programme

** Variable quantities.

It must be noted that the food assistance in 1985 was observed to be varied and rich in fresh food compared with the assistance given to refugees in other parts of the world.

In a programme for self-sufficiency, the relationship between assistance and production is complementary. In order to cut back assistance, COMAR and UNHCR have to assess the degree of self-sufficiency, but this is very difficult. COMAR has developed systems for the assessment of self-sufficiency in economic terms (COMAR, 1988), but the necessary reliable data on food production and wage labour are difficult to come by, and COMAR officials do not trust the refugees' information. On the other hand, the refugees consider the cutbacks premature, and the self-sufficiency enforced. They argue that COMAR and UNHCR have not provided the promised prerequisites for self-sufficiency. Thus, the complementary relationship between assistance and production has created a form of interaction between the refugees and COMAR which is based on their mutual distrust.

"We don't starve" the refugees say, but often they have to be content with "tortilla with salt", which is rock bottom and the symbol of poverty among them. The harvest of beans was poor in 1987-88 and it has proved to be very difficult to grow fruit and vegetables on the land surrounding Maya Tecún. Fruit and vegetables are luxury goods that have to be bought from the Mexicans. The refugees, therefore, need cash in order to avoid malnutrition.

In September 1988 hurricane Gilbert hit the peninsula of Yucatán, seriously affecting the agriculture of the region. If Gilbert and the inundations following it had not devastated 75% of the crops, the majority of the refugees would probably have been self-sufficient in corn and beans during 1988-89. But still the refugees' land is insufficient to produce a marketable surplus, and the income generated per household in the settlement projects is insignificant.

Hence wage labour has become indispensable for the households in the refugee settlements, and even widows occasionally leave their children in order to raise cash. An estimated 90 per cent of the households have income from wage-labour. According to the refugees, average employment time per household was 60-70 days during 1987, ranging from one week to more than 250 days. In 1988 the average household made 500,000 MXP (daily wages for casual labouring were 6,000-8,000 MXP in rural enterprises in Campeche). If the household (five members) bought clothes and a pair of shoes for everyone, they would have 5,000 MXP left per week for food, transportation and domestic utensils. In 1988, tomatoes cost 2,000 MXP per kilo, meat 10,000 MXP, and a trip to the market in Champotón, 2,000 MXP. While a cheap dress cost 30,000 MXP, the imported Guatemalan cloth for the traditional skirt cost 100,000 MXP. Only the wealthier households can afford this luxury (except for the Mam, who weave their cloth themselves).

The refugee community is marked by an increasing economic differentiation. This is another problem that makes the assessment of the degree of self-sufficiency difficult. Some refugees are well off. Young men without children ride bicycles or promenade with their radio-cassettes in the evening. Some have watches, others wear elegant leather

boots. Employers emerge, and in spite of the initial resistance from COMAR, households have set up stores in which they sell canned food, soft drinks, sweets, clothes, batteries, and even watches and radio-cassettes. The storekeepers "are the ones who left Guatemala with money or cattle...they are ahead of us", as other refugees say.

On the other hand widows, disabled, old people and others who cannot leave the settlement for wage labour have very little access to cash. Some of these households are recognized as "vulnerable families", which means that they receive corn and beans every week. In November 1988 they received clothes for the first time in several years. Occasionally they receive help from relatives or from the group to which they belong, but in general the redistributive systems that used to support widows, disabled and old people seem to work less efficiently than they did a few years ago. The poverty of these groups is a recurrent theme in the local discourse on the welfare in Maya Tecún.

In sum, the majority of the refugees are not yet self-sufficient, and they will not be so in Maya Tecún: the settlement cannot provide the livelihood for 1,300 households in the long run. The gardens are too small, the land belonging to the refugees is poor and limited, the local landowners are raising the rents for land outside the scheme, the settlement has run out of firewood, the surrounding *ejidos* have forbidden the refugees to gather wood on their land (so COMAR have to pay for it now), and the provisional dwellings need thorough repair. Therefore COMAR and UNHCR are planning to relocate 500 households to live in Kesté, a large farm scheme which is located 75 kilometres from Maya Tecún in the state of Campeche. The European Economic Community has financed the purchase of Kesté.

Through trade, land tenure and wage labour the refugees have been integrated into the economic life of the region. Money has penetrated the economic life of Maya Tecún, although payments in kind are still frequent: education promoters in *modulo* 1, for example, received 16 kilograms of maize and 5 kilograms of beans per pupil from September to December 1988 in addition to their salaries.

