

CHAPTER 5

Dealing with the Dragon

Social Dynamics and Ambiguity in Emiliano Zapata

You see, PEMEX is like a dragon. And what are we? Nothing!
Because the dragon is very powerful, and it is burns us. We're
nothing against PEMEX.

—Doña Maria

Hydrocarbon extraction, its temporal consequences, and its material implications determine many aspects of the local lifeworld of the community members in Emiliano Zapata. Oil extraction is accompanied by certain social dynamics that exceed the influence of tangible and temporal aspects, as mainly in the context of company-community relations, and specific social settings determined by the circumstances surrounding extraction (see, e.g., Cochrane 2017; Silva Ontiveros et al. 2018). The oil extraction in Emiliano Zapata has an impact on the social dynamics within the community and contributes to the set of different uncertainties. The oilscape of Emiliano Zapata is a multidimensionally constituted space, which is formed in a processual manner by constant renegotiations and reconfigurations through the dynamics of its social actors. The creation of such a space is often a conflict-riddled process over economic and ideological resources and understanding these tensions can contribute to an understanding of major issues (Low 2014: 35). In order to understand these dynamics, this chapter will complement the previous analysis, focusing particularly on the involved actors and the interactions and practices through which they create and negotiate the oilscape. The circumstances that shaped local relationships and ways of interactions between actors are changing and, in this way, create new challenges.

In its long history with the oil industry, Emiliano Zapata has built a multilayered relationship with the oil companies as acting entities characterized by inherent power structures. Its status as a state-owned company

has given PEMEX the dominant authority for extraction and processing activities in the country as well as in the community. Hence, PEMEX has become synonymous with the oil industry in general for many of the community members and continues to be so. Therefore, for many, PEMEX has become a ubiquitous entity in the local context, which is perceived as a kind of “monster” at times, while the local residents are condemned to its destructive powers. The image of such a powerful and even dangerous monster has been captured impressively by Doña Maria during an interview, when she denominated PEMEX as a “dragon”—a metaphor she used for the oil company to describe the relationship between the community and the company from her point of view. This metaphor symbolizes the unequal power relations between the company and community, which dominated the territory for many decades. PEMEX as a powerful player, had a significant impact on the area’s regulations, modified the material surroundings, damaged the soil, and polluted the water, but also created new income prospects and lifestyles and introduced compensation guidelines. For many, the company thus also became a symbol of wealth and economic opportunities. The local perception of the oil company is thus highly ambivalent among the community members and depends on individual trajectories, social and economic statuses as well as personally established relationships.

The oilscape of Emiliano Zapata has been the stage for several land conflicts between community and company and also between different community groups, all of which are influenced by issues of presence and interests of the oil industry. The company as a dragon is perceived partly as destructive, partly as a patron, but always as a powerful entity. The metaphor of the dragon reflects the ambivalent perception of community-company relationships that determine the social dynamics through the interaction between oil company actors and local residents. The particularities of the social dynamics determined by the conditions of oil extraction contribute to the set of uncertainties emerging within the oilscape and call for new strategies by the community members in response to them. In this way, these uncertainties directly reflect back on the composition of the social texture.

The Dragon among Us: PEMEX in Emiliano Zapata

“Come in,” Doña Clara says and then examines me from head to toe as I enter the room. Then suddenly she recognizes me and all the little wrinkles on her face seem to disappear when she opens her mouth to a wide smile. “Güera!” she exclaims, immediately getting up to pull out a chair for me and sit down with her.

I hurry to forestall her, but she moves with surprisingly quick, small, and stiff steps, and I have to take the chair from her firm, calloused hands after she has already grabbed one from the pile of plastic chairs in the corner of the room. I know Doña Clara is still surprisingly agile, but her nimble movements sometimes surprise me anyway. The gray-haired woman in the simple white-and-brown patterned dress and worn flip-flops in front of me sits down, looks at me excitedly, and pushes a glass and the two-liter bottle of Coke toward me over the table.

Doña Clara was born and raised in Emiliano Zapata. She is one of the very few women to hold the title of an ejidatario, which she received from her husband, who died a couple of years ago with no son in the community who wanted to inherit it. “But I’m thinking of dividing up the land and giving it to my children in equal parts so they won’t fight over it later,” she told me last time I visited her. But that would also mean that she would have to convert it to single property—an issue at the center of a simmering conflict within the community, where members constantly fight over tenure and the exact measurement of parcels. The territory Doña Clara has for disposal is not vast but is just enough to plant some orange trees for the market and a little corn for home consumption. The modest one-room house where six people currently live has no floor slab, and the bathroom is an outhouse in the backyard, shielded by black plastic tarp.

Doña Clara lives here—with her daughter-in-law and one of her sons. Her husband, by whom she has seven children, left her years ago, and she is happy about that fact since their relationship was marked by constant domestic violence. Today, all her children except one son have left the community to look for work elsewhere. She gets a grim expression on her face and a reproachful tone in her voice when she talks about them. “They don’t send me any money. They are a bunch of drunks and gamblers!” Just one of her many sons stayed. But according to her, he is the worst of all drunks and does not take care of his wife and kids because he spends the money at the cantina. I am a little uncomfortable with her telling me this in the presence of her daughter-in-law. She makes breakfast for me, even though I had just eaten and explicitly said “no” when asked if I wanted anything to eat. But I should have known that this was not a real question for Doña Clara, so my response was not a real answer either. While I am eating my enchiladas like a good girl, I enjoy it when she tells me more about her life.

Doña Clara was one of the few people already living here when PEMEX came for the first time to do the exploration. “They came and started to put some dynamite right here in the backyard,” she remembers. “I was just a little kid, and I was so scared when the explosions began! Also, it was really dangerous, because suddenly big rocks and smaller stones flew

through the air and could hit your house! So, every time they screamed ‘Cohete,’ we all ran as fast as we could.” She and the other children were frightened by the explosions, but also very curious about the strange men coming into the community. Usually they were nice to the children and sometimes brought gifts. Doña Clara remembers that at first, she was afraid of the oil workers, but then got used to them being friendly visitors or customers for her parents and neighbors when they sold them food or offered minor services. She soon began to regularly go to the installations at noontime to sell lunch. When her children were born, she brought them with her. Selling lunch was a nice way for her and her family to earn some extra money. However, neither she nor her relatives ever established personal relations with the *petroleros*. They remained visitors passing through or customers for services and goods, but she herself did not engage with them more than this. As one of the few ejidatarías, she has reported damages to her orchards when they became polluted over the years, and she got compensated. “It’s not a lot they’re paying,” she says. And the humble home silently confirms that statement.

After our conversation, we sit in silence at the table for a while, listening to the TV hanging on the wall. The sauce burns in my mouth, and I have to drink some more glasses of Coke until I manage to quench it on my tongue and palate. I am sure she will not let me go without giving me some of her homegrown, dried chilies, which are so hot that it is impossible to have more than three of the pea-sized red fruits in a quart of enchilada sauce. I will certainly leave her house with stomach almost bursting, on the verge of a sugar rush and at the same time amazed by Doña Clara’s stories. The curiosity for more will certainly drive me back to her house again soon.

Developing the Community

In Mexico, as in many parts of the world, companies in the extractive industry have taken on important social tasks in the affected areas. During the first major upswing of PEMEX in the 1950s and 1960s, the idea of the company at the time was to provide certain social services to employees and local residents. In this way, PEMEX delivered what was at that time a national consensus on “development” for many rural areas. I had the opportunity to talk to a rather high-ranking PEMEX official from the general directory, who told me about how he interprets the the role of the company within the national economy. “In fact, this is something I always emphasize,” he said. “In many areas of the country the first civilizing entity that brought development was PEMEX looking for options to explore new

oil sources." For him, this implied the role of the company as a generator of wealth, as well as the provider of jobs and services for the population:

That is why PEMEX has many employees. Because PEMEX also incorporates a medical service, and a series of different other sections like "communication." I for example went to a school especially for children of oil workers . . . they gave us everything, that we needed. The books, the notebooks, the pencils, everything. In fact, they even produced our notebooks in the PEMEX workshops.

Due to its status as a state-owned company, it was assumed that PEMEX had a general social interest in benefiting the entire nation and therefore every Mexican citizen, through its oil profits. The company soon established an impressive internal infrastructure for its workers, who enjoyed the benefits of an internal PEMEX social and welfare system (Czarnecki and Vargas Chanes 2018: 76). The industry was established as a representative unit of the hydrocarbon industry and as a pillar for national development. This also implied a prioritization over other sectors or forms of land use as in the case of ejidos. Even though ejido land was technically inalienable, Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution encompassed the possibility of expropriating strategic resources for "the common good" for guaranteed indemnifications (del Palacio Langer 2015: 22). This rule has been applied specifically to the interests of PEMEX as an important entity for national economic development. After the nationalization of the hydrocarbon sector in 1936, PEMEX expropriated large parts of the national ejido territories for extraction, as was the case in Emiliano Zapata. The ejidos were indemnified accordingly—though this process was often contentious. Adherence to this law was accompanied by aggravating circumstances, as the nationalization of hydrocarbon resources and the status of PEMEX as a state-owned company also meant that an explicit implementation of CSR measurements was not considered necessary in the company's Code of Conduct. PEMEX was supposed to work for the benefit of the entire population (2015: 138).

