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The Democracy Development Machine

Nicholas Copeland

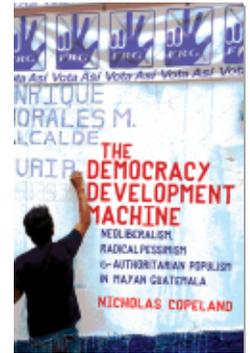
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NOS FALTA CAPACIDAD

Training Enterprising Selves

General Analysis of Attitudinal Development: As the last Progress Achievement Report concluded regarding the South Coast Federation: “They are essentially aware of their long range objectives; however, they still have not settled down to a realistic understanding of the long road ahead.” It was during this reporting period that leaders of the Federation confronted the question of a “realistic understanding.” They became aware of the fact that an adequate economic base of their own to finance their ambitious planning could not be developed overnight, and that the rank-and-file members in the local associations still did not identify them as their leaders. But most importantly, they learned that the discipline (not so much the capacity) of maintaining effective administration of their organization was alien to them. Most of them have not understood that the details of bookkeeping, micro-planning and documentation are a very necessary part of organizational development. Their life styles are essentially ones of independence with large spans of leisure time; they do not have to account for their work and time to other persons. Some are willing to make the necessary adjustments implied by the “value system” of organization and some are not. Some understand that these adjustments have to be made in order to gain the objectives of economic betterment, a greater voice for themselves as a “people,” and the development of a broader understanding of the world in which they live.

*PROGRESS ACHIEVEMENT REPORT: RURAL ORGANIZATION
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, PILOT PROJECT—GUATEMALA, 1970*

Indeed the very idea, the very possibility of a theory of a discrete and enveloped body inhabited and animated by its own soul—the subject, the individual, the person—is *part of what is to be explained*,

the very horizon of thought that one can hope to see beyond. . . . Our inquiries would pursue the lines of formation and functioning of an array of historically contingent “*practices of subjectification,*” in which humans are capacitated through coming to relate to themselves in particular ways: understand themselves, speak themselves, enact themselves, judge themselves in virtue of the ways in which their forces, energies, properties, and ontologies are constituted and shaped by being linked into, utilized, inscribed, incised by various assemblages.

NIKOLAS ROSE, *INVENTING OUR SELVES* (ITALICS MINE)

Capacitation isn't just a talk; rather it is that in which you can achieve a quality of life and changes in people's behavior.

FORMER DEPARTMENTAL DIRECTOR OF DIGESA
(INTERVIEW, 2015)

When I arrived at Juan Jiménez's house early one morning for a scheduled meeting, his wife informed me that he was around back. I walked not far down the trail to find him waiting for me in a recently tilled empty field. After greeting, he explained that his friend, an *ingeniero agrónomo* (agronomical engineer), grows papaya and told him how to make money from it. Jiménez wanted to grow Hawaiian papaya because they are smaller and sweeter tasting and also because, hopefully, based on his research, they would grow in Los Altenses. “I cut all the coffee plants down. My neighbors—the people here—thought it was crazy. But they do not understand. Now I don't want anything to do with coffee.” Jiménez was gambling, in an educated way, that papaya sales would earn him much more than simply growing coffee. His reasoning followed that of international development agents and policy makers involved in promoting nontraditional agricultural exports (NTX) to raise the living standards of small farmers.¹ Earlier that year, Jiménez had calculated days worked and fertilizer and transportation costs, and reasoned that he was losing Q150 (\$20) per quintal growing coffee. “Coffee doesn't pay,” he announced decidedly. After the prices recovered, some people profited, he explained, but so little that NTX sounds better all the time, especially because “coffee requires so much work.”

Jiménez already kept bees and sold their honey to a local NGO that exported it. When I asked about the possibility of exporting local varieties of wild mushrooms, some of which were quite unique and delicious, he

said that he had also discussed it with the *agrónomo*, proudly informing me that he knew many *ingeniero* whom he had met in his travels to other towns. The same man, Jiménez informed me, “*ya se superó*” (“already made it”) selling papaya, and he intended to do the same. As he showed me the new plot, he explained that last week he had invested Q425 (\$60) on papaya seeds, a discounted price he arranged through his friend. He can get eighty trees per *cuerda* (20 square meters), each of which bears fruit every six months. He figured he could sell the papaya for Q5 each, regardless of their somewhat small size. “The problem,” he said, grinning, “is that no one knows what they are yet.” He nodded and laughed at my suggestion that he slice one open and offer samples. He also expressed admiration for the production on large *fincas*, describing how they used tools to level the rows to make sure that no water escaped: “Perfectly even!” They also use two applications of chemical fertilizers and another organic fertilization every two or three years: “Very scientific!”

I first met Jiménez at the village assembly, where I asked permission to live there and conduct research. He sat in the front row and made direct eye contact with an intent expression. He was relaxed and not at all timid about speaking to people from outside the community. He had served on various village development committees and, in 2004, was head of the *padres de familia* (parents) committee, responsible for improving communication between the villagers and the director and staff of the village school, almost all Ladinos from the town center or Huehuetenango. He had inherited a great deal of productive land from his father-in-law, a former leader active in the first development committees in the village.

Jiménez and I spoke on numerous occasions. I enjoyed his quick wit and irreverent attitude, and he seemed interested in hearing my perspectives. One of the first things he told me about himself was that he had taken several courses with the Association for Integrated Development (ASODESI)—San Pedro’s most prominent local development institution—and currently worked for it as a health promoter, a job that required travel to different *municipios*. Facts and details learned in courses taken with development institutions in hopes of gaining particular certificates were the standard fare in my conversations with Jiménez and others who had earned such credentials. Villagers trained in such a manner were a distinct minority and were generally less timid and more willing to engage me and to seek out my company than others who were not.

Jiménez took calculated risks experimenting with new crops and used scientific knowledge and technologies to take utmost advantage of his land. He enjoyed learning new things. These traits earned him an elevated status in the community; he was regarded as an intelligent person, one of the most *capacitado* in the entire village. One hot Sunday afternoon, I ran into him at a local cantina where I sometimes went after the market died down to find men when they had free time to talk and to enjoy a beer myself. Jiménez, who had a reputation for sometimes imbibing too much, was drinking beer with two young men from his village. The youths were sipping more slowly than he was, despite his prodding, but listened patiently as he told them about the importance of having “vision” and a “mission.” Vision was the goal, and the mission included the concrete steps one would need to take to get there; both were necessary for success. These were lessons he had learned working for ASODESI. As the young men—both high school graduates—listened, it appeared they were humoring him by sitting quietly and nodding at appropriate intervals. I got the impression that they had heard this talk before but enjoyed or at least tolerated it. He continued for several minutes, repeating several times how he traveled to different *municipios*, knew experts, and was always learning new things. He exuded confidence that often veered into arrogance born out of his conviction that he possessed *capacidad*.