The integration and the cutbacks in assistance have caused some problems for the refugee community as such. As wage labour gains importance, education promoters begin to feel "poor". They start looking for other jobs outside the settlement and retire. The situation has made COMAR/UNHCR increase their wages in order to keep them, since they constitute a very important resource in the settlement.

Furthermore, a schism is emerging between those who opt for wage-labour and those who want to work on projects and in agricultural production in and near Maya Tecún. This schism has appeared in many discourses on the "lack of respect" for the authorities of the community. Leaders complain about adolescents and others who have left the settlement in favour of making their own money elsewhere. They resent the fact that the burden of supporting the weak groups, the schools, the

10. Either - Or ! Making up their Minds

clinics and the infrastructure has fallen on those who stayed and fulfilled their duties. "They ought to serve their people, who have suffered for them", as a representative put it. One way of solving the problem is to go "individual", an option chosen by a small number of men: they are freed from the community duties but have to pay a fixed sum for the water, the wood and the clinic.

In many of our conversations refugees deplored what they perceived as a decreasing level of organization and solidarity: the group members did not show up at the meetings, the whole place had become "even more untidy than Pustunish" (the neighbouring Mexican village), stealing was increasing, and so forth. In my view, the integration into the regional economy and the process of becoming self-sufficient releases differentiating and centrifugal forces that further disorganization in the refugee community. But other forces contribute to the schisms and the increasing problems of "getting organized".

"We consider putting ourselves on the list for returning in January. We're 15 families. My son is calling us. He was in Guatemala when the problem appeared. After the massacre he returned to Playa Grande (where the Ixcán garrison stays). We consider going to Cantabal (a new model village nearby). He says that he's got his plot there, and that there are still five or six plots left. But we have to return soon. Our plots in San Antonio Tzeja are occupied. He says that there is peace, but who knows if it's true?

"What do we do if we regret our decision?" (Extract from interview)

Ten men were standing outside the COMAR hut, asking for details of the repatriation procedure. Two days later, the 25th of November, I met one of them who explained that they had heard the latest news and had decided to wait and see. "Here we've got a house for our religion", he said, referring to the temple of the Pentecostals. The piece of news that convinced them to wait and see was the reported massacre in Aguacate, Chimaltenango, where somebody - presumably the army - killed 22 peasants on the 22nd of November (**Report on Guatemala, 1988**).

Another day, I met with a person from the same group, who had expressed strong feelings against repatriation under the prevailing conditions. This time we sat alone together and he asked me in a low voice:

"I would like to ask you a question. Which is better? To stay here or to return to Guatemala? We've just received a letter from my big brother, and afterwards a tape from.. and two other letters: 'Come, come, come! It's quiet now, your plots are still here.' My wife says 'let's go at once.' But I'll hardly leave, because I will have to do service in the civil (defence) patrol. But they say that there are no longer soldiers in the village. What do you recommend?" (Extract from interview).

The options

What to do: to stay in Mexico or to return to Guatemala, that is the question. There are three recognized solutions to the refugee situation: resettlement in a third country, integration in the country of asylum, or voluntary repatriation.

Resettlement in a third country is not an option for the recognized Guatemalan refugees. Canada once offered this solution, but like the United States and the European countries, it has enforced its migration restrictions. They do have a programme for Guatemalans, but only urban-based, undocumented families (from Mexico City, where an unknown number of refugees hide) are eligible for selection.

Integration in the country of asylum is an option in the case of Mexico, but there are certain limitations to the integration. Foreigners are not allowed to own land or to become *ejidatarios*. In order to be able to enter an *ejido* or to buy land, the refugees would have to assume Mexican citizenship. But as land is a highly disputed resource in Mexico, the authorities are not likely to give the refugees the desired citizenship. Refugee children who are born in Mexico are in a different situation. They are citizens from birth.

The refugees in Maya Tecún have two options if they wish to stay in Mexico. They can remain in the settlement, or they can go to Kesté, the previously mentioned farm scheme which is located about 75 kilometres from Maya Tecún.

Kesté has about 1,000 hectares of fairly fertile land, more than 400 head of cattle, large plantations of mangos, oranges, and other fruits, several tractors, and wells for the irrigation of 80 ha. of vegetable gardens. The owner is a fiduciary with representation from the refugees, the Mexican Government and UNHCR. But there is no housing for the refugees, who, once again, will have to build their houses, school, clinic, and water supply. Each will get a donation of US\$ 500 for the construction of a durable house. According to COMAR estimates, the refugees would need more than that, but they would be allowed to enter a Mexican credit scheme for another US\$ 500.