The oil explorations in the respective regions have resulted in several urban areas where the local economy relied almost entirely on the extraction and processing of hydrocarbons, as was the case for the city of Poza Rica (see Salas Landa 2016; Quintal Avilés 1994). However, this was not the case in all oil-rich areas. Especially in regions with a strong presence of agriculture based indigenous communities, the idea of industrial development has often clashed with rural realities. The national vision of a complete integration of the indigenous population as Mexican citizens often failed because there was a lack of mechanisms to recognize and foster diversity (Rincón Gallardo 2004). The PEMEX-led oil industry has been

assigned a “development contract” for rural areas, while severely lacking in sensitive implementation guidelines. My interview partner reflected on this era, acknowledging that the integration of indigenous people into a homogeneous society of Mexican citizens through industrial development failed. “The intention or the underlying will of the Mexican state was . . . to integrate them as proper citizens,” my interview partner conceded, talking about the indigenous people of Mexico. He explained: “Here in Mexico it would be unthinkable to just see them as ‘indigenous.’ That would go against everything that we wanted or believed in, because it is a nation of citizens.”

Emiliano Zapata was one of the rural indigenous communities he referred to by the time PEMEX conducted the first explorations. In this context, it was partly integrated into the oil industry, not on a voluntary basis but because of its location. With the expropriations of large parts of the ejido territory, the company’s presence in the community became even stronger and the industry continued to spread. This process caused tensions to prevail between the community and company, and also between different groups within the community. Land conflicts, which arose through the industrial development, remain an issue in Emiliano Zapata until today and have thus affected the social dynamics as well as the appearance of the oilscape in a particular way. The company’s presence in Emiliano Zapata is not only evident from equipment, installations, and pipelines, but also by the presence of its staff. Since the beginning of the extraction in 1956, the oil workers have interacted on a daily basis with the residents, and for many community members over the years, the staff thus personified the company. When PEMEX entered the community, it was welcomed as a guarantor of security and economic stability by several of the inhabitants, and its workers were perceived as patrons who would facilitate protection and benefits. At the same time, many community members expressed discontent with the disrespectful way the company’s employees claimed the territory, but they also acknowledged the company’s power to do so. PEMEX established itself as kind of an almost almighty entity that punishes and sometimes rewards, or at least compensates, as impressively illustrated by the comparison of PEMEX with a dragon in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. The dragon is able burn whoever stands in its way, constantly threatening the community and forcing it to obey its will. On the other hand, it also benefits the community by constructing infrastructure and offering certain goods and services during the years of its operation.

One of the first factors through which the presence of the oil industry became tangible for the community members was PEMEX staff commuting from the city to the extraction sites, entering and crossing the

community. The oil company expanded its activities rapidly and needed an increasing amount of territory to extend the extraction, which is why about 250 hectares of Emiliano Zapata were expropriated for extraction purposes during the boom. Having the extraction taking place so close to their homes created several contact opportunities with the PEMEX staff for the residents, including new income strategies. Many of them started to sell food or goods to the PEMEX workers and the workers themselves mostly strove for good relations with the community members, among them many women, who did not have the opportunity to earn an income before. However, the close contact between community and company personnel led to a variety of changes within the social structure of the community.

Gender, Traditions, and Social Norms in Times of the Oil Boom

During the oil boom, the numbers of inhabitants increased, because many people from all over the region, looking for security and a source of income, recognized the opportunities offered by PEMEX. Some of migrants who came to profit from the economic upswing came from the area of Totonacapan and spoke Totonac as well, but the majority had to rely on Spanish to enable the communication with the original population of Emiliano Zapata. The former social structure of the community started to shift from the traditional Totonac household organization, being patrilocal with strictly divided gendered labor tasks and agriculture for subsistence toward a model that included merchants, single men and women without close family ties, and other differing lifestyles.

Adaptations concerning Spanish as the main language already started with the establishment of the first school in Emiliano Zapata in the 1940s, but it was enforced even more for the practical reasons of communication with inhabitants from other places and the PEMEX staff. Doña Ana, the sixty-year-old daughter of such an already-deceased dancer told me: "Look, back then the community, it didn't look like it does now. Now PEMEX is already established here. But before it did, our parents, for example my father, he was very indigenous." Elderly people with a traditional way of life and cultural practices from pre-colonial times, such as the ceremonial dance of the *voladores*,¹ were rather reluctant toward the appearance of the oil company," she told me. "But after they died, PEMEX was allowed in after all." Apart from old traditions vanishing, which were associated with an antique and less desirable lifestyle, new forms of everyday life performances became popular. Novel moral and social norms

were brought in by the oil workers, who until today belong to a mainly male dominated professional category (see Mottura 2017; Palermo 2017).

Soon the PEMEX staff introduced new forms of possible gender roles to the community. Some of the oil workers started to engage with young resident women, stressing the dominant social norms. Even though the moral standards have been modified during the last decades, the role of women from the community engaging with oil workers is still considered sensitive, where oftentimes conflicting ideas of morality apply. Many families sought to prevent the contact between their daughters and the oil workers, because they feared immoral behavior, leading to illegitimate pregnancy in the worst case. Again, others, however, even encouraged their daughters to get in contact with the PEMEX staff because they enjoyed a high social status in combination with wealth and high education standards. Furthermore, they were the main customers at many stores and in the restaurants and the owners strove for friendly engagement with their customers.

Doña Imelda, a woman in her fifties is the daughter of a shop owner from Emiliano Zapata. She has several daughters from different fathers, none of them living in the community, but all providing her with the necessary money to support her children. She is grandmother of three and her daughters are unmarried as well as herself. The fathers come to visit them sometimes, but mostly they are not part of the life of their illegitimate children. Doña Imelda told me about the time her father, a native resident of the community, had opened his shop. Her family still spoke Totonac at home at first, but she says that she hardly remembered anything today since her parents did not continue to talk to her in their language. Their store was mainly frequented by oil workers and teachers who were the main customers and who spoke Spanish and the parents also started speaking Spanish with the customers and also within their own family: "I didn't learn how to speak Totonac. My older sister still did, but at that time in 1956, my mother said, they had a shop where teachers and oil workers came to buy things and drink beer, and I was raised speaking Spanish." Doña Imelda remembered that her father was very friendly with the oil workers who were his customers and started drinking alcohol with them: "There were many oil workers coming to the store. We had a jukebox playing music and everyone was in a good mood and my father used to drink with them. My father had many friends among the oil workers. He got along with them really well!" Doña Imelda's father did not only engage in a very friendly manner with his customers but encouraged her to do the same. Especially when the oil workers came regularly to have parties and bought beer at his shop, he encouraged her to dance with the oil workers: "I was going to the dances. I still very much like to dance! And my father would tell me to dance with him, and I did. I was young back then. And

when an oil worker would come to us he would tell me to dance with him as well, and I did.”

This behavior was not welcomed by all of Doña Imelda’s neighbors, not even by all her relatives. But she claimed that she liked that lifestyle, appearing attractive and mundane to her at this time: “I like to make conversation, I like to laugh, and my family criticized me for it. They said I looked like a *chichí*—‘little bitch’ in Totonaco. But I thought, ‘Let them talk, that’s how I am. I like to dance and make friends.’” Yet the intentions of the oil workers were often of a sexual nature, which were often even furthered by her father. “My father tried to hook me up with older oil workers and I danced with them.” The idea of engaging with the oil workers from the city seemed pleasurable for many young women, and they enjoyed going to public dance events, learning dance styles from the cities. The oil workers mostly did not bow to social pressure concerning possible marriage with the women in the community and in most cases did not attempt to engage in serious relationships. For the women, this created pressure and in the case of Doña Imelda, despite of enjoying the dances and the attention of the oil workers, she also had some negative experiences with men she was involved with. She suffered unwanted pregnancies and an abortion after she started a romantic affair with one of the oil workers, who was already committed to another woman in the city. She quickly realized when she got pregnant and told him. He then asked her to abort, and she did. “I packed my things, and I wanted to run away to see him, but before I could, I was told that he had a girlfriend,” she said. “He said I should take the tea. And I did. I was not even two months pregnant, like one month and fifteen days.” What Doña Imelda described applied to many young women in the community when the relationships with people from other parts, mainly from urban areas intensified during times of boom. On the one hand, they were attracted by new opportunities and a pleasant lifestyle but along with them came novel expectations concerning their roles and behaviors, for men as well as for women. Women for the first time now had the opportunity to gain an income on their own, for example, by selling food and therefore reaching a certain independence from the traditional family model. But this also meant a modification of expectations toward them and sometimes pressure to move toward an “urban way of life.” The latter included wealth and independence but also alcohol and an increased risk of possible sexual abuse or the complications of unwanted pregnancies. The stores, the bars, and also the brothels came with the oil workers to the community, as has been documented all over the world in cases in which a big company accessed a rural area (see, e.g., Cancian 1994; Davidson and Davis 2012; Harma 2009). With them came money, goods, and shifting ideas of lifestyle and role models for both genders.

PEMEX Personnel and Community Members

Until today, oil company personnel still are the customer target group of many community businesses, but only few contacts have become personal acquaintances, and even fewer have transformed into enduring relationships. Most community members perceive the PEMEX staff as “the others” even now and in contrast to cities like Poza Rica, the element of identification with the company is rather low, despite its long-term presence. Pablo, a PEMEX staff member from Poza Rica, who worked on the San Andrés oilfield for many years, described his view of how the community members of Emiliano Zapata perceived PEMEX employees like him: “Well, at the booths, where we go for lunch sometimes, they treat us well. But many people who pass by, they look at us and make a face. They see us as the bad guys.” He, like most of the others, keeps his distance from the community. These limited interactions between the community and the company’s staff are certainly one of the main reasons for the lack of identification with PEMEX in Emiliano Zapata. Moreover, the low-paid part-time contracts that the residents could mostly manage to get, limit the ability and willingness of the community members to associate themselves with PEMEX. Hence, PEMEX did not become an integrative entity, but remained an external force to negotiate with in order to gain benefits and minimize damages.