Some villagers had evidently grown tired of Juan’s self-importance, which also made me uncomfortable on several occasions. One evening I was sitting on a log conversing with one of his neighbors who lived near the unpaved road that runs through the village. Without speaking, the men exchanged an angry glare. I later discovered that the man had been teasing Juan, saying he was from the neighboring town of San Juan Atitán. Juan was actually from a distant *aldea* in San Pedro. The joke was about the name Juan and Juan’s mustache, which resembled those typical among Mayan *Sanjuaneros*. The teasing seemed intended to take Jiménez down a notch, as was the disrespectful nickname, “Juan Papaya,” mocking his interest in fruit. I interpreted his difficulty in taking these jokes as a sign of his self-perception as someone who should be taken seriously. *Capacidad*, it seemed, did not render a person ethical or immune from criticism, and it was also a source of jealousy.

Juan’s close friend Arturo Bravo exemplified similar characteristics, and to a higher degree. When I first met with the development committee



Figure 3. ASODESI offices in San Pedro, 2011. Photo by author.

in Los Altenses, Bravo spoke the most. He proudly described how this was his second time to serve as president of the committee and that the community had recently asked him back because the prior leader had failed in his duties. Although it was a lot of work, Bravo said he had agreed in hopes of promoting development in the village and to build on previous accomplishments. He recounted that during his term as president, the committee got funding for the school we were sitting in, the road, and a potable water project in one zone, among other improvements. Other committee members, two women and another man, the young *alcalde auxiliar*, nodded quietly.

At the meeting where I presented my research plan to the village, it was Bravo who spoke on my behalf, arguing that my research would be good for community development. Bravo was an active and capable participant in village and church meetings and even at town-level meetings with Ladinos. After decades of involvement with a range of development programs, starting as an adolescent in the 1970s, he had no fear of giving his opinion in front of groups, and he seemed to enjoy it. He always tucked a clean

shirt in beneath his belt and had a full mouth of clean, straight teeth: a rarity in the villages. As one of very few men in the village with visibly protruding bellies, Bravo had earned the nickname “*Gordo*” (“Fat”). Like Juan Jiménez, he had a tendency to brag about his *capacidad*, but his main focus was on projects he had attained for the village. One evening, a few months after my arrival, and after a few drinks, Bravo reminded me that “if it were not for me, you wouldn’t be here.” This assertion of dominance and status led into a larger discussion of his skills and credentials: traits that marked him as a leader. Their training, as well as their orientation to self-improvement, market activity, and the acquisition of development projects, made Jiménez and Bravo the ideal subjects of neoliberal democracy. Both men were part of José Antulio Morales’ political coalition, and Bravo was a trusted lieutenant.

Capacidad: A New Norm

Stacy Leigh Pigg (1993) describes how categories from development discourse percolate into heterogeneous settings, influencing the way that the subjects of development understand and construct their social worlds. The history of colonial population management is crowded with myriad attempts to instill a “will to improve” among marginal populations (Li 2007b). Akhil Gupta (1998) argues that the preponderance of development discourses has given rise to “underdevelopment” as a dominant form of identity: a pervasive discourse of inferiority and rationalization for inequality that is a defining characteristic of the postcolonial condition. Guatemalan elites have long blamed national underdevelopment on “Indian backwardness” and inferiority even as they repressed indigenous efforts to improve their material conditions. Only in the second half of the twentieth century were policies adopted to promote “Indian” advancement, and only then to contain the threat that extreme poverty and inequality posed to national stability. Yet these programs had left an unmistakable trace. The most significant manifestation of the will to improve in San Pedro was the discourse of *capacidad*, referring to individual capacity development. The description of Jiménez and Bravo shows the manner in which Sampedranos had woven discourses and practices of *capacidad* into their lives and shared conceptual frameworks.

Capacidad, which translates most generally to capacity or ability, is a blanket term commonly used by rural Mayas and Ladinos alike to refer to a person's level of individual capacity *development*, specifically the technical skills and knowledge received through involvement with institutions and experts. This included schooling—the ability to read, write, and do basic math—as well as skills gained through participating in the various kinds of workshops offered by development institutions and NGOs. A person could be capacitated in distinct ways, independently and in combination, but institutional knowledge imparted by experts was always key. For example, the difference between being more or less capacitated as a farmer was based on the extent to which one was fluent in “modern” and “scientific” agricultural practices and agronomical knowledge as defined by agronomists. *Capacidad* was the kind of knowledge or skills attained through training that enabled individuals to perform technical actions that were otherwise impossible. The term was used more broadly to refer to a “modern” or “scientific” outlook, a way of carrying one's person, and one's relationship to economic and political life.

Capacidad was framed as a transcultural universal in that each person could theoretically be assigned an accurate location on a neutral scale of achievement and ability. However, there was no precise consensus on how to rank individuals; this was an ongoing topic of discussion. Still, *capacidad* was thought to be a “principle true in every country” (Mitchell 2002, 55), superior to autochthonous ways of knowing and acting, which from the point of view of *capacidad* were arbitrary, parochial, and pathological: destined to disappear. *Capacidad* was Eurocentric: Western knowledge and behavior were privileged, and white North Americans and Europeans occupied the top place on the scale, followed by Ladinos. European and American experts, prototypically male, were the high priests and priestesses of *capacidad*. But *capacidad* was liberal in the sense that it was theoretically open to everyone willing to undergo the process, which is part of why it was interesting to indigenous villagers in the first place: attaining *capacidad* opened up the practical possibility of becoming equal to Ladinos, materially improving their life conditions by transforming their minds and themselves.

In this chapter I examine how discourses and practices of *capacidad* had taken hold and reorganized the conditions of possibility for subjectivity in San Pedro. I describe the introduction of *capacidad* by an array of

institutions over several decades and unpack what *capacidad* consisted of for indigenous Sampedranos and its effects. How did these new values, narratives, conceptions, practices, and desires suffuse their economic, social, and political lives and open up new forms of thought and action? How did *capacidad* alter the patterns and logics of social differentiation? To what extent was *capacidad* gendered and racialized? What possibilities for forming alliances did it make possible and impossible? How and under what conditions did differently positioned Mayas appropriate, resignify or resist *capacidad*?