Whatever the refugees choose to do, the relief assistance will suffer cutbacks in 1989. The refugees will receive almost no food, they will have to pay the electricity bill for the communal installations, for half of the fertilizer and other inputs, for the firewood, and - after a last round of repairs - for all maintenance work. On the other hand, the authorities have given the refugees the opportunity to enter the Mexican credit scheme on the same conditions as the local peasants.

In conclusion, the situation urges the Guatemalans to make a decision: they can stay and integrate or they can leave!

Voluntary repatriation. Is voluntary repatriation then the best option

for the refugees? Since the civilian president, Venicio Cerezo, a Christian Democrat, was elected in 1986, the Guatemalan government has done much in an attempt to convince the refugees that peace reigns in their country. But the refugees themselves are not sure of that, and incidents of the past year seem to back up their doubts: an attempted military coup, the appearance of a new "death squad", the continuing disappearances of members of popular movements, the Aguacate massacre, and the extension of guerilla activities. Finally, if the refugees return to their villages under the control of the army, they will most probably find their plots occupied by other peasants. Under any circumstances they will have to do service in the "Patrols of Civilian Self-defence" (PAC). In January 1989 the Guatemalan army launched a campaign to catch and settle the "Communities of Populations in Resistance" which have been living and moving in the jungle of Ixcán ever since 1981-82. According to the Guatemalan Church in Exile (IGE), the army armed and used the civil defence patrols of Mayalan, Xalbal and Cantabal in the front lines (Central America Report, 1989). These are some of the villages to which the Ixcán repatriates return from Mexico. If these refugees return, therefore, they may have to fight their own neighbours.

In January 1988 the refugees in Chiapas, Campeche and Quintana Roo elected representatives for a "Permanent Commission" set up to negotiate conditions for repatriation with the Guatemalan government. According to the Commission, the refugees have four options, "the four roads": (a) they can become third class peasants in Mexico, (b) they can return and join the guerillas, (c) they can return and join the army, or (d) they can return through an organized repatriation scheme. The refugees have made certain conditions for repatriation. They want their land back; they want guarantees of freedom to organize and guarantees of safety after return; they want the presence of exclusively civilian authorities in their villages; and they want to be accompanied by international organizations during and after the return.

Finally, in November 1988 the representatives were invited to participate in the "Commission for National Reconciliation" in which 47 organizations participate. There are, however, a few very important organizations missing from this national dialogue: the army, the UNRG (the guerilla organization), CACIF (the organization of Guatemalan businessmen), and UNAGRO (the large landowners' organization). In spite of the invitation, it is very unlikely that the Guatemalan government will accept the conditions of a large-scale repatriation - that is, in groups of 1,000 or so. The repatriation is important for the image of the government, but they want the refugees to return dropwise, so that the process will not get out of control. The army is not interested in the return of the refugees at all. The army is reported to view all refugees as *guerilleros* (La Jornada, 1988).

The options and the perspectives.

Among the inhabitants of Maya Tecún the following options were discussed during the autumn of 1988: to repatriate in January, 1989; to wait and hope for better conditions and a large-scale repatriation in either Maya Tecún or in Kesté; to go to Kesté and stay there for good; or to leave the camp for an undocumented existence in Mexico or in North America. This last solution is not uncommon. According to the register, 25 households left the settlements in 1987-88, but a larger number of adolescents choose this option, either on their own, or through intermarriage with Mexicans (males as well as females).

Guatemala or Kesté?

Guatemala? According to the Maya Tecún refugees who return to Guatemala, they do so: (a) in order to be reunited with their families, whose members are calling them; (b) to get a plot of land before it's too late; (c) because they have inherited a tiny piece of land in the highlands; or 4) because they are "bored" in the settlement ("bored" has a slightly different meaning in Guatemalan Spanish. It is similar to "exhausted" or "fed up". You can be bored if you have many children, or disappointments can bore you).

The refugees who stay in Mexico either state that the returnees are the ones who did not experience the violence or that they are people who belong to the Evangelics. "They are religious, they put their destiny in the hands of God", as an atheist said. This perception is not completely false. In 1988 at least 169 households left Maya Tecún for Guatemala. Of these, 120 were registered as "Evangelics" or "Pentecosts". Several *catequistas* commented that the evangelics who returned accepted the existing injustice by doing so, while the Catholics preferred to denounce the injustice by staying in exile. "To the army every refugee is a *guerillero*", as one of the *catequistas* said, but the Evangelics "will say that the Catholics are the very *guerilleros*".