During the 1950s until the 1980s, the official PEMEX guidelines for company-community relations were rather unconstrained and allowed the executive team a great deal of individual interpretation and guidance. The way PEMEX was perceived by the community members, therefore, often depended on the individual relationship with the oil workers. This partly changed in the 1980s and 1990s, when some internal guidelines were introduced, but a modification of the official Code of Conduct was first conducted in the 2000s, when CSR measurements were officially incorporated into company policies in 2006 (García-Chiang 2018: 2). When damages or seepages occur, the community members report their claims directly to the company, which then responds to them. Unfortunately, the official way of reporting damages often takes some bureaucratic effort and the company often takes a long time to initiate the repair. Several of the seepages in one of the two small community rivers were fixed during my field research stay of many months, and the community members complained about this and other delays PEMEX caused in repairing damages by not responding promptly to claims. The people whose plots were affected by pollution, or a possibly cracked pipeline, had to endure the uncertainty of waiting for an indeterminate time for the company to inspect or fix the problem. Many community members, therefore, found ways to

work around the official reporting structure by establishing personal contacts with individual company staff members.

Don Francisco is a middle-aged man who lives with his family next to an extraction well close to the main road. He inherited the house from his father and is, therefore, used to the industrial activities since his early childhood. When I interviewed him, he complained about the lack of commitment from PEMEX, when pipelines under his house got damaged. I asked him how he normally reported damage to the company, and he told me that usually one would go to the main office in Poza Rica or call an official hotline to the headquarters. Since it takes a long time before somebody reacts through official channels, he calls the personal phone number of one of the PEMEX *ingenieros*. Don Francisco pulled out his mobile phone and showed me the number among his contacts on the screen that belongs to one of the *ingenieros*. The *ingeniero* gave his number to Don Francisco during an inspection of damage after Don Francisco complained about the long delay in response to his notification. Now he can simply call a leading staff member directly and the issue gets attended to a lot faster.

While many inhabitants like Don Francisco have established contacts with staff members, the connections are strictly professional. Most inhabitants do not identify themselves with the company or maintain personal relationships and most of them see an unbridgeable gap between themselves as community members and the oil company and its staff. This is also due to the limited options for proper employment for the residents. When talking about employment opportunities at PEMEX, I often asked if my interview partner ever worked for the company. Most interviewees denied it at first during the interview, but it turned out that the person worked in construction, service, or elsewhere at some point. Doña Maria has several male relatives who worked in construction and as day laborers for the company over the years. On being asked if she knew people working for PEMEX, she answered: “No, here we don’t know anyone working for PEMEX. They’re all from the city. We don’t know them.” When asked again later whether PEMEX sometimes offers jobs to community members, she reaffirmed her statement: “No, we’re all campesinos. Because there are no jobs for us to work for the company.” Later during the same interview, I wanted to know if her husband or her sons worked in construction for the company and then she conceded: “Yes as *obreros*.² They went to the excavations and they helped to maintain the pipelines.” This kind of work is not seen by locals as “working for PEMEX.” Instead, a strict line is drawn between the “real” PEMEX staff and low-wage workers, that is, people who only receive short-term contracts. This is in line with the company policy, as PEMEX has not been looking for local employees to integrate

into the staff since the beginning of its activities in the community. Therefore, the residents of Emiliano Zapata see a big difference between *trabajar en PEMEX* and a proper *petrolero* or *ingeniero*. Technically, *obreros* also have the possibility of joining the Sindicato de Trabajadores Petroleros de la República Mexicana (STPRM), but in Emiliano Zapata none of the marginal and short-term workers in construction or maintenance became members of the union. Most consider themselves *campesinos* and never strived to unionize, while the STPRM has never explicitly advocated the inclusion of rural day laborers, whose agenda was perceived as too different from the claims and goals of the oil workers in oil towns like Poza Rica (see Quintal Avilés 1994). Paradoxically, the unionized PEMEX staff is perceived as a group of the “urban elite,” in contrast to the rural farmers who, occasionally work as day laborers.³ PEMEX employees maintain a physical distance from the community and restrict direct interactions with the villagers to official business relationships, such as purchasing services or goods. No one in the community ever worked as a permanent PEMEX employee. They come to work every day from the cities of Papantla or Poza Rica. When I asked if Doña Maria knew about company staff living in Emiliano Zapata, Doña Maria said: “Well, I actually don’t. They usually arrive in their company vans together and stick to themselves. They sometimes come to buy something, but most of the time they just pass by and go directly to the pipeline they are sent to check on or whatever they are sent to do and then get back.”

Nevertheless, a handful of PEMEX employees who worked in the San Andrés oilfield for a long time stayed in the community after retirement. Yet, they see themselves as simple workers and not as leading personnel referred to as *ingenieros*. Don Aturo is one who worked for PEMEX for many years. He was born in the area around Poza Rica and started working at the lower end of the corporate hierarchy. During his time working for the oil company, Don Aturo became familiar with the company system. He explained why he and most of his colleagues had little contact with the residents from Emiliano Zapata when working on the San Andrés oilfield, although they were in charge of the leaks and seepages the residents often complained about: “Well, there were an infinite number of leaks, but that was no longer our responsibility as workers. We only were to look where the leak was coming from and to isolate it, not to repair it. Isolate it and that’s it,” he told me. Yet, the actual repairing, as well as the negotiation for compensation for affected community members corresponds to PEMEX employees. During that time, Don Aturo and his colleagues, who worked every day near Emiliano Zapata, never directly witnessed compensation payments or the negotiations about damages with the community members, only higher-level employees dealt with

the local residents directly, especially in case of damages or reparation claims. In this way, the internal organization of PEMEX contributed to a certain distance between company personnel and community members, a common approach for companies in the extractive sector (see, e.g., Appel 2012b; Auyero and Swistun 2008; Cross 2011). Therefore, PEMEX continues to be perceived as a powerful external entity rather than a factor amenable to integration and even less for self-identification.

Conflicts and Corruption: PEMEX Expropriating the Ejido

PEMEX started in 1956 to build industrial infrastructure in Emiliano Zapata but made the first official request for expropriation about eight years later on 24 September 1964. Until then, the construction of installations had already caused damage and limited the use of several areas within the ejido. The inconvenience was compensated by individual payments before the official indemnifications were paid to the ejidatarios. At that time, compensations were only paid for damaged soil, plants, and other goods. When the expropriation was finally implemented eight years later, PEMEX initially claimed 106.3474 hectares of land from the ejido. But before the expropriation was executed, the company again revised the measurement and decided to claim double—an additional 106 hectares—266.3474 hectares in total. The ejido council objected to that claim, which for many seemed too much territory and after a new series of measurements and negotiations with the ejido assembly, they reached a consensus with the company on a total of 185.42 hectares in 1976. The expropriation of \$3,671,331.84 was paid that should be divided equally among the affected ejidatarios (Reporte Proyecto IICA-RAN 2012). However, not all of them were satisfied with the agreement. And indeed, new measurements carried out by the ejidatarios showed that PEMEX was in fact, occupying the 266.3474 hectares they originally wanted to expropriate, while they only paid for the contracted 185.42. At that time, the majority of the ejidatarios had already agreed to the payments and signed the documents, so that regress claims could not be asserted. The ejido was governed collectively as a communal landholding and each ejidatario used a part of the communal land according to the agreements made in the assembly, without exact documentation about who cultivated what on which parcel. In the realm of the agrarian counter reform of 1992, this principle was changed when the farming parcels were supposed to be exactly measured and officially assigned to individuals. The program, PROCEDA, was initiated with the purpose of surveying and certifying the individual parcels and respective land rights of each ejidatario. After the

designation process, each ejidatario received a certificate that enabled the successor to apply for an actual property title (see Smith et al. 2009).

In Emiliano Zapata, the ejidatarios were not eager to certify land parcels in the beginning because they had become accustomed to their distinct way of distributing the territory among themselves. Yet, the legalization also promised benefits, like the possibility to sell the land later, which was not yet allowed. Don Esteban, a native of Emiliano Zapata and an ejidatario, has served in the ejido representation several times in different positions. He inherited this title from his father, and now he is in favor of the new regularization, as he told me: “With the certificate, you would be able to deal with any individual matter. But now we can’t do that just because we don’t have a document. Also, at the moment we can’t prove that there were irregularities when PEMEX paid the indemnity.” Hence, for the ejidatarios the regularization would have two main beneficial effects. First, they would have the possibility to make individual decisions about the parcels without having to get permission from the assembly for every legal question, and second, without regularization some claims against PEMEX cannot be made without official titles. In 2002, the ejidatarios decided to make an initial attempt at regularization. In 2004–5, a second attempt followed, since they could not agree upon the parcel sizes, followed by a third in 2007 via the government program PROCEDE. Apart from the personal disagreements between individuals, a major problem in finalizing the process was the expansion of the area occupied by PEMEX. During this process and the corresponding inspection of old documents, some inconsistencies were discovered. The ejidatarios recognized that the territory occupied by PEMEX was larger than the 185.42 hectares that the company had officially expropriated. In addition, it turned out that the indemnification payments were distributed unequally between the ejidatarios. These discoveries soon led to internal conflicts between the ejidatarios.