I began with an understanding of development as a discourse and set of techniques engaged in the formation of new subjects and spaces deployed within diverse schemes of governance and processes of state formation. Reading program documents and secondary sources enabled me to understand how *capacidad* was promoted by a range of institutions for several decades. Living for an extended period of time in rural villages revealed a multiplicity of ways that villagers incorporated notions of development and *capacidad* into the warp and weft of their everyday lives. *Capacidad* was an important way for rural villagers to think about who they were and to grasp a foothold in a chaotic world so patently lacking in justice, compassion, and reason. I describe the poetics of *capacidad*: the ways that Sampedranos used the term and its correlates to mark certain kinds of subjects as possessing, or lacking, a particular kind of quality or status (Clifford and Marcus 1986). *Capacidad* was a way of “narrativizing the local cultural real” (Stewart 1996, 4), infused with the desire to make oneself smarter, more effective, more skilled, and more able to live a healthier, happier, and wealthier life.

Discourses of *capacidad* have generated a new poetics of self by fostering a new way of being in the world, specifically, a market-oriented, rational, calculating individualism. In speaking about sense of self, I am concerned with connections between how people identified socially; who they thought they really were; their personal habits and beliefs, including their notions of intelligent, moral, or normal behaviors; and the ethical and political relationships that they cultivated with themselves and with others. Deeply related to the self is a notion of well-being: the conceptions of the material goods that one needs to survive and be comfortable as well as the ability to make a living. I am particularly interested in emergence of an individualized self that plans and calculates the future and conceives of

the acquisition of capabilities as an ongoing project of improvement and as a means of attaining individual and familial well-being through market activities.

Capacidad was the dominant paradigm of advancement and neoliberal democratic self-fashioning that I encountered in San Pedro. It focused on the individual as the target and object of improvement and deployed an array of practices of self-mastery and knowledge. From its arrival, *capacidad* was tangled up with existing narratives, identities, habits, social relations, and political struggles. Rather than depoliticizing poverty (e.g. Ferguson 1994), *capacidad* was presented and taken up as a way of escaping a “backwards” Indian identity by learning the skills, habits, outlooks, and forms of self-discipline required to advance in a market society.² *Capacidad* opened new spaces for social and political agency but exacerbated inequality among villages and rationalized discrimination and poverty in a different frame.

New Selves

Capacidad is of recent origin in Guatemala’s indigenous communities. For generations, the notion was part of the assumed biological difference between Mayans and Ladinos: Ladinos could attain it; Indians could not. In the traditional community hierarchy, status was granted to men based on age, not *capacidad*. Economic stratification has long existed among indigenous villagers alongside small-scale participation in the market economy.³ Class divisions intensified with the advent of cash cropping in the 1960s and 1970s, a change that led individuals to challenge community hierarchies and *cargos* (community service responsibilities), mainly because these structures inhibited the accumulation of personal wealth and perpetuated Ladino dominance.⁴ Through *capacidad*, villagers came to think of themselves as substantially different types of persons, possessing different personal qualities and status based on the extent of individual subjective transformations and forms of self-mastery offered by institutions.⁵

Capacidad in San Pedro attained universal status as a result of its existence as a common thread between various programs that aimed to improve local conditions. Inspired by Catholic Action’s vision for the

development of the whole person through education and training, bilingual promoters from the urban center tried to convince villagers to build schools in the 1950s and 1960s. They met stiff opposition from locals who were suspicious of education and who needed their children to work. It was not until the 1970s and after some persuasion that schools were established in all villages and basic education became routine, although for boys more often than for girls.⁶

Throughout the 1970s, Maryknoll priests trained catechists and encouraged economic development among their followers. One founded the Santa Teresita cooperative, which was part of the National Federation of Savings and Credit Cooperatives (FENACOAC), a cooperative network that was closely associated with the moderate reformist Christian Democracy Party and that aimed to lift rural Indians out of poverty.⁷ *Capacidad* was a key theme in cooperatives that introduced chemical fertilizers and pesticides at low cost and trained farmers how to use them, helped their members market their crops, educated them on savings, and spoke about politics, even land inequality: a taboo subject after 1954.⁸ Cooperatives espoused an inclusive vision of community development and were one of the few spaces where Ladinos and Mayas worked together for a common goal, although only a small percentage of villagers participated actively and the co-op hardly satiated local demand for credit or extension services.⁹

Several state programs that promoted rural development in the 1970s and 1980s helped consolidate an authoritative understanding of *capacidad* that they made available to a large number of villagers alongside agricultural techniques, new technologies, market-oriented pedagogy, and credit.¹⁰ The most significant state-led, USAID-funded agency was the General Directory for Agronomical Services (DIGESA). With superior funding, organization, personnel, and reach, DIGESA promoted market-oriented development as the path to Indian advancement and generalized the use of chemical inputs, credit, and cash cropping.¹¹ These programs, as I describe in the next chapter, were guided by a vision of political development and a securitized vision of democracy capable of safeguarding Guatemala's asymmetrical social order. They were official responses to grassroots pressure for broader conceptions of development.

Participating villagers, for their part, viewed DIGESA as similar to the guerrilla movement, and safer, even though the army initially opposed it

along with all forms of village organization. Development was slow and painstaking but eventually freed some indigenous villagers from exploitative and racially discriminatory work situations either on *fincas* or for local Ladinos.¹² State investment in rural development was minimal; training and credit programs closed during the war, and most of the Public Agrarian sector, including DIGESA, ended during Structural Adjustment in 1996. By then, *capacidad* had become established as a nearly universal value.

As a result of the program closing, despite the prevalence of these discourses of development and *capacidad*, only a small number of individuals—maybe fifteen adult men and fewer adult women in a village—were seen as having truly attained a high level of *capacidad*, and even they wanted to attain more.¹³ To be considered *capacitado* did not require a complete high school education, which was largely unavailable to the previous generation, but a high school education would count, and literacy—the ability to speak, read, and write in Spanish at a basic level or better—was almost always necessary. Those who had attained a high level of *capacidad* were generally well-known beyond their home villages and occupied various leadership positions.

In addition to the *capacitados*, some people were labeled as “not wanting to develop.” Another group was the *superados*—people who had “already made it” economically. In what follows, I provide ethnographic examples of people who either identify or are identified by others as exemplifying each of these categories in order to demonstrate their salience in people’s lives. These categories were interrelated and mutually dependent. They constituted one another and formed a complete and coherent reality.