In Guatemala, some of the fundamentalist, non-Catholic sects (mainly sponsored by their North American mother organizations) are closely related to the army. In the conflict stricken regions of Quiché and Huehuetenango, where the Catholic Church was eliminated during the "pacification", the non-Catholic sects predominate. In Maya Tecún, the rumour goes around that there have been non-Catholic preachers in the settlement who have told their people to return and have promised them land in Guatemala. The opposition between Catholics and non-Catholics should not be overestimated or generalized to all groups or all questions, but the disagreements on the question of repatriation sharpen the opposition.

Kesté? COMAR has presented the Kesté programme as an option for those who are not yet considering repatriating. Around 300 households have enlisted in the programme, but many have done so for opportunistic reasons, since they would get access to the land. In general,

however, the refugees have been very reluctant to decide on the Kesté option, much to the surprise of COMAR and UNHCR. Apart from a tiny minority who have decided to stay in Mexico for good, most of the families I spoke with had not yet decided. The number of enlisted households changed from week to week.

The refugees mentioned various misgivings concerning the Kesté option: several said that they were "really tired of construction". Many refugees have constructed four houses within the past 10-15 years, and this time they will have to do the construction work without relief assistance. Hence the work will compete with wage labour, with the preparation of the land, and with the duties at the farm. Furthermore, they will have to put themselves into debt in order to build their houses.

Others state that yet another relocation will turn out to be "too much movement". They have experienced the costs of uprooting; they have reconstructed a familiar social environment and do not want to uproot their children again. Another aspect is political/patriotic considerations. Some groups of refugees argue that the relocation to Kesté will indicate to the world that they will not return to Guatemala, that they will become Mexicans and that they therefore renounce their political role. For them it would be important to sustain the image of provisionality in order to uphold a position of strength in the negotiations with the Guatemalan government.

Lastly, the refugees are preoccupied with the perspectives of Kesté in the light of their previous experience. They kept asking me about the "fiduciary" and the relations of property. Refugees expressed a fear of putting a lot of work into the construction and expansion of the Kesté programme, since they felt that the Mexicans could take over the whole enterprise. This happened in Ixcán: the colonizers had made the region productive, they had started to make money and were no longer dependent on migratory labour when the army took over, first the marketing of the products, and then the land, the coffee, and the cardamom plants. A *catequista* summed up the lesson they had learned in Guatemala: "The rich do not want the poor to rise, they do not want us to become independent....". Would the Kesté experience be different?

The refugees' experience adds to the effects of the provisional nature of exile. "Suddenly we'll return to Guatemala", they say, and they will leave everything behind them once more. Maybe they will never be able to reap the fruits if they plant a tree now. So why should they plant a tree now? The lack of perspective and indecision are detrimental to the whole enterprise of helping the refugees to become self-sufficient. A representative complained: "We left the enthusiasm in Guatemala. Here, we're living from day to day". "Poor people. They don't work heartily. They suffer. I can see it", one of the leaders said.

But hope has not completely disappeared. Some of the refugee leaders are working to gather funds for the education of the adolescents, so that they can serve the community as professionals. One of the

leaders, who was a co-operative leader in Ixcán, reflected on the present situation in the following way:

"Now it's time to consider the future. We don't know how the situation is in Guatemala, we don't know the price of coffee, of cardamom. Our land is not there any more. In Ixcán they live like we do. They are not going to give us land. When we get there: What to sell? Where to go? Only patrols and peasants. Only with sweat you'll earn a living. Pure machete. At the coast you can earn something, but it's a long way.

"Now it's time to consider this. But we're weak. People don't think. They want to go out and earn their money, and that's it. They return with their 600,000-700,000 MXP-when will I ever see that much money - and they've got for their radio-cassette, for eating things. But money is like flowers: in the morning they look pretty, but in the afternoon.... When they return to Guatemala they know how to eat, they know how to manage money. But they will not earn anything there. What to sell? Where to go? Pure machete, since they haven't studied. They'll become criminals, as they are used to the money. Here we've got someone supporting us. But there? Who are going to teach us? The studies are only for the rich.

"But they are few, those who understand it. One here, one there. You can count them. I would like to learn, but I can't any more. The young don't want to study. At the age of 15 or 16 they seek their company, and afterwards the small ones arrive. The *catequistas* haven't got studies, They're only studying the Bible. Traditions, traditions....

"We need teachers, agronomists, drivers, mechanics.... How are we going to go to the Governor, if we have't studied, if we don't know how to present our wishes, our ideas? We will never have our rights.