Don Simón, a farmer and ejidatario in his forties, inherited the title from his father recently. He became a secretary of the comisariado ejidal in 2016 and along with the comisario, he started to regulate the disorderly paperwork of the ejido. They resolved the vexing issues and hoped that the fourth attempt at official regularization, which took place in 2016–17, would be successful. In 2016, he told me about the conflict smoldering in the ejido assembly at that time, concerning the unsettled payments for hectares that PEMEX had occupied but not expropriated, and traced them back to a corruption case in the 1970s. By revising old documents, he revealed that some of the ejidatarios received more money than others, even though the amounts should have been evenly distributed. Meanwhile, PEMEX paid for fewer hectares than were actually occupied, as

Don Simón explicated: “Now it turned out that the that PEMEX paid less indemnification money to the ejido, than they were obliged to. Only a few ejidatarios knew and they accepted the payment. They never distributed the money equally between all of them.”

By studying the old endowment papers, Don Simón discovered that PEMEX had paid indemnifications for a group of only thirty-one ejidatarios representing fifty-eight in total. By the time the agreement was settled, the ejido was not yet officially divided into individual parcels, while the payments were granted individually, but not to all. It is suspected that a group of ejidatarios had accepted individual payments from PEMEX in return for agreeing to the expropriation of the smaller area. Yet in Don Simón interpretation the indemnification was not rightfully conducted for the simple reason that the ejido was not divided into individual parcels back then, but the decree individually lists the names and the amounts of money. In a decree from 1976, the thirty-one ejidatarios who were individually paid by PEMEX are named, the first official expropriation then was decreed on 10 November 1978. After the document about the payment of 1976 had been dug up in the context of the regularization process, the ejidatario assembly started to retrospectively reclaim the irregularity of the process with the company by presenting a list of the missing twenty-seven ejidatarios who had not received the payment. The claims against PEMEX have not been successful so far, as the company holds the official paperwork with the endowment of the expropriated territory. As Don Simón remarked: “PEMEX claims to have already indemnified the 185 hectares. And many of the ejidatarios who were paid back then are already deceased.” Therefore, the ejidatarios did not receive any payments from PEMEX retrospectively. Attempts by the assembly to resolve the problem by claiming money for the areas, which are considered to be affected by PEMEX installations but have not been properly indemnified, were unsuccessful as well. These claims can only be asserted when the people of Emiliano Zapata manage to agree on the regularization of each parcel.

Complications within the Regularization Process

During the attempt at regularization, which was initiated this time under the new program of FANAR, which subsidized PROCEDE⁴ in 2007, a map was constituted showing the areas affected by PEMEX. However, the *ejidatarios* did not agree on the cartographic boundaries of their parcels. The map shows serious effects on the human settlement for which the community members have not yet been compensated either. Again, this can only be asserted once the regularization process is legally completed.



Map 5.1. The surface of the ejido Emiliano Zapata 2007, highlighting Plots and Parcels occupied, or affected by PEMEX Installations. Courtesy of the Comisariado Ejidal of Emiliano Zapata.

This includes a larger area, which was not part of the indemnified surface of 1976. PEMEX built turbines and the gas flare here in 1980, but instead of claiming an additional expropriation, it paid a *pago de ocupación superficial*. This allows the company to operate on the area for a certain number of years, as opposed to the expropriation, which is unlimited by time.

Since the company has abandoned several of these installations, the community can legally reclaim these areas. Don Simón reported from his meeting with the government agency Procururía Agraria, which suggested that the ejidatarios should agree on the boundaries of the human settlement area, also called *fundo legal*: “We went to the agrarian procurator’s office and they told us: ‘it is important that you constitute the *fundo legal* in your community first, because PEMEX is affecting the nucleus of the human settlement.’” With the titles that the ejidatario and each community member would get with the regularization of their parcels, they could then make their claims against PEMEX in case their parcel is affected, or they could reclaim the territory that the company no longer

uses. Therefore, Don Simón, like many others, is in favor of a quick regularization process. But not all the ejidatarios agree with him. Many of the elder assembly members have received the indemnification payments and do not see the necessity of a parcel regularization, because their corresponding area is not affected or has been properly paid already. Instead, they fear the potential consequences, such as increasing fees after the endowment of the parcels. Don Simón acknowledges these concerns, but he still insists that it would be worthwhile considering what the titles could enable: "They say that the only reason for the government to grant us the certificates is that they want to charge more taxes. And in fact: If we get the titles, we actually will pay more taxes. But also, the land would be worth more money or, in other words, what we call capital gain."

Many ejidatarios are still reluctant to conduct the regularization process, also because many of them have already sold parts of the parcels they were assigned internally by the assembly. Technically this is not allowed under ejido law, but nevertheless, many ejidatarios already started to sell or rent more and more of their corresponding territory, often to close family members. Since this practice is not legal and therefore also not officially documented, the ejidatarios are free to negotiate the price and the conditions. The practice of illegitimately selling and renting ejido land has been established for many years in Emiliano Zapata. Now, many ejidatarios fear that a regularization would also regulate the prices and conditions of the sale. Don Simón admitted: "The ejidatarios don't want to report their profits from the sales. They don't want to make it transparent. Technically, they are not even allowed to sell, but sales are already taking place." He sees a possibility to resolve the problem with support from the propietarios—community members who live and work on building plots or parcels without being granted the ejidatario title.

Over the years, the community has grown steadily and many people who came here were never interested in becoming an ejidatario. They would much rather settle down to work in the service or construction sector. Hence, the number of community members who are not ejidatarios has grown steadily, while the number of ejidatarios has remained the same since the 1960s. The regularization of the housing area must be conducted by also integrating the community members living there without being ejidatarios. They also have a particular interest in conducting the legalization of their plots, since they are affected by PEMEX installations for which they could then theoretically claim compensation payments or devolution of the territory. One particular problem that hinders many propietarios from acting is the same reason why many ejidatarios are not in favor of regularization—they sometimes received documents for the plots and parcels they bought from the ejidatarios, which are not lawfully

valid, due to the prohibition of the ejidatarios to sell the land in the first place. Now, many are worried that their titles, therefore, would not be officially validated retrospectively, and they would lose their properties. Others are more optimistic, since they have the titles from the ejido assembly and assume that the complications would fall back on the ejidatarios in a worst-case scenario. Unfortunately, the ejido assembly has the final say regarding the regularization, as Don Simón lamented: “There are a lot more propietarios than ejidatarios. So, the majority is in favor, but the ejidatarios do not agree. The law determines that the assembly of ejidatarios has to reach an agreement to constitute the *fonda legal*, so only they can ultimately make the decision.”

In 2016, a fresh attempt at regularization was initiated. The process failed a year later, after internal conflicts led to Don Simón and his companions being charged and replaced by a new comisariado. The new leaders are not generally opposed to a regularization under the government program, but they have argued against several legitimization attempts by their precursors. They particularly objected to a possible retroactive reimbursement to the ejidatarios or their families, who were not indemnified by PEMEX in 1976, and the prevention of further illegitimate land sales. Many of the ejidatarios are against the final regularization, not only because of the higher taxes they would probably have to pay, but also because they would certainly lose some of their sovereignty. As long as the ejido parcels are not individually assigned, they are free to decide how the territory is governed. If the assembly agrees on an issue, the ejidatarios can distribute the land as they please, and although they are not officially allowed to sell or rent parts of the land to non-ejidatarios, this had been practiced for many years. A regularization would, therefore, restrict its governing power and give the propietarios certain rights and competences.

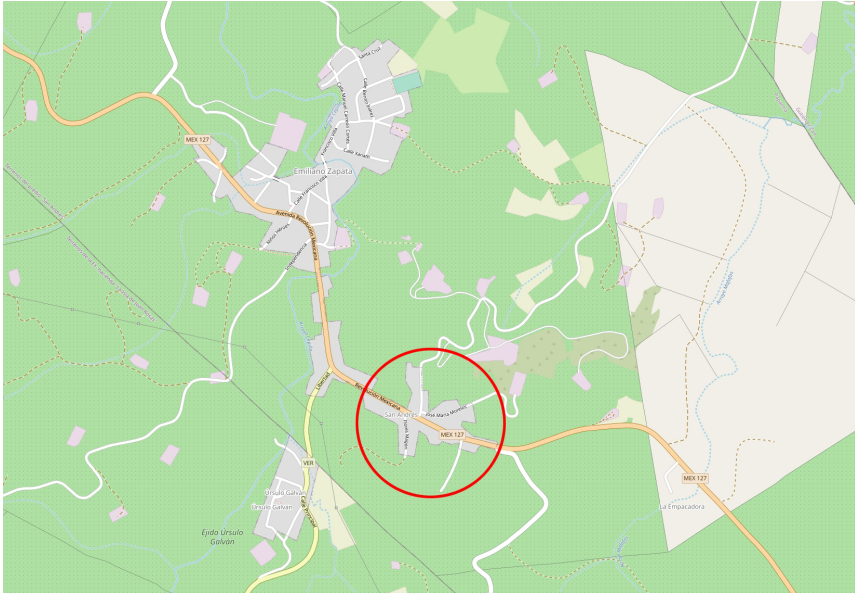
In some ways, however, it would serve the interest of the ejidatarios to regulate the land. First, they would obtain official ownership of their parcels and selling of parts of the land would be legal and safe. In addition, they would also have the possibility to claim damages and return occupied land from PEMEX, which is not possible in the current situation. The energy reform has an aggravating effect in this decision-making process, as a potential takeover of the PEMEX installations by a new company would ultimately reduce the possibility of claiming incomplete indemnification in retrospect. Emiliano Zapata comprises only fifty-eight rightful ejidatarios, but this minority is entitled to make all decisions about the land within the realm of the ejido. This imbalance is stronger than in other ejidos, as its history included income opportunities in the service and construction sectors by the oil industry. Therefore, many immigrants did not

see the need to apply for an ejidatario title here. Unlike Emiliano Zapata, there is not a single ejidatario living in San Andrés, as this colony was founded at the time of the oilfield development and populated by people who earn their income in the infrastructure facilitated by PEMEX, such as in restaurants, stores, barber shops, or in construction.