Los No Capacitados

One way that I came to appreciate what discourses of *capacidad* meant to rural villagers in Los Altenses was by spending time with people who did not embody these norms. Most people, while not overtly critical, did not jump at the chance of receiving a *capacitación* or assuming the responsibilities that come with *capacidad*, such as a position on a village development committee. This was especially evident among the generation of men who had never attended school and who had participated in only a minimal way in DIGESA and subsequent programs. I observed several

characteristics of the “less capacitated” type. In making this comparison, I do not intend to reproduce a discourse that makes one into the norm and constitutes the other as “lacking”—although this was exactly what most villagers expressed—but rather to bring into view different categories of personhood.

One of these individuals whom I came to know best and fell into the category of “less capacitated” was Pedro Bravo, whose sense of self and well-being made an interesting comparison because he was Arturo Bravo’s older brother. He was only ten years older, but his manner of carrying himself was quite distinct. Both were considered upstanding community members and actively participated in communal events such as weddings, funerals, and work projects. He rarely missed a church service in the village and usually attended Mass in the town. But the differences stood out clearly. Pedro never went to school, and his Spanish was somewhat sparse, although sufficient for basic conversation. Because of this, Pedro had received little direct training in agricultural programs and relied instead on his siblings for critical information. He was very easygoing and secure interpersonally, and did not attempt to manage his impressions according to what he perceived my expectations of “capacitated” behavior to be. Image-managing practices were common to the point of overcompensation among villagers who either had *capacidad* or wanted to, such as Juan Jiménez, who was always worried that others should perceive him as an intelligent leader. Moreover, Pedro Bravo did not engage in much long-term calculation or preoccupation about agricultural production. He had a choice piece of land that he planted with maize, and he never seriously considered diversifying his crop beyond the beans, squash, and herbs that were common to *milpa* agriculture. Nor had he given thought to the oft-repeated warning given by agronomists regarding long-term risks to subsistence production. When I asked if he worried about the diminishing returns of chemical fertilizers, he replied that if his land “is burnt by chemicals, I’ll apply a remedy.” He was far more concerned about the increasing cost of inputs than their side effects. He was not interested in learning to read or write, and seemed content with the little Spanish he could speak. One of his cousins told me that “of course Pedro is less intelligent. But he has learned. We taught him certain things, about planning and taking care of his money.” He voted in elections and participated moderately in political campaigns but was never considered

for a leadership position in party politics or on development committees. Compared to his brother, he was significantly less well off, but he was not engaged in concerted efforts to improve his condition.

Superados

Most Sampedranos I talked to expressed a desire to *superarse*: “to get ahead” economically.¹⁴ This concept existed before *capacidad*, dating back to the advent of cash cropping and merchant activities. Over time, more successful farmers purchased more land and hired other villagers as workers. Some opened shops. There were numerous nearly identical *tiendas*, diners, and pharmacies of varying sizes, each animated by a similar dream and using the same business model: buy in bulk in Huehuetenango or La Mesilla and sell at a small markup. Over time, a few of these businesses succeeded and grew to have more selection and lower prices. But their space to grow was limited, and they never expanded beyond the town. They also faced some outside competition. Although *superación* did not necessarily require *capacidad*, it was the preeminent end goal of training and market-oriented development. Participants in DIGESA; the National Coffee Association (ANACAFE), a private promoter of coffee production; and later NTX programs were assumed to be following a path to *superación* through credit, saving, investment, and training. For the vast majority, *superación*, like *capacidad* itself, was elusive, an ever-receding horizon. Communities were rife with stories of individuals who had made a fortune and then lost it, careening back into poverty. But the small number who had “made it,” almost all of whom were men, were known as *superados*.

To attain *superado* status was almost to become legendary. One archetypical figure of Mayan *superación* in San Pedro was José Martín. Martín was reportedly the richest individual in town, even wealthier than any Ladino. He owned the *transportes Sampedranos*, a three-bus line that trekked to Huehuetenango twice daily. Many villagers told me his Cinderella story, which was presented as an example of the possibilities of hard work. When he was young, José Martín came to San Pedro from another town; he sold dried fish, walking village to village. He then upgraded his stock to include kitchenware, and, little by little, as he saved his pennies, his wealth multiplied. The narrative of *superación* through *capacidad*

framed individual success as a product of personal effort and spark, something that was available to everyone who put in the effort. Once the status was achieved, *superados* were supposedly set for life, but people often fell from grace. The former mayor Natanael Aguilar was one example. When he was mayor, he lived in Huehuetenango, but years later, when he had run out of money, he returned to his village to grow coffee, a clear step down. Newcomers to this group were those who had come back from living in the United States with a nest egg earned in dollars. Individual *superación* was the narrative frame for class divisions that were becoming steadily more pronounced among villagers.

The *superados* were distinguishable by their consumption patterns, which could seem ostentatious relative to the threadbare conditions in which most Sampedranos lived. They built new houses, sometimes in villages, usually in the town center, and sometimes in Huehuetenango, but always with *terraza* (a flat, cement ceiling, or terrace), more expensive and durable than the more common adobe and *lamina* construction. The wealthiest Mayas lived in the town center, some in houses with multiple levels. *Superados* also engaged in significant luxury and leisure consumption: eating in *comedores*, taking frequent trips to Huehuetenango, buying new clothing, drinking beer and whiskey and inviting friends to drink, and similar behaviors. Of course, like the *capacitados*, nearly all *superados* sent their children to high school and, when possible, to college. *Superados* often helped finance political campaigns, which required significant personal investments, and some ran for office themselves. *Capacitados* and many non-*capacitados* also threw extravagant parties on special occasions, like a funeral or wedding, sometimes cooking upwards of fifty pounds of chicken or beef for hundreds of guests: a huge expense, a practice rooted in the *cofradía* (Catholic religious brotherhood) system.¹⁵

Profesionales

In the most basic sense, to be a professional means to have earned at least a high-school diploma. *Profesionales* are that subset of *capacidad* who perform mental labor and are recognized as experts. It denotes someone who is qualified, even if temporarily unemployed, to have a job with a salary and not work as a farmer. The most common baseline example is an elementary school teacher. At the pinnacle of this category are

the *licenciados*—individuals with an advanced college degree. The term *licenciado* commands great respect. The vast majority of the professionals among Mayas—from the villages especially but also in the town—are young, below the age of thirty-five in 2004. Although few in number, they are influential. Professionals hail disproportionately from the town center, where a politically decisive group arose in the late 1960s. This was the first generation of children whose parents were able to afford to send them all the way through school, and in a few cases to college. By 2014, there was only one indigenous attorney in San Pedro and only one doctor, but several more were studying for these careers.

