

# *Some notes on the folklore and political economy of la Chiclería*

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## INTRODUCTION

For approximately 75 years (1895-1970) collecting and exporting chicle, a natural base for chewing gum, was the major economic activity in El Petén, a vast formerly underpopulated tropical forest frontier. Men who tap chicozapote trees (*Achras sapotae*), chicleros, are not only seasonal laborers but also figures in popular imagination. Thus in addition to historically valid descriptions of chicleros, one may also examine folklore about them. As Dary Fuentes<sup>1</sup> points out in another context, one must deal not only with the «life, work and anecdotes» of real people, but also with characters of popular imagination partly based on but not completely identical with those people. This essay is a first step toward reporting and analysing folklore about one particular group, the chicleros.

The essay will briefly review the history of la chiclería in Guatemala, describe popular images of chicleros and what chicleros say about themselves through a sample of their proverbs and poetry. Finally, I suggest an hypothesis to account for contradictions in popular images of chicleros.

## HISTORICAL RESUME OF LA CHICLERIA IN GUATEMALA

Until the early 1940s the main ingredient of modern chewing gum had been chicle, the milky sap of *Achras sapotae* (thereafter synthetics increasingly replaced natural resins in commercial chewing gums). The tree is

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<sup>1</sup> C. Dary Fuentes, «La figura de Eusebio Ibarra (don Chebo), en la historia y la tradición oral de Guatemala». (*La Tradición Popular*, Nos. 48/50. Boletín del Centro de Estudios Folklóricos, 1984), p. 1.

native to the Maya lowlands-Yucatán, México; Petén, Guatemala; and Belize (formerly British Honduras).

Although pre-Columbian Mesoamericans used *tzictle* (a Nahuatl word from which «chicle» is derived), U.S.A. demand played the critical role in its modern history. In 1848 the first commercial chewing gum was produced in the U.S. from spruce trees, but loggers rapidly depleted U. S. supplies of spruce and substitutes were sought. Of various alternatives, chicle became the favorite, although after about 1924 U.S.A. manufacturers mixed East Indian jelutong (*Dyera costulata*) with chicle to make chewing gum. Chicle tree tapping began in México in 1866, and by 1871 Thomas Adams, Sr., produced the first commercial chewing gum with a chicle base. Shortly afterwards, the first flavored chewing gum, called «Yucatán», appeared on U.S.A. markets.

During World War I there was a boom in the industry, largely because advertisers persuaded people that masticating gum was an excellent way to reduce tensions.<sup>2</sup> U.S.A. companies, with a monopoly on chewing gum production, now began to sell the product throughout the world. Until the late 1970s the most important manufacturers were Wrigley Import, Beech-Nut and American Chicle (a corporation formed in 1899 when several firms, including Adams', merged). Chicle Development, well known in Petén, was a joint subsidiary of Beech-Nut and American Chicle, and then in 1962 the latter merged with Warner-Lambert Pharmaceutical, and Beech-Nut became part of the Squibb Company.

Commercial chicle tree tapping in Petén apparently began in the early 1890s. The earliest official mention in Petén dates from a 4 March 1895 San Andrés, Petén, council session wherein it was mandated that all who extract chicle from the municipality must pay the town hall a one *real* per quintal tax. By 1900 chicle collection was the major economic activity in the department. Wrigley Export and Chicle Development began to purchase large amounts of chicle from Yucatán, British Honduras (now Belize) and Petén. In Petén the great boom in *oro blanco* (as chicle was soon called) apparently occurred between 1910-20. Many of the popular images of *chicleros* crystallized at this time.