San Andrés: A Settlement between Oilfield and Ejido

The settlement of San Andrés represents a part of Emiliano Zapata, where the developments induced by the oil industry became exemplarily visible to the entire community. The *colonia* was founded in the early 1960s, when some people from the neighborhood of the settled in the immediate vicinity of PEMEX installations. They prepared meals for the passing oil workers and offered goods and services in improvised stores and snack bars, or they went to the extraction site every day to seek opportunities for casual work. By then, the community of Emiliano Zapata comprised only about five hundred residents and the ejido territory was large enough to provide land for more inhabitants. These people also settled so close to the PEMEX installations, they actually lived on land that the company was occupying anyway. Having a location so close to the extraction site brought the benefit of being close to the target customers, but with the disadvantage of living on a ground that was strongly pervaded by pipelines and not meant for settlement. After ten people died in the gas explosion of 1966 known as *quemazón*, PEMEX financially compensated the settlers and leased part of the ejido territory, about 1.5 km from the community center, to relocate the San Andrés settlement to a less dangerous area in the same year.

Today, there are very few people in San Andrés who personally witnessed the accident. Some of the older residents vaguely remember the times when the settlement was located closer to the installations and recall when PEMEX reimbursed the victims and acquired part of the ejido territory for them to settle on. Don Amado is one of the older residents of the colony. As many of the first settlers of San Andrés, he is from the rural parts of Puebla and grew up under very difficult circumstances. His father left the family very early, and his mother died a few years later, so his older siblings raised him and his younger siblings. His family owned very little property, and he inherited no land to work on, so as a youth, he had to leave and look for work. He shares the difficult childhood and his upbringing in poverty with most older settlers of San Andrés who were drawn by the boom of the oil industry that offered an alternative income to a group of poor rural but landless sons and daughters of peasants. Don Amado learned to cut hair, but without seed capital, he did not find a



Map 5.2. OpenStreetMap of Emiliano Zapata highlighting the Colonia San Andrés © OpenStreetMap-Mitwirkende (www.openstreetmap.org/ copyright).

place where he could settle down to open a salon. In an interview, he recalled how he came to San Andrés in the first place: “I wanted to work in Poza Rica, but I couldn’t. In every hair salon I went to, they asked me for a person that would recommend me. Well, nobody knew me there, who was going to recommend me? I returned and took the bus to Martinez, but I didn’t arrive there, I passed by this place, and I stayed here ever since.”

Most inhabitants of San Andrés have similar stories to tell in which they did not originally intend to go to Emiliano Zapata and settle down close to the oil installations, but rather passed by on the way to a larger city in the area. They saw opportunities to work or to sell services and goods, and they stayed there in improvised small huts. In the beginning, the ejidatario assembly under its former comisariado, was rather open-minded about the new settlers. Since PEMEX had paid for the plots they occupied, and the new settlers did not even show any interest in setting up farming parcels or applying for titles as ejidatarios, they posed no real competition. The ejidatarios even allowed more people to settle in the area when new migrants arrived after the relocation in the 1960s. A few years later, however, the ejidatarios not only tightened their policies with the election of new representatives, but even demanded the land back and wanted the settlers to leave, as Don Amado recalled: “Later another man came into

office. And that's when the conflict began. They started to claim that we should leave this place. The conflict is now more than twenty-five years old and still remains." The ejidatarios went to the municipal authorities and filed a complaint against illegitimate occupation of the ejido territory in the early 1970s, but Don Amado and some of his neighbors from San Andrés were able to defend their right to stay on their parcels by showing the documents they had received from the comisariado and PEMEX when they were relocated. Afterward, several of the ejidatarios still tried to convince the settlers to leave the territory, but they had no legal basis to act upon anymore.

The land conflict with the ejidatarios, the distance to the community center, as also the shared identification as migrant merchants rather than farmers rooted to the land, led to the development of a strengthening identity as "residents from San Andrés" rather than as community members of Emiliano Zapata. The inhabitants of San Andrés acknowledge their administrative assignment to Emiliano Zapata, developed family ties and friendships and some of them even hold offices in community politics. Nevertheless, many inhabitants of San Andrés foster their own feelings of cohesion. They identify themselves with their settlement as merchants who emerged through the business opportunities facilitated by PEMEX rather than with the ejido and campesino community as they perceive Emiliano Zapata. As PEMEX had assigned them the territory they are occupying until this day, the company furthermore, serves as a legal patron to them. Doña Minerva is the daughter of residents from Emiliano Zapata, but she moved to San Andrés about a decade ago to live with her husband from San Andrés. During a focus group interview with the inhabitants of San Andrés, she explained why she as many others, perceive San Andrés as an extended part of the oil industry, with PEMEX being the patron of the colony:

We were so to say, an "extension of PEMEX," that belonged to the company. Back then there was an economic boom, there were jobs, everything we could ask for. People came from all kinds of different places and settled here, sometimes within the boundaries of the ejido. Then PEMEX relocated them, to this area to take them out of the ejido. Technically this piece of land where we live now belongs to PEMEX.

She pointed out the different economic basis that San Andrés has in contrast to Emiliano Zapata, which forms a different kind of shared identity: "People come to do their business here. Here we are businesspeople, so to say. Everybody here has a small business—a store, a booth or a cantina. Over there it's different. Maybe it's the economy over there, right? People work their fields and orchards, and they live from day to day. Here we have more economic activity."

The relationship with Emiliano Zapata is still difficult due to the land conflicts in the past, and several residents of San Andrés favor the liberty to establish their own community with its own legal status. So far, there have been no serious attempts to legally process independence, and such an endeavor would be difficult since the colony is still located within the limits of the endowed ejido territory. Yet, San Andrés started to establish its own institutions and already has a church, a small primary school, and even a kindergarten at its disposal. Furthermore, the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) started to count San Andrés as an independent community in their last census from 2010, which is seen by many inhabitants of San Andrés as a further argument for San Andrés being independent from the ejido. Since 2014, the inhabitants of San Andrés also started to hold their own *fiesta patronal*, an annual celebration of the patron of each community (usually the titular saint). In the case of Emiliano Zapata, the *fiesta patronal* is on 12 December, as the day of the Virgen de Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico. San Andrés would have been part of this celebration as part of the community but started to organize its own celebration on 29 November, the day of Saint Andrew, their titular saint, and therewith, demonstrated a certain self-adscription as an independent community. Doña Minerva emphasized the success San Andrés already had in establishing new public services for themselves, while the inhabitants of the center of Emiliano Zapata are perceived as quarrelsome: “Emiliano Zapata doesn’t like progress. They don’t want new things in the community. They fight a lot; they always have conflicts among themselves. Here we don’t. People in San Andrés are very united.”

When PEMEX started to withdraw from the area and abandoned many of the installations, the economic situation for many residents from San Andrés became increasingly difficult. Most of them relied in one way or the other on the flow of oil workers and goods for their small businesses. However, many of them can still sell enough to sustain their families due to the customers that pass by during the time of the orange harvest season, or they look for other opportunities to earn income. When PEMEX abandoned many of their installations during the crisis, many ejidatarios from Emiliano Zapata saw that as a possibility to claim back the hitherto occupied territory. That also included the parcels that PEMEX had leased for the San Andrés colony after the accident in 1966. Since they still did not have the legal basis for reclaiming the land officially, the authorities from Emiliano Zapata did not try to relocate the colony but wanted to sell them possession titles for their homes, even though the territory still counted officially as part of the indemnified territory from PEMEX. However, since PEMEX was no longer present on the scene on a regular basis, the inhabitants of San Andrés feel abandoned by their patron company. Yet, the



Figure 5.1. The colony San Andrés beside the main road, Papantla, Mexico, 2018
© Svenja Schöneich.

ejidatarios could not get legal approval to reclaim the occupied areas from PEMEX until now and, therefore, the colony remained and persists till this day, belonging to Emiliano Zapata on an administrative level. In case the regularization of the ejido under the government program FANAR is to be conducted in the future, the ejidatarios could then try to reclaim some of the territory occupied by PEMEX, possibly also the parcels occupied by San Andrés, exposing the residents of the colony legally to the decisions taken in Emiliano Zapata. Recently the relationship between Emiliano Zapata and San Andrés was challenged through novel land distribution schemes, which might be soon established via the regularization of the ejido.