Not working as a farmer was the mark of distinction shared by the professionals and the *superados*, and peasant farmers regularly complained that their high-school-educated children were “no longer accustomed” to agricultural work and felt like they were too good for it, preferring *trabajo suave* (soft work). Nevertheless, many parents of professionals recounted working hard to ensure their children’s education precisely so that they would not be farmers, which was synonymous with being poor and stuck. Consumption practices among this group varied, depending on an individual’s success. Elementary and high school teachers earned a monthly salary of about Q1,000–Q1,500 in 2004, much more than most farmers, but not enough to buy a car. But first- and second-year teachers regularly built homes and bought motorcycles and nicer clothing. Healthy, clean teeth were the norm, as were dress shirts and polished leather shoes. But the promise of *superación* through professionalization had encountered a blockade. A growing problem for young high school graduates trained as teachers was that there were now too many teachers for the positions available. Those who worked as teachers complained of having to live in remote villages to get a contract. Contract employment for one year or one semester was becoming more prevalent, leading to a rise in economic insecurity among this group. A growing number of unemployed professionals had no way to use their skills.

Restless, many opted to migrate to the United States. The dangers of the desert; the high cost of immigration (upwards of \$7,000 by 2014, a small fortune); reports of declining work opportunities and discrimination in the United States; well-founded rumors of kidnappings, rape, and extortion during the border crossing; and news of increased deportations and immigrant detention were rarely sufficient to dissuade them. I knew

several mothers who made the perilous journey with young children in tow, eager to reunite with distant husbands who were living strange and separate lives. Ironically, professionals typically performed manual labor in the United States, using their education to master the skills required to migrate and to navigate a strange and hostile landscape with minimal resources and without legal permission or protection. Those who had returned successfully lived in homes they had had built in their absence and were considered to have attained a special level of *capacidad* based on their familiarity with an advanced and deeply contradictory society, especially if they had learned English. People with experience in the United States always looked at me differently: knowingly, with more familiarity and less deference, and even complete strangers often stopped me to let me know they had been there.

No Quieren Desarrollar

I became acquainted with another, much-more-distressing form of categorization with origins in discourses of development during my first week in Los Altenses: a subset of people about whom it was said that they *do not wish to develop*. I was first made aware of the existence of this category while interviewing a couple in their late sixties who lived among the Ruíz family. Although the husband, Paulo, was himself a Ruíz, he exasperatedly began to decry the way that the rest of the people in his zone lived:

The Ruíz family is just barely holding on. They live really fucked. They don't have land. They're just stealing. They cut firewood on other people's land. They are not smart, and they don't have any money. They don't know anything or how to make money. They don't know how to manage money. Other people have a good life (*vida buena*). They already bought land and planted coffee. . . . They drink. They don't live well in with their family and with their women. They look for other women. Where do they get their corn? They're barely buying it. They go work a little with the people here, as *jornaleros* (day laborers). They are working, but they are very backwards.

I encountered similar expressions of moral outrage directed at families and individuals on many other occasions. Paulo's tirade was ironic. A fallen evangelical and a serious alcoholic, he kept his family finances afloat only with money sent by children who had migrated to the United States. This man

was describing a large, extended family living in extreme poverty without land, food, income, a cash crop, education, or much hope, and he blamed their squalid condition on backwardness, a lack of intelligence, and alcohol. Although he did not say it, the word associated with these negative characteristics was *Indio*. Even if the word was out of use, the space it occupied was still part of the imaginary, sometimes used in anger, and incessantly conjured up as the inferior opposite of *capacidad*. Paolo never mentioned the history of dispossession, racism, exploitation, violence, and abandonment: a toxic combination that makes these outcomes inevitable for the vast majority of indigenous campesinos in Guatemala, regardless of how hard they try to escape. *Capacidad* legitimated discrimination among Mayas and recast racist rationalizations for social exclusion in race-neutral terms.

One person who appeared to reject *capacidad* and invite these criticisms was Felipe Ruíz. He lived on the edge of the village farthest up the mountainside in a one-room house made of sticks and plastic. He unapologetically claimed these traits when we met:

There is no money. After the coffee harvest, then there's money. We are barely eating. *Yo se chupar*. (I know how to drink.) I can drink 15 beers. When I've got money, I won't come back home to the house on Sunday, not until Monday. I'll sleep on the floor of the cantina. Sometimes I spend Q200 on beer. That's why there isn't any money.

Another way that Felipe “fit” this type was his behavior toward other people's property. Felipe had been promised an electric light connection by the newly elected FRG *alcalde*, who had offered to pay for the post and cement if Felipe dug the hole and supplied the sand and gravel to stretch and strengthen the cement. On our second meeting, he enlisted me in gathering gravel and handed me a large *costal* (a nylon sack used for 100 pounds of dried maize or coffee) and a *mecapal* (tump line). Grabbing a small pick, he led me down the steep, slippery slope to the *peña* (rock outcropping) on a neighbor's land. While filling the bag with rock that he chipped off the *peña*, he told me that he did not have permission to gather gravel; we were stealing it! With the veins in my neck popping out as I strained against the weight of the *mecapal*, my boots slipping on the thin footholds in the steep muddy trail, I pondered not only the difficulties of everyday peasant labor but also the humor that would be expressed if I were to die by having my

face smashed into the rock by the eighty-pound bag of stolen gravel that teetered precariously on my back. Eager to live down stereotypes about work-averse gringos, I trudged on out of embarrassment for how much more difficult the task was for me at 160 pounds (at the time) than for Felipe, who weighed at least 30 pounds less.

Felipe was not an active participant in development or in community social life in general. He had never served on a village committee, nor did he care to. However, on occasions he helped with community work projects, such as cleaning the road with machetes, and even showed up to help build the foundation for the new Catholic church in the village. When I asked him why he had decided to help out, he replied: "I don't have a religion. I only went to help with the church in case one of my children wants to hear the word of God. I believe in God, yes, but I don't go to church." Felipe's seeming lack of care for his soul and uninterest in personal development did not resemble a rejection of his neighbors' normalizing value judgment, but ownership of it. Felipe was not resisting development in the name of a counter-ideal; he was uninterested in working to make his life resemble the norm of proper behavior. There were many people like Felipe who, in some sense, seemed to like to break the rules, publicly and audaciously. Most often this happened when they were drunk, drunkenness being the quintessential habit of someone who rejected development (even though men with *capacidad* drank frequently). Being drunk was like a crime against *capacidad*. It undid it, prevented it, or put it on hold. A decidedly masculine performance in San Pedro, drunkenness was a publicly recognized abandonment of responsibility and was often self-destructive. One of the great appeals of evangelical religion was its renunciation of alcohol, to end drunkenness and the mind-set that accompanied it. Felipe was consciously enacting an anti-norm, staging what seemed to be small, ultimately futile inversions of his neighbors', and perhaps his own, notions of acceptable, healthy behavior or anything resembling becoming "developed."