During this period, labor contractors and merchants, many of them with prior experience in logging and rubber tree tapping operations, made and sometimes lost great personal fortunes. *Chicleros* from Petén, British Honduras and México, joined by many Kekchí Indians from Alta Verapaz by the late 1920s, also earned relatively large amounts of money. This was also a period of legal injustice and violence in *la chicleria*. To cite one famous example, in 1916 Mexican *chicleros* protesting what they felt were Guatemalan government «injustices in the chicle business» seized a part of what is now Melchor de Mencos, Petén. There was shooting be-

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<sup>2</sup> R. Hendrickson, *The Great American Chewing Gum Book* (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Book Company, 1976), pp. 107-109.

tween Mexicans and Guatemalan soldiers, and a member of an archaeological team led by S. G. Morley was Killed.<sup>3</sup> Chicleros also fought among themselves for control of chicle trails, and theft of chicle and equipment apparently was a regular if not necessarily frequent occurrence. Toward the end of this boom era Chicle Development and Wrigley Export established a network of camps, warehouses and laboratories in their respective concessions. The former, operating in northwest Petén, shipped chicle through México to the U.S.A., and the latter working mostly in northeast Petén shipped chicle out through Puerto Barrios. During the 1930s, a network of forest airstrips was built in Petén to handle transportation.

As early as 1920-26, la chiclería was beset by several problems. The supply of chicozapote trees began to decline, attempts to establish chicozapote plantations failed, territorial concessions to foreign companies apparently hurt the interests of several Petén municipalities, and legal irregularities accompanied by some violence continued in the chicle fields and at Petén's borders. Smuggling chicle from Petén to British Honduras, and failure to report true production figures was so common at this time that statistics on Guatemalan chicle production are virtually useless until 1927. Some idea of the situation and the reaction of some Peteneros to it may be gathered from the following extract from a San José, Petén, annual report dated 10 December 1964. The report was written by the now deceased municipal secretary, Carlos Jacobo Cahuiche, a well-known Petén personality. Don Jacobo, citing an earlier report he composed, writes:

The most bitter and sad experience which the municipality of San José could have suffered occurred during the accused administration of the ex-president of the Republic, José María Orellana, in the years 1922-1926, who, abusing his power (and) without acknowledging the authorization of the honorable National Legislative Assembly... gave in monopolistic form the chicle concession to... Victor Morales Ibarra and Francisco Nájera Andrade, who sold the chicle concession to Mr. Percy Wellows Shufeldt (sic. Welles Schufeldt, apparently working for Chicle Development) for the derisive sum of five American gold dollars per hundred weight of chicle which he might export, omitting fiscal and municipal taxes (and), as a consequence of such an onerous concession, the municipalities of this district (i.e., Petén) found themselves on the brink of ruin; the municipality of San José, with the help of its residents, had to plant communal milpas each year so that it could partly support itself... not one municipality could carry out a single project... this district was completely forsaken and exploited, the concession holders benefitting themselves... and the inhabitants of the district suffering .... (words in parentheses added).

Don Jacobo adds that 240,000 quintales of chicle were extracted and exported from Petén between 1922-26. The concession was annulled by President Chacón in 1926 or 1927.

The Ubico period (1930-44) was a mixed blessing for Peteneros. Whatever violence had occurred now largely ceased. Chicleros, contractors and municipalities were paid in a more reliable manner, although municipal taxes on chicle remained low, Q 0.50/quintal extracted from their respective territories (the tax was raised to Q 2.00 in 1953). Ubico also limited

<sup>3</sup> R. L. Brunhouse, *Sylvanus G. Morley and the World of the Ancient Mayas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), pp. 101-110.

the number of contractors working for U.S.A. companies, thereby increasing profits for the favored few. He also tried to close the borders with British Honduras (Government Acuerdo N.° 1538) so that chicle would be shipped overseas through Puerto Barrios and Petén trade redirected toward southern Guatemala. While this effort was not completely successful, it did favor the interests of Petén merchants over those of British Honduras. At the same time, Ubico's subordinates in Petén imposed severe restrictions on the mobility of chicleros and enforced what amounted to a system of debt peonage on many of them (although Ubico deprived debt peonage of lawful status, in fact the system persisted). As older chicleros say, this was a time of «great law and order» and also the «time of the *palos*» (a reference to beatings administered by *jefes políticos* to chicleros who left forest camps without permission).

During World War II, manufacturers began to use synthetic gum bases on a large scale and to increase the use of natural bases other than chicle. Several factors were responsible for this: continuing depletion of chicozapote trees, worker demands for higher wages, perhaps pressure to increase chicle excise taxes, and wartime shipping difficulties.