Changing Social Dynamics after the Energy Reform

Despite the rather early hour, the sun is burning mercilessly from the cloudless sky and even though the assembly room the casa del campesino at the main square in the community center provides shade and the windows are wide open, the heat is already crawling into the room. The meeting should have started at 10 o'clock, like Don Alberto, the comisario ejidal, told us the day before, but when I arrived on time at the *auditorio*,⁵ there are only very few people present. Now, almost fifteen minutes later we are all together, not more than eighteen individuals sitting on the rows of wooden benches in the assembly room. Two vehicles finally arrive a

few minutes later and park directly in front of the *auditorio*. The first one is showing the PEMEX logo and a second one displays the lettering from the company Oleorey. Three people are getting out of the first car, two men and a woman, while two men get out the other car. All of them are wearing company overalls except the older man from Oleorey who is wearing jeans and a blue shirt also portraying his company logo. All five greet the comisario ejidal who was waiting for them standing by the door.

While two of the visitors wait in the background, three men stand up behind the small desk. They look oddly small in front of the big painting of revolutionary and peasant leader Emiliano Zapata at the back wall, which now seems like a relic from another era. The tallest one standing on the right starts to talk. He is wearing glasses and has a PEMEX badge on his overalls and presents himself as a PEMEX staff member. As he speaks, the two visitors in the back start to hand out two different attendance lists to the people on the bench, one for each company. "So, like we already told your comisariado ejidal who called in this meeting, we want to announce an increased activity of the gas flare within the coming four weeks," the speaker reveals his reason for coming here. He continues with a talk about technical matters and details on why this measurement is necessary—mainly because a large quantity of surplus gas has to be burned that accumulated during the recent extraction activities. The other two men in the front add some detailed information here and there and all of them assure the group that everything will be done to properly control the burning—a fact they emphasize a lot. Then they offer to answer questions if the people of Zapata should have some. Many hands immediately go up: People do have questions!

Most of them are worried about accidents that might occur or the noise disturbance caused by the increased gas flare activity. Some get angry mentioning former spills and accidents that have not been resolved. Others complain that this meeting was scheduled at very short notice, so there was no time to mobilize more people to attend today. The agente municipal is furious, which may also be due to the fact that the company seemingly ignored the protocol to contact him first to call the meeting but informed the comisario instead. He points out that one of the recent seepages has still not been resolved. When he called the PEMEX people, they referred him to Oleorey, who then said that PEMEX was responsible. In this way, the seepage continued for weeks. Other community members nod in agreement, the unresolved questions of responsibility between the companies are at their expense. The company representatives remain friendly but distant while facing the accusations. They say that other people from the company have been responsible for what happened in the past and relegate responsibility—they are only

responsible for informing the community, stating that they do not know much about the problems of the past. Some community members do not believe them and get up angrily and leave, but a few remain seated and demonstrate interest in what the representatives have to say. The comisario raises his hand and proposes that the companies could do something to compensate the disturbances. The visitors listen and nod but before one of the company affiliates responds, the first speaker calls up the next person who raised his hand to speak and the issue remains unresolved for now. Once again.

The Entrance of a New Company: Oleorey takes Over

After seventy-six years of PEMEX's monopoly, new companies and thus new players are entering the scene. The San Andrés oilfield is not yet assigned to a foreign company, but the Venezuelan firm Oleorey is already in place as a subcontractor and is probably going to take over the installations in the following years (García-Chiang 2018: 4–5). The residents of Emiliano Zapata became accustomed to the influence of PEMEX over the years and today, the people who remember a time when the company was not present in the community are significantly outnumbered. PEMEX had subcontracted other national firms for basic construction works in the area since it started operating, which then used local labor forces, long before the energy reform. Yet, the state-owned oil company always represented the responsible entity in charge (see García-Chiang 2018). PEMEX staff assigned the work to be done, contracted the conducting staff, and oversaw the construction work. Since the oil company owned the hydrocarbon sources and managed the extraction sites and the territory expropriated from the ejido, PEMEX had been the major counterpart in question of indemnification and compensation payments. When the new Venezuelan company, Oleorey, started to take over several installations on the San Andrés oilfield after 2012, it was difficult for the community members to get accustomed to a new entity being in charge aside from PEMEX. To date, PEMEX is still perceived as the equivalent for any extraction related entity and most of my informants still tend to equate it with the term “oil company,” even though they know about the position of the new firms as operating entities. Don Clemente, an ejidatario and native of Emiliano Zapata, has lived through more than six decades of PEMEX reign. As one of the elder residents, he is used to calling everything related to the oil company “PEMEX.” He explained to me: “Now it's actually no longer PEMEX, there is another company in charge now. They call it Oleorey, it's a foreign company. That is the one that controls all the wells now, and not

PEMEX anymore. People still call it PEMEX, because, you know, we are used to that.”

The new company, Oleorey, follows guidelines different from PEMEX with regard to hiring local workers and many community members of Emiliano Zapata lament the fact that they rarely contract laborers from the community. The first thing Don Clemente, as many of the community members told me about the new operating company, told me was the difference regarding job opportunities between Oleorey and PEMEX: “Now there are practically no jobs anymore, they abandoned everything. People no longer have the opportunity to work around here. At least when PEMEX was in charge there were jobs.” But it is not only the lack of jobs that was perceived as more complicated with the new company as compared to PEMEX. In particular, the protocol of accountability in cases of damages and claiming the corresponding compensations became more difficult. This situation in Emiliano Zapata is no exception. Foreign firms often follow different rules when it comes to accountability, which creates a challenging situation for local residents (see Hernandez Cervantes and Zalik 2018). When damage occurred, the residents of Emiliano Zapata often relied on the contacts they had established with individual PEMEX staff members with whom they had already negotiated a procedure of how to treat issues like seepages and disturbances. In that way, the question of accountability had entered a personal level, which had created at least some trust within an often hardly reliable system of compensation management. In more severe cases, the community members had even gone directly to the PEMEX headquarters in Poza Rica to report the damage. Now that foreign firms are taking over, people feel unsettled and wonder how those issues will be dealt with in the future.

Many community members are used to contacting company staff directly in case of a complaint, but since Oleorey took over, the changing conditions in terms of contacting the company had led to discontent among many affected farmers. Don Esteban, an ejidatario with a lot of experience in enforcing compensation claims against PEMEX told me: “This new company . . . I don’t know where the headquarters of Oleorey is, and where to get our compensation.” He shrugged while looking at me. “None of us really knows. Me and the others we have struggled to report damages to them and get our compensations, because we don’t know where to go. With PEMEX this was different. Everybody knows where the PEMEX offices are and where you had to go.” The established protocol in case of emergencies or complaints have been disrupted because of the lack of availability of company staff from Oleorey in contrast to PEMEX in the past. Whether this issue is a long-term matter due to the transition phase during the processual establishment of a new company

or rather a permanent problem due to the company's different approach is not certain yet.

The presence of the company represents an inconvenience on several levels not only for the community members from Emiliano Zapata, but also for the PEMEX staff that had been stationed at the San Andrés oilfield for many years. New workers are taking over jobs that corresponded to PEMEX team members before and the processual privatization causes tensions within the working environment for PEMEX.⁶ Therefore, many of the staff members also consider the (albeit fragile) equilibrium, established between company and community, to be in danger. For example, local PEMEX workers complain about the inexperience their new colleagues demonstrated when they started working on the San Andrés oilfield, which could cause further accidents and complications. Alejandro is one of the PEMEX workers who had been laboring at the installations close to Emiliano Zapata for many years. He criticizes not only the lack of experience from the workers of Oleorey when they entered the area, but also their bad behavior in the community, claiming that it would cause the general image of oil workers to deteriorate. "What happens is that here there is a company called Oleorey," he started our conversation about the situation for him and his co-workers after the new company started operating in the area. "Those guys have to start from zero, because they don't know anything. They start from scratch. Besides, they walk around and make all the girls falling in love, sometimes also the wives." He took a sip from his Coke and continued: "We're talking about people who are already married. The locals they don't like that and that way our [oil workers'] image is seriously damaged."

In the meantime, most community residents in Emiliano Zapata do not seem to have a particularly bad image of the Oleorey staff members. Despite the complications regarding accountability for damages, the new firm is often perceived as more complaisant in terms of the implementation of community support programs and CSR. Oleorey participated in several of the recent installations such as the community kitchen or the sewing workshop, or the renovation of the school in collaboration with PEMEX. Don Esteban told me that the Oleorey staff has recently approached the ejido council and other local authorities to establish contacts with them and asked the authorities for priorities regarding support programs. The company then financially supported the construction of several public buildings: "Recently, Oleorey approached the comisariado. They presented themselves to him and said that they also wanted to support the community and asked what we would want them to do for us," he said. And indeed, the community authorities seized the opportunity and asked Oleorey for a new school building, which the company then



Figure 5.2. Entrance of the primary school renovated by PEMEX and Oleorey in Emiliano Zapata, Papantla, Mexico, 2016 © Svenja Schöneich.

started financing. However, many community members, remain skeptical about the benefits in the long term, but they acknowledge the increased effort of the new firm to grant certain benefits as part of their CSR measures.