" We are here to work!" (Extract from interview).

This statement expresses the vital community spirit among the Guatemalan refugees as well as the fear of centrifugal forces, which tend to tear the community apart in the exile. It illustrates the widening gap between adults and adolescents, and - lastly - the statement recognizes the fact that if the refugees want to survive as a community, they have to develop new strategies for survival, and new forms of organization. They will never return to their old Guatemala. The refugees are forced to continue the quest for a new way of life whether they repatriate to Guatemala or become "self-sufficient" in the Mexican society.

11. Conclusion

From 1981 to 1983 more than 100,000 Guatemalan peasants crossed the border into Mexico, seeking refuge from the violent political conflicts which had devastated their villages in north-western Guatemala. UNHCR recognized 45,000 of them as refugees and assisted them through the Mexican Commission for Assistance to Refugees, COMAR. In 1984, the Mexican government, for a variety of reasons, sought to relocate the refugees to the south-eastern states, Campeche and Quintana Roo. In 1988, 18,000 Guatemalan refugees were living in five settlements in these provinces. UNHCR and COMAR have set up an assistance programme designed to help the relocated refugees become self-sufficient. This report describes the transformation of an assisted refugee community into a self-sufficient community and the problems that emerge in the process.

The case of Maya Tecún shows that the organizational forms that are adequate for the distribution of relief assistance might not be adequate for production for subsistence. COMAR and UNHCR have been able to cut back food assistance, but have had to change the organizational forms suggested by them at the start. The refugees differ from each other in language, religion, and experience of organization, and have developed different organizational forms in order to provide the means for subsistence. The cultivation of lands that the refugees have rented on their own initiative and wage labour in agriculture and construction provide the major part of the subsistence.

Differentiating and centrifugal forces threaten the hitherto well-organized refugee community as UNHCR and COMAR cut back the assistance, and as wage labour gains importance. The situation urges the refugees to decide whether to repatriate or stay and integrate into the Mexican society. The report describes how the refugees perceive and classify their options and how their religious affiliations, previous experience, and analysis of the political conflict in Guatemala affect their opinions.

The report emphasizes some aspects of refugee assistance which are often overlooked, such as the complexity of the refugee community, the importance of the refugees' own initiatives, and the long history of "uprooting" that predates the exodus. Rather than seeing uprooting as bound to the exile experience, the report suggests that the exodus is one possible consequence of decades of uprooting, that is, the quest for new ways and new explanations of life in response to the undermining of previous conditions of life.

Appendix

The groups of Maya Tecún, the number of ethnic groups in each, the most important ethnic group and its share of the group members, and the religious affiliation of the households in each group. The figures presented below are based on the Campeche state government census of 1986. Information is collected in the settlement register.

Name	No. of ethnic groups	Majority ethnic groups	%	Catholics %	Evangelics %
Modulo I	7	Kanjobal	49	59	34
Zunil I	5	Kanjobal	45	83	14
Zunil II	3	Kanjobal	91	77	23
Delicias I	3	Kanjobal	81	79	17
Delicias II	4	Kanjobal	50	49	45
Delicias III	3	Chuj	61	41	59
Delicias IV	3	Kanjobal	80	58	33
30.de Abril	2	Ladino	78	50	50
Nuevo Ixcán	6	Kanjobal	42	63	33
Puerto Rico	5	Kanjobal	58	59	41
Piedra Blanca	4	Kanjobal	63	89	7
Alvaro Obregón	2	Chuj	84	56	35
Carmen Xan	3	Ladino	92	3	31*
Loma Bonita	5	Kanjobal	74	56	44
Modulo II	6	Kekchí	73	86	12
S.Ant. Tzeja	2	Kekchí	97	65	35
S.Ant. Chiquito	2	Kekchí	97	94	6
S. María Dolores	1	Kekchí	100	94	6
Rosario Caneja	1	Kekchí	100	90	10
S. María Tzeja	5	Quiché	67	94	6
Vic. Guerrero	3	Ladino	79	58	19**
Modulo III	6	Mam	57	69	29
Mayalán I	5	Kanjobal	60	91	9
Mayalán II	2	Mam	88	21	79
Mayalán III	2	Kanjobal	88	77	23
Mayalán IV	3	Mam	90	61	39
Angeles I	5	Mam	83	68	23
Angeles II	3	Mam	91	34	66
IV Pueblo	5	Mam	75	82	16
Xalbal	2	Kanjobal	63	78	20
Maya Tecún	8	Kanjobal	29	70	25

* Jehova's Witnesses 62%

** " " 19%

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