Felipe lived in a village subsector occupied exclusively by his extended family, almost all of whom had voted for the FRG. When I asked him why he voted for the FRG, Felipe responded with brazenly disengaged fatalism:

NC: Why do you vote for the FRG? Many people say that Ríos Montt killed a lot of people. What do you think?

Felipe: Yes, he is an *asesino* (murderer). I only went to vote for Mariano Díaz (the FRG candidate for *alcalde*). I don't participate in politics. I just mark an "X" and go back home. I voted for the FRG because they said they would pay the patrollers and they also gave me a job. But the job is over already. I don't have a political party; there isn't one of them in favor of the people.

At first I thought of this cavalier attitude as another in a string of crimes against the norms of *capacidad* and good citizenship, but I later came to understand it as part of a more widely shared set of understandings about the futility of politics, a theme to which I return in chapter 4.

Capacidad and Gender

As the ethnographic vignettes at the beginning of the chapter make clear, *capacidad* is intertwined with dominant notions of masculinity. This reinforced the tendency in rural Guatemala for parents to favor the education of their boys over that of their girls, even as girls' education had risen significantly since the 1970s. Despite it being less available to women, *capacidad* was a route to a certain level of gender equality. Being *capacitada* allowed woman to speak and act with more authority in spaces and on matters historically reserved for men, but it remained difficult for women to speak among men and be taken seriously. Although professional women had a higher social status than un-capacitated men, the *capacidad* of moderately capacitated women was rarely considered equal to that of somewhat less capacitated men.

Concepción Bravo was a woman who was considered highly capacitated. In 2004 she was single and in her early forties. She had no children of her own but had raised one of her brothers' daughters with her sister and later adopted a son. Concepción lived with her sister, who was also single and had two children, each from different fathers. Concepción and her sister shared the responsibility of caring for their aging parents. Concepción had a sixth-grade education and said she never wanted more. Most important to her identity as a capacitated person was her employment as the local representative for DIGESA's women's programs in the 1980s and 1990s. Both she and her sister worked closely with a Peace

Corps volunteer when he was in the village, and they still remembered him fondly. She explained that she was chosen to be the local coordinator for the DIGESA's women's programs because she could speak Spanish and was not afraid of strangers or foreigners.

Concepción participated in almost every form of local development. There were very few women like Concepción from her generation in Los Altenses. She associated with a fairly close-knit group of women leaders in the village, the majority of who are also from the Bravo family. They, like their husbands, are considered the most *capacitada* in the village. One day I met a young woman while walking home from the town. She was a recent high school graduate who stood out as brave enough to strike up a conversation with an outsider, especially a gringo. I later found out that she was a leader among her peers (men and women) and one of the best athletes and academics of the young women in the entire town (Mayan or Ladino). When she found out that I lived near the Bravo family, she remarked about how much she admired Concepción, describing her as *muy creativa* (very creative) and as a role model.

After DIGESA was closed along with the rest of the Public Agrarian Sector in 1996, Concepción stayed active as one of the two women on the new Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo (COCODE), headed up by Arturo Bravo. The other was an elderly evangelical woman. Whenever there was an announcement from some institution or another about a project for women in the village, Concepción would sign up and tell others. She attended a number of meetings that were not for projects but for *capacitaciones*, sometimes walking to the town center or taking a bus to Huehuetenango. She was active in the Huehuetecan Women's Forum, a government-sponsored women's organization, and also went to talks given by the *Defensoria Maya*, by *Asociación Ceiba*, and at least once by the National Coordinator for Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA). Often, she translated between development organizations and village women who only spoke Mam. Concepción was a devout Catholic, active in church organizations, such as the Catholic *Maria Auxiliadora* (Mary Help of Christians). Remembering DIGESA's programs, Concepción mentioned learning how to bake a cake on a *comal* (iron stove top), saying it had been years since she tried it. It reminded me of my mother learning to make macramé plant hangers in the 1970s: a supposedly useful skill acquired but never used.

Economically, Concepción was fairly comfortable relative to her neighbors. She had already inherited from her aged parents some productive coffee land. She had a modest cash income, which was mostly spent on health emergencies. Her decision to adopt an abandoned child, in addition to being unusual, was an expensive choice born out of compassion and perhaps regret at not having children of her own.¹⁶ Because she could not breastfeed, she paid nearly Q50 a week for formula. Like most women in the village, Concepción spent many of her days weaving, mostly *huipiles* (blouses), *cortes* (skirts), or *morrales* (handbags). She would sell some and make others for her nieces, for whom Concepción and her sister were parental figures. This did not make her much money, but Concepción enjoyed it. She was talented and proud of her work. Concepción once started a small weaving cooperative with local women, buying bulk thread with the help of a Peace Corps volunteer, but it did not work out. She complained that local women mistrusted group leaders who hold money and that she had once been accused of theft, making it not worth the trouble.

I first met Concepción at the meeting with the COCODE before asking the village permission to conduct research. At Arturo's suggestion, when I started collecting oral histories, I offered her a job as a translator. She spoke Spanish well and had worked for outside organizations before, and I was eager to learn more about her experience with DIGESA. "*Ella no tiene miedo.*" ("She is not afraid.") That would not be the last time I heard that said about her. Beyond those qualifications, she was available and needed the work. Although she did not appear particularly interested in the interviews themselves or overly curious about my research, she quickly grasped the kind of information I wanted and was a quick translator. Lack of interest aside, she was intelligent and insightful, was a good source of news, and had a somewhat irreverent sense of humor.

I got to know her much better after she found out that I was looking for a residence in the village. She offered to fix up an abandoned home in the cluster of houses where her family lived. The house belonged to her brother-in-law, who had since moved to another village. Having hoped for a room in a house at best, I was very happy to have a larger space that would afford me the privacy that I had never quite grown accustomed to losing during fieldwork. I offered a mildly inflated sum for rent and moved in at the end of the week. Over time, I became close with all of the Bravo family and one unrelated neighbor family, a young couple with two young

children who lived next door. As fieldwork became more time consuming, I accepted more invitations to eat with the Bravos. I made a point to pitch in on food purchases and, whenever I could, to cook and clean, although my efforts at making tortillas produced more laughter than tortillas. I spent many evenings with the family around the stove processing the day's events. Luckily for me, Concepción was a willing translator of Mam on most evenings.