Oleorey itself assures commitment to the needs of the affected communities close to its operations, but also refers to its position as an operator under PEMEX. As part of their obligations in this capacity, they formally acknowledge their duties toward the communities. Valeria is one of the few Mexican employees of the company based in Poza Rica and is in charge of the company-community relationship. I had the opportunity to interview her. We met one afternoon in a cozy café in Poza Rica over a coffee and some snacks. She made a friendly and committed impression to me when she talked about her work and how she always tried to fulfill the needs of the community members. Yet, when talking about the community relations guidelines for the company, she pointed to PEMEX as the contractor: “In the end, we are under contract with PEMEX. We have an obligation to support the communities where we are working, which is called a *licencia social*.” Valeria also emphasized the commitment the firm has with PEMEX as the contracting entity in the first place. PEMEX

required them to follow certain guidelines including the dedication of a certain percentage of their annual income to community support programs. She, furthermore, acknowledged the difficulties that the company recently had with the people from Emiliano Zapata, but also pointed to the limitations of resolving the tensions under the conditions that PEMEX imposes on them. “Unfortunately, we had some misunderstandings with Emiliano Zapata.” She said, sounding regretful. “There are times, when the community asks us . . . I don’t know, to build roads for them . . . and we are not authorized to do that, and people get angry because they think we just don’t want to. But if it’s not approved, the company loses money.” Valeria was understanding regarding the community members needs and regretted to not be able to meet their expectations but referred to the strict requirements for CSR measures, which limit her actions. Her company acts under a contract with PEMEX, allowing for certain rights, but still treating the company as an operator of PEMEX property. This constellation fosters room for misunderstandings and unclear responsibility distribution, causing new tensions between the community and the company.

Resisting New Uncertainties

With the modifications in preparation of the energy reform, Oleorey took over the operation of several former PEMEX installations, among them the gas flare. Since the new operators were not familiar with established protocols between company and community, which hitherto were fragilely balanced, they kept the gas flare running constantly day and night and with increased intensity. While PEMEX operated the gas flare, the community members already felt disturbed by its visible and audible presence, but at least its intensity was reduced on a regular basis allowing for a pause in the disturbance. Its intensity sometimes began to rise even all night long without prior notification and many community members felt severely hampered and disturbed in their everyday lives. Afterward, the intensity decreased for some time, but then was frequently increased again in an unpredictable manner. So, when the situation did not improve after an intervention by the agente municipal, some community members did not see any option other than to engage in open protest by 2014–15.

The last time open protests had occurred was in 2003, when community members from Emiliano Zapata joined peasants from fifty-six communities from the area the city of Poza Rica against PEMEX. The protesters took umbrage at the unfulfilled promises on the part of the company to pave and maintain the main roads in the area when instead the roads were further damaged with heavy machinery. The protest was initiated by several

communities in the whole region, not by the residents of Emiliano Zapata alone, a fact by which the protesters ensured a stronger stance against the company. PEMEX promised more benefits for the communities, but the inhabitants of Emiliano Zapata claim to have hardly noticed an improvement. This time the community members engaged in protest again mainly because they did not see any other option to see their claim answered.

Don Fernando's orchards are close to several PEMEX installations. When I interviewed him, he remembered the time when the light and sound of the gas flare was unbearable: "Well, now, you cannot hear anything. It's quiet now. But if you had been here when the loud noise started last year . . . No, no, no, you would not have understood a word from me standing right next to you." He told me. So, the community asked the agente municipal to intervene, and he did so by contacting the company and asking them to tone down the activity at least at night. Don Fernando continued: "Then the agente municipal went to ask them about the noise, and they said they would be extracting more oil—I don't know how much—so they were asked to turn it down. A lot of elderly people like us, some were almost going deaf." Unfortunately, the outreach remained unanswered for about two weeks and the disturbance continued. Neither PEMEX nor Oleorey assumed the responsibility, and the community members could no longer rely on their past established personal contacts, as no staff member would assume responsibility. The community then saw no other way than to engage in open protest: "But it lasted about fifteen days, day and night, and the flame of the gas flare was lighting up the community every night as well. So, we started protesting." The protest in Emiliano Zapata was organized and joined by a few other local leaders in the region. They decided to block the bridge over the Remolino River, and consequently, the main passage for the oil companies to access the San Andrés oilfield.

Unfortunately, the movement was not as successful as many community members had hoped it would be. The police intervened and two leaders of the protesters were arrested. The arrested community members were supported by NGO lawyers, who managed to avoid a trial, but the fellow protesters were nevertheless scared and halted their actions. However, many community members were disappointed by the minuscule achievement gained through the manifestations and expressed a feeling of impotence against the powerful companies and the government protecting it. Don Alberto, who has been dealing with the impacts of the oil industry for most of his life, has also been part of the protests, as was his brother. He felt that Oleorey was not open to negotiations as PEMEX had been in the past. To end the protests, the company intervened with the support of the police and two leaders of the protesters were arrested, one

of whom was Don Alberto's brother. The two leaders could then defend themselves with the support of an NGO lawyer. Despite the relatively unscathed outcome for the leaders, the fellow protesters were frightened, fearing the powerful firms, and they stopped their actions. Don Alberto remembers being scared after the arrest and thus resigned from the protest and pointed out the power of the oil company that the community is unable to withstand: "They only wanted to scare us. And the truth is that you know that they have all the power. And the one who has the power wins in the end."

Even though the protests were stopped, and many community members were disappointed by how little was achieved, at least some of the claims were answered after these events. Even when local media reported and journalists made the claims public, the oil company did not respond as the community members who participated in the protests had hoped. The loud noise of the gas flare was toned down, and the community members were promised to be alerted to an increase in the activity of the gas flare in the future. The recently organized protests and the increased willingness to again participate in such openly articulated resistance is a new factor within the set of mechanisms for responding to uncertainties. They are a result of the changing circumstances of shifting power relations and an altering composition of the social dynamics within the oilscape of Emiliano Zapata in the aftermath of the energy reform.

New Technologies and New Actors: The Anti-Fracking Movement

The protests in Emiliano Zapata that had taken place in 2014–15 drew the attention of local environmental organizations and activists. Since the implementation of the energy reform, protest movements against major extraction projects and neoliberalization of the energy sector had emerged. The issue of fracking had specifically caused agitation due to the great uncertainty of the technique with regard to environmental and health risks (see Bradshaw and Waite 2017; Smartt Gullion 2015; Williams et al. 2017). Since the fracking sites had not been marked implicitly as such in the region, many potentially affected communities had become concerned that fracking might be taking place close to their homes without their knowledge (de la Fuente et al. 2016: 64; Hernández Ibarzábal 2017: 367–69; Silva Ontiveros et al. 2018: 482). Thus, a joint movement of activists and communities against the implementation of fracking arose with a critical discussion of the issue on a national level (see Ánimas Vargas 2015; de la Fuente et al. 2016; Silva Ontiveros et al. 2018).

In Emiliano Zapata, the topic was publicly discussed in 2015. The press had just released data of fracking showing that Veracruz was the state with the highest number of operational fracking wells by far and inhabitants in different places of the state were concerned about its future implications (Chenaut 2017; Cruz 2018). The then agente municipal Don Eusebio heard about the implementation of fracking in the area and like many others, he was concerned if that also indicated a possible health and environmental threat for Emiliano Zapata. When I interviewed him in 2016, he told me how he became aware of the possibility that fracking would soon be applied in Emiliano Zapata too: "Well, we heard in 2014 that here in the region fracking was going to be implemented. But this was supposed to happen already in 2015," he said. The municipal authorities then denied any fracking, but Don Eusebio, like many others, remained suspicious. "I think that it's because of the falling oil price. That's why they stopped the activity. But it's not off the table yet! That doesn't mean that it's not going to happen later." He then started to read and hear more about fracking in the media, which increased his concerns. He worries that more damage on the territory will occur and the risks will intensify as soon as the company would start fracking. When he was approached by a group of local activists belonging to the AMCF, he agreed to hold a conference in Emiliano Zapata, where various communities of the region were invited to participate in informative talks and activities to engage in protests against fracking. The event, "Encuentro Regional Norte-Golfo por la Defensa del Agua y el Territorio Frente a los Proyectos de Muerte," was held on June 20 and 21 in 2015: and provoked a national, and partly international media response (e.g., Administrador Regeneración 2015b; Ejatlas 2017; Lastiri 2015).

Many, but not all, community members of Emiliano Zapata participated. During the event, groups of urban artists from Mexico City offered to decorate the houses of community members willing to participate with street art graffiti depicting statements against fracking. The graffiti are still visible and send a message of strong disapproval and engagement of protest of the community members of Emiliano Zapata. The activists asked the participating community members as to who would be interested in having their houses painted and presented a set of graffiti motifs the people could choose from. Several community members agreed and today their houses or stores display different graffiti against fracking.

Yet, many community members still cannot imagine what fracking exactly is. Most of the local knowledge about the topic in Emiliano Zapata stems from information given out at this event, which was not attended by the entire community. The term, fracking is familiar to the community members, but what it implied remained unclear. Due to allegations con-



Figure 5.3. Anti-fracking graffiti in Emiliano Zapata, Papantla, Mexico, 2016/2017
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cerning its harmfulness, the community members perceived it as a new threat, but on the other hand they were already used to many types of risks with regard to oil extraction. From this perspective the application of the new technique confirms or even intensified the existing social patterns of environmental injustice as it has been shown for similar cases (see, e.g., Cotton 2016; Delgado 2018; Malin et al. 2018). Furthermore, fracking as a part of the energy reform, was a possible factor for a successful revival of the economy after the crisis. Moreover, it remained unclear if fracking had been implemented in the community. Don Eusebio requested information from the oil company and the municipal authorities but could not get a satisfactory answer to the question: “The officials did not tell us anything. They even said they wouldn’t know what fracking is, that that they wouldn’t know of any fracking pit nearby.” When he referred to the event held by the nationally recognized NGO, the authorities reacted reluctantly and accused the NGO of spreading false information. While a strong mistrust about the integrity of government authorities and PEMEX, which is prevalent in Emiliano Zapata, the group of activists who started to approach the community emerged as a group of new potential allies.

During my interviews, many community members expressed their support for the NGO, who also had lawyers within their ranks who had

already supported the residents of Emiliano Zapata during the arrests after the protests against the gas flare in 2014–15. During the event that lasted a few days, an assembly of the community was also held with the purpose of claiming the territory officially as “free from fracking,” which would serve as a publicly signed statement of resistance against the technique. Initially, the community could not agree on whether to sign it or not, since several of the ejidatarios were against it. The ejidatarios were not the only ones who remained skeptical about the act of signing the statement and the general intentions of the activists. Some of the other residents did too. Don Alberto from the ejido council doubts the good intentions of the NGO for the community and pointed out during our interview that the organization could be working for the government and/or seeking to enrich itself via its seeming support for the community: “Some *compañeros* wanted to sign this act, but we didn’t know if they are really on our side or if it’s just a way for them to get money from the government.” He himself prefers to be cautious with the organizations as he suspects a possible withdrawal from their side without complying with the agreements taken with the community beforehand: “Many times they told us that they would stand with us but when the government comes and tells them to back off, they do as they’re told. They just say that they couldn’t do anything for us, and that’s it.” After the anti-fracking event, some community members lamented the diminishing NGO engagement with the community. For the community members of Emiliano Zapata, the meaning of the presence and role of actors like NGOs is not yet determined. Some see them as possible allies, while others remain skeptical about their motives.

With the organization of the event, the media interest in Emiliano Zapata increased significantly in contrast to past years, as fracking represented a late breaking topic on a national level. Local newspapers published reports about the event and the situation of Emiliano Zapata contesting PEMEX and the oil industry in general. Due to the topicality of fracking in Mexico, national and international researchers such as myself started to explore the topic. Recently, some papers about fracking in the area and also about Emiliano Zapata, focusing particularly on oil extraction, have already been published (e.g., Checa-Artasu and Aguilar León 2013; Chenaut 2017; Aguilar León 2018). Anthropological and archaeological interest, particularly in Totonac ruins or Totonac cultural practices, is not uncommon for the area, but as Emiliano Zapata is not perceived to be an indigenous community nor are there any anthropological sites close by, the community had hardly been the focus of research interest. For the community members, this interest represented a new experience of visi-

bility that transcended the local horizon. Suddenly, they were questioned by outsiders who wanted to know about the oil industry and, of course, about fracking in their community on a regular basis. Some community members welcomed the opportunity to talk about their concerns because they hoped for even greater visibility in the media and national discourse and wanted to make their case. But not all community members are eager to constantly share their opinion and knowledge on the issue with outsiders, especially since most of the journalists and students repeatedly asked the same questions.

During my second research stay one year later, the public interest in fracking in general and in Emiliano Zapata in particular had already declined. The representatives of the press continued to report about claims against the oil company in cases of major seepages, as had occurred in 2017 on a minor scale, but the general interest was declining. The NGOs were no longer active in the community, even though some activists continued to keep personal friendly contacts with individual community members. Marta Conde and Philippe Le Billon claim that “alliances” do not have only an enabling effect on communities engaging in resistance but can also have a hindering effect (2017: 692). This also holds true for Emiliano Zapata, where the new allies supported the resisting community members on the one hand, but left them partly disappointed on the other, after the public interest in fracking as a “hot issue” decreased. It could not be clarified with certainty if fracking occurred close to the community and/or on the ejido territory or not, nor if it will be applied in the near future. In the meantime, it was revealed that the possibility of fracking being applied further to the southwest region of the area is much higher due to the particularities of the local geological formations (see AMCF 2019; CartoCrítica 2019).

The interest in current changes on the local level induced by the energy reform, and particularly a possible application of fracking had created a type of hype that attracted new actors, who then withdrew again after the hype had subsided. Some community members were disappointed by the reduced attention and more so by the relatively scarce practical achievements in context of their claims for more benefits and community support programs. Yet, these new actors had also started to play a role in the community life and influenced the relationships between actors and thus caused several alterations within the oilscape. The NGOs had provided the community members with new resources, such as legal support and public surveillance regarding the possible ways of contestation, and the journalists and researchers increased the visibility of the community’s interest within public discourse. They had, therefore, also influenced the

disposition of the community members to find new ways of articulating protest. Yet many residents of Emiliano Zapata were skeptical regarding the intentions of the outsiders. They were disappointed by the declining interest in their community after the hype and perceived the situation as even more uncertain than before. Either way, the social dimension of the oilscape in Emiliano Zapata was reconfigured through the entrance of new actor groups with the implementation of the energy reform and the possibility of fracking being applied.

Ending the Age of the Dragon: The Energy Reform as a Turning Point for Social Dynamics in Emiliano Zapata?

The rise of the oil industry and the extensive oil extractions on its territory has shaped Emiliano Zapata and its surroundings as a space that I refer to as an oilscape. It underlies constant transformations through modifications of the material environment over time, and also through human practices and interactions and thereby the dimension of social dynamics contributes to the constant reshaping of the oilscape (Low 2014: 35). Since the beginning of the industrial activities, PEMEX has established itself as a major player within this oilscape. The company changed the living conditions and was soon perceived as a dominant institution, exposing the community members to life hazards and health risks. As a powerful company, PEMEX was compared to a “dragon,” who sometimes acts ruthlessly and does not assume its responsibilities and thereby, endangers the residents, but who can also bring in wealth and opportunities. This ambivalence created uncertainties, to which the community members responded by using mechanisms of adaptation. They do so by targeting the company staff as customers of products and services, establishing personal contacts with PEMEX personnel in order to skip lengthy processes of officially enforcing claims, or engaging in negotiations over jobs and compensation with the company. However, their bargaining power is rather limited, and many community members feel that they are essentially at the mercy of PEMEX.

The interactions between the community and the company and its staff have played a key role in demarcating territory space and thus in defining ownership and access rights to land. In this way, the ejido was challenged by both the company’s interest and the internal interactions of the community members who split into “ejidatarios” and “propietarios.” The murky and corruption-laden process of indemnification for the territory expropriated by PEMEX, caused internal conflicts, which were revived as the ejidatarios started the regularization process for individual

parcels as a part of the agrarian (counter) reform of 1992. On one hand, the regularization may be the only way to assert claims for compensation retroactively, while on the other hand, it challenges established patterns of government and sovereignty.

In the course of the energy reform 2013/14, new companies and its employees have recently entered the social space and expanded the spectrum of actors, thus changing the social dynamics of the oilscape. Oleorey acts as a subcontractor of PEMEX and slowly takes over the operation of several oil installations, as well as more and more responsibilities toward the community. This poses new challenges for the community members, such as the foreseeable but indistinct deadline for settling land disputes, as it will be impossible to reclaim payments or land from PEMEX after the activities have been taken over by a new company. On the other hand, the energy reform also introduces new opportunities. As the new companies started to revive some of the formerly abandoned installations, many community members saw options for an improvement of the economic situation. Another element of the energy reform was the implementation of CSR measurements in the energy sector and PEMEX has introduced several strategies to do this in close cooperation with new firms entering the market. Some community members, therefore, reported positive experiences with the engagement of the new company and also hope for improved maintenance of the old oil infrastructure, which caused many concerns in the community during the oil crisis. At the same time, non-transparent structures have led to confusion and to a lack of accountability in several cases of damages or accidents, generating a new set of uncertainties the community members faced by taking new measures with support of new allies such as the engagement in open protests.

While the introduction of fracking as a new extraction technique did not just confirm existing patterns of social and environmental injustice (see Cotton 2016; Malin et al. 2018), the public attention regarding the issue had also another effect: the breaking with the binary relationship between the community and one powerful oil company. Through the shifting power relations different forms of articulating protests also emerged. Aside from the new firms, other new actors, such as representatives of the media, activists, or researchers suddenly entered the oilscape and rearranged the old-established relationship setting. The energy reform therefore represents a new turning point in the course of oil extraction over time, through which the oilscape enters a further process of change. While old uncertainties remain to some extent, new ones emerge and the strategies to deal with them are readjusted again.

Notes

1. The dancers of the ritual dance of the *voladores de Papantla* is a popular ritual, as well as a tourist attraction in the area (see Bertels 1993; Schöneich 2014)
2. Simple workers, in Zapata usually understood as day laborers.
3. Around 63 percent of the survey respondents have worked on such a contract or know somebody close to them who had over the years: “Yo he trabajado por ejemplo como contratistas para compañías o empresas petroleras o conozco a alguien cercano que ha trabajado así.”
4. The government PROCEDE was cancelled in 2006 and subsidized by the new program FANAR. Both programs serve the same goal of regularizing ejido and communal land to individuals aiming for a processual transformation into private property.
5. An *auditorio* is a roofed square and meeting point where most assemblies take place and represents the center of most of the communities in the area. In Emiliano Zapata, the *auditorio* is located next to a building gallery with several rooms for public administrative tasks.
6. Newly introduced conditions regarding tensions about the energy reform and the privatization of the hydrocarbon sector among PEMEX staff, present worthwhile topics for further research. The reform has been discussed mainly in terms of political and economic factors, but not yet following an actor centered approach regarding the oil company staff (see, e.g., Alvarez and Valencia 2015; Vidal Cano 2016).