It struck me as odd that someone as well off, fun, and *capacitada* as Concepción had never married. It was not for lack of opportunities; she had had several boyfriends. She told me that she was once thinking about getting married but that the relationship ended when her boyfriend went to the United States. She had also turned down proposals from two prominent men in her village. One came while she was working for DIGESA, and she told him to wait until that was over, but she never responded to him. The man, a widower, got angry and stopped talking to her. It occurred to me that it would take a special man not to be intimidated by Concepción's level of *capacidad* and her reputation as intelligent and independent. It was also possible she never married because she recognized the freedom she would lose as a wife, who would be expected to stay home, cook, clean, and bear and care for children. She laughed when I asked if this were the case but said it was probably correct. I noticed that many highly capacitated women of her generation, among whom it was less common, were single.

Concepción paid a price for her relative freedom. An incessant joke that circulated soon after I moved into the house near Concepción was that we were bathing together in the *chuj* (steam bath; *temascal* in Spanish). Some claimed to have seen pictures of this fictitious event. I felt bad and hoped these jokes would end, but they never seemed to get old for both men and women, who would still ask and giggle years after I had left the village. These were not the first rumors about her sexuality, which were fueled by her tendency to move independently outside of domestic spaces. It is quite possible that she exercised some sexual freedom, but men's sex lives were rarely similarly criticized. Being *capacitada* was double-edged because to the extent that it expanded a woman's freedom, it exposed her to gendered criticism.

Comparing Concepción's role and status in the community to Juan and Arturo's further elucidated how notions of *capacidad* were gendered.

Women like Concepción could speak in public meetings because of her recognized level of understanding. Men in general, regardless of their *capacidad*, have the presumed right to speak, although men with more *capacidad*—as demonstrated by the male-male conflicts fought in the idiom of *capacidad*—claim more. Concepción, because of her work with DIGESA, was recognized as possessing certain expertise and was seen as a trustworthy conveyor of information.

Yet the *capacidad* of women was only rarely considered equal to that of equally capacitated men. If present at a community meeting, a capacitated man would always assume a leadership role over a woman. Concepción and other women might speak to address a particular point but would cede the floor to the male leader. Even in cases where a woman was seen to be more *capacitada* than many men, her leadership domain was limited to other women in the village. Only men, it seemed, commanded the authority to lead the entire community. These limits were apparent when Jose Antulio Morales included Petrona Lázaro, a Mayan *licenciada* from the town center, on his political team as second *consejal* (councilor). Other men in the organization were furious that they had been passed over and insisted that it would hurt the party to include a woman, whom many did not take seriously. Despite the limitations on *capacidad* imposed by gendered structures of power, it challenged prevailing gender roles and opened new spaces for women's agency in their family and in the community. This promise of freedom and empowerment through increased practical knowledge and skill—in addition to whatever immediate material benefits—no doubt motivated some women's attraction to *capacitación*. Most men remained skeptical of women's new freedoms, although men with *capacidad* were generally more open to women's advancement. *Capacidad* opened some space for individual women within a highly asymmetrical gendered order but left those structures largely intact, especially as men had more access to the means to self-improvement.

Capacidad and Indigeneity

Although attaining *capacidad* was first motivated by a desire not to be treated “like Indians,” Sampedranos did not equate development with assimilation or becoming Ladino: an implicit and sometimes explicit goal of state

development programs. Modernizers continued to speak indigenous languages, live (mostly) in villages, marry endogamously, and maintain a separate ethnic identity. Even the most capacitated Sampedranos continued to speak Mam, professional Mayan women continued to wear traditional dress, and many *capacitados* continued to live in villages. Inter-marriage between Mayas and Ladinos was frowned upon by members of both communities, and somewhat rare. However, this new space for “non-Indian” identity was not at first overtly understood as “indigenous” or “Mayan”; those concepts were not prevalent in rural communities in Huehuetenango and much of the western highlands until later.¹⁷ Native peasant populations had been classified as Indian since colonial times, and Sampedranos previously understood themselves as *Mames* (Mam-speaking) or *naturales* and engaged in a range of behaviors that marked them outwardly as such, such as eating herbs, bathing in *temascales*, and living in villages. Moreover, indigenous villagers shared a language and a wide body of knowledge and practices that most recognized as theirs, usually referred to as *costumbre*; examples include prayer to Mother Earth, purification rituals, participation in village hierarchies, beliefs about saints, and conceptions of community and kinship, medicine, shamanism, and more.¹⁸ Catholic Action’s campaign against *costumbre* in the 1970s was effective but never complete.

Sampedranos adopted Mayan-indigenous identities in the flow of struggles against discrimination and efforts for individual and collective advancement, a process aided by a range of institutions and programs espousing conceptions of indigenous rights, culture, and tradition. Among the most influential of these institutions in San Pedro was the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG), a semiautonomous, state-funded program founded in 1990; guided by a positive conception of indigeneity, its aim was to recover and catalogue local traditions (Fischer 1996, 66–67). In a similar manner to long-standing conceptions of Indianness, new discourses of indigeneity highlighted a distinct identity and cultural traditions, with the key differences being that they assigned a positive value to tradition and recognized indigenous people as subjects of a unique kind of rights rather than as inherently and irrevocably inferior. Some modernizing villagers found jobs running ALMG investigations, interviewing elders about tradition and language, transcribing them for the organization, and leading workshops

in indigenous culture and indigenous rights. The ALMG's efforts were soon supplemented by a range of programs and institutions of national and international origin with the explicit mission of promoting indigenous rights.¹⁹ These notions infused grassroots political organizations in San Pedro, whose leaders easily saw their long-standing struggle against Ladino authority, discrimination, and the state through the frame of racism. Ironically, those villagers with the highest levels of *capacidad*, who were the most exposed to national-level politics were the first and most likely to identify explicitly as "indigenous" and "Mayan" and pursue politics under that sign. This is similar to what Kay Warren (1989) found in San Andrés Semetabaj in the 1970s.²⁰ Some were bilingual instructors or had worked in Maya-centered organizations or in various other NGOs and government programs that promoted Mayan culture. Indeed, Mayan culture was frequently discussed as something that a person could become capacitated in, rather than knowledge that indigenous people inherently possessed.

Although Indian identity dates back to the conquest and a colonial culture that, at various points and in contradictory ways, codified native tradition alongside a process of dispossession and exploitation, "Mayan" identity was a more recent "articulation" (Li 2000) in San Pedro. It emerged at the historical conjuncture of the defeat of the guerrilla movement; genocidal violence and militarization targeting indigenous communities; official recognition of indigenous culture; the long-standing cultural activism of indigenous intellectuals, particularly around the 1992 campaign against celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Columbus's voyage; international discourses of indigenous rights; and other factors.²¹ The adoption of discourses and practices of capacity development, rather than provoking "culture loss," furthered this ethnic identification. These events reinforce a view of Mayan identity as a fluid, relational, and heterogeneous process that cannot be understood through the binaries that have historically framed these questions (modern/primitive, urban/rural, indigenous/Ladino).²²

I observed numerous manifestations of Mayan identity in San Pedro. Of course, indigenous villagers spoke Mam and listened to marimba as they had before the arrival of indigenous rights, but now there were development organizations with Mayan names, and a *Casa de Cultura* was under

construction on the edge of town. Some young couples gave their children Mayan names: Ixchel (the Mayan goddess of midwifery and medicine) and Ixmucane (the Mayan goddess of creation) were common choices for girls. I met fewer boys with Mayan names but knew at least one Balam (Jaguar). Some high school students I met had been assigned passages from the *Popul Vuh*, the K'iche' book of life. I found that a vast majority of Maya Sampedranos supported the idea that they had a distinctive culture that merited special rights and protections from the government. And many individuals were investigating and experimenting with indigenous spirituality. One notable case was a retired Ladina teacher and widow who over the course of a relationship with a Mayan teacher from a neighboring town—kind of a public secret—began wearing indigenous *traje* in certain contexts.²³ I once saw her participate in a Mayan solstice ceremony in Zacaleu, an archeological site located near the department capital.

Although such expressions were limited and mostly reflected the proclivities of relatively well-educated and younger residents, indigenous rights were highly salient in party politics given the long-standing Ladino dominance of the town. However, traditional political structures such as the *alcaldes auxiliares*, a body composed of male representatives named in each village, had little authority relative to political parties, their sovereignty limited to improving communication between the village and town and resolving disputes between villagers. Such responsibilities are not insignificant but have little influence over resources or other roles commonly associated with sovereignty. Elected officials hold considerably more sway, and many villagers opt to use the state-linked justice of the peace over communal justice systems. This is distinct from other regions in the highlands, where indigenous identity is more pronounced and where traditional structures of power separate from the state are more firmly grounded and have gained strength since being recognized by the peace accords, bolstering earlier protections in the 1985 constitution.²⁴

Although discourses and practices of *capacidad* were hegemonic, very few villagers had completely assimilated to its norms. Beyond lack of access and the way that *capacidad* is an ever-receding horizon, was there something irreducible or antithetical to discourses of *capacidad* that could be seen as an “indigenous” sense of self? Even Felipe Ruíz still constructed his “self” in terms of discourses of development and *capacidad*, if only to invert them. Thinking about this question also leads me back to Pedro Bravo, the person

who was seen by his family as “undeveloped,” whose unassuming manner was coded as simple backwardness. What Pedro did not do, and what made his difference stand apart from the norm of *capacidad*, was that he did not conceptualize his self as an object he was trying actively to fashion and improve throughout his life span. He did not treat his self as a “work in progress” that he was shaping and cultivating for public circulation and display, like Juan Jiménez or Arturo Bravo. He took pride in his accomplishments as a father and farmer but did not brag like his younger brother. Pedro worked hard to provide for his family and participated in village life, but being a good person for him did not require institutional training. Although he attributed status to highly capacitated people, he rejected the market-oriented individualism characteristic of neoliberal life.

Thinking about Pedro reminded me of something I was told by Gabriel Martínez, a man in his early fifties who was a former catechist, a DIGESA community representative, and a careful thinker who was considered quite *capacitado*. While conversant and confident in the Ladino world, Gabriel described a recoiling from development that he likened to aversion to other sovereign forces that impose their wills on villagers:

The people here have a way of speaking, very humble, slow, with great respect. Now, the information or news always comes from outside; it comes very hard, from above. It's obligatory. Sometimes the people run away. We feel commanded. This is how the church speaks today, also the political parties. You have to do this and this; you have to do that.

Discourses of *capacidad* encountered alternative ways of conceptualizing the self and social world that limited its adoption. Although Gabriel believed that Mayas should develop and become *capacitados*, he was critical of the violent and absolutist form in which the process was usually presented. He also valued humility and respect as meaningful differences that were being disrespected and pushed aside.

Reflections on *Capacidad*

These examples clarify how *capacidad* had become an important conceptual framework to think about oneself and distinguish among types of

persons in rural villages. The common statement: “Before there was no development, but now that is changing” was evidence of this reconfiguration, which was almost universally understood as a hard-won achievement for indigenous people. These categories and implicit narratives of teleological progress became embedded not through blind faith in development but as a result of the changes that these new forms of thought, practices, and technologies made possible. The naturalness and validity of competitive, market-oriented individualism were reinforced through the ways they became useful to people faced with the everyday challenge of navigating economic and social exclusion. The rise of *capacitación* was almost universally invoked by Sampedranos as a path out of racial subordination and economic destitution and toward personal advancement and freedom; the terrain on which this struggle took place was generally taken for granted.

Being *capacitado* meant to be important, knowledgeable, powerful, and unafraid. It connoted one’s seriousness as a person; it gave one the right to speak; it was the knowledge that was worth suffering to attain and important to share. Becoming *capacitado*, at least in theory, allowed *indígenas* to be considered equal to Ladinos; it charted a path for collective racial dignity through individual improvement. More training, more certificates, and more money were proof of fundamental equality between the races. Quite practically, it protected Mayas from deception and opened new possibilities for economic and political advancement. It was no longer necessary to humiliate themselves to Ladinos or to fear them. However, as individuals advanced, people with *capacidad* outpaced their neighbors economically and edged them out as leaders; the collective was left behind. General levels of poverty remained unchanged, and social bonds grew weaker as *capacidad* aroused envy and mistrust and significantly increased accusations of dishonesty, egotism, and self-interest.

Capacidad held out the promise of equality while providing a new justification for inequality. Not everyone wanted to become *capacitado* or had the means available to do so, yet this was framed as a universal standard and an individual choice. *Capacidad*’s conflation of intelligence and schooling was a tacit devaluation of knowledge that did not come from institutions—including most “indigenous” forms of knowledge—as well as of individuals who had not been shaped by them: a hostility to ways of being human that were less individualistic and less enterprising. *Capacidad*

was also gendered, not only in that it was associated with masculinity and that the means to achieve it were more available to men, but also in that the women who attained it remained subordinate to men of equal or lesser *capacidad*. Everyone was encouraged to evaluate themselves and each other—literally “their selves”—on an individual basis according to this new standard, even though it judged most of them harshly. Ironically, despite its hostility to indigenous ways of being and knowing, *capacidad* played a role in the positive reconceptualization of Mayan identity.