Nevertheless, *la chicleria* remained the major form of wage labor in Petén. For example, in 1945 Wrigley worked with 26 contractors and 1632 chicleros, and Chicle Development with 19 contractors and 1497 chicleros. Of the 45 contractors, 36 were Guatemalans (15 of them from Flores) and 9 foreigners. Of the 3129 chicleros, 2329 were Guatemalans, 500 Mexicans, 268 British Hondurans, and the rest coming from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Jamaica.<sup>4</sup> Given Petén's population at the time (11,475 people in 1940 and 15,908 in 1950), the importance of *la chicleria* within the department is unmistakably clear.

After 1949, Guatemalan government agencies exercised increasing control over *la chicleria*, FYDEP assuming the responsibility in 1959. FYDEP now grants licenses and quotas to contractors, collects and redistributes all chicle derived taxes, acts as the exclusive agent of sale of chicle to foreign companies, and so on. But it is regulating an extractive enterprise of rapidly declining significance for Petén.

International market demand for Guatemalan chicle has slackened considerably in the last few years. By 1985 FYDEP had great difficulty finding a buyer for chicle, and the agency owed contractors some Q 400,000. Percentage values of chicle exports relative to total Guatemalan exports have fallen from a high of 8.0 percent in 1946 to 1.8 percent in 1967<sup>5</sup>, and are lower today. FYDEP estimates there are now 1,500 chicleros, but contractors say the figure is lower. Moreover, other Petén forest products have increased in value as chicle's importance has decrea-

<sup>4</sup> *Memoria Anual del Departamento del Petén* (Flores, Petén, 1946).

<sup>5</sup> J. M. Aybar de Soto, *Dependency and Intervention: The Case of Guatemala in 1954* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), pp. 318-319. *Europa Year Book* (London: Europa Publishers, Limited, 1959-1972).

sed, e.g., lumber, pimienta gorda, (allspice) and xate (*Chamandera sp.*). Cattle, honey bee and agricultural production have also increased dramatically since the middle 1960s, and by 1970 Petén's farmers were shipping maize and beans to southern Guatemala. During this time, there was a demographic explosion in Petén, partly owing to FYDEP's land sale and colonization program. Population went from 21,300 in 1960 to 64,503 in 1973 and 162,874 at least by 1982. Thus chicleros are no longer a major element in merchants' considerations. The relative as well as the absolute economic value of la chiclería has been greatly reduced. Today la chiclería is simply one element, and far from the most important, in a far more diversified economy than existed up to about 1965.

### **SOME ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS OF LA CHICLERÍA**

Space prohibits a detailed discussion of the complex socioeconomic organization of la chiclería, but several factors must be mentioned to understand the contradictory elements in popular images of chicleros. The present tense is used here in describing these factors as they have been relatively constant over time and today still condition what remains of la chiclería.

First, owing to tropical forest ecology, chicle trees are scattered throughout northern Petén, and attempts to establish plantations have been unsuccessful. Thus chicleros must be a mobile labor force working in small, relatively unsupervised groups. Moreover, well into the 1970s Petén lacked a network of roads and communication that could have facilitated labor control. Even today the northern border with México is quite open. Direct, close supervision of the chicleros has never been possible, in contrast with, for example, plantation or factory labor.

Second, although foreign firms control the manufacture of chicle, they have rarely owned and certainly never monopolized the means of chicle production. To produce chicle one needs machetes, ropes, iron climbing spurs, rubber and burlap bags, iron pots to cook the latex, wooden molds and mules (now trucks) for transportation. Except for mules or trucks, all the other productive instruments are relatively inexpensive and accessible to many people. The nature of production and the dispersal of the chicleros means that direct control over production is not a key factor in regulation of la chiclería.

Third, as a consequence of the above two conditions, foreign firms, state agencies and contractors have to be more concerned with controlling relations of exchange, especially those involving credit, than with relations of production. All sorts of credit arrangements, too many to describe in detail here, exist among foreign companies, government, contractors, subcontractors, muleteers, truckers and chicleros. But what stands out is that to recruit, retain and control a labor force, a middleman (the

contractor or subcontractor) must extend credit to chicleros prior to the chicle tree tapping season. The indebted chicleros then promise to turn over their chicle to their creditors. A large percentage of the contractor's profit, up to 50 percent and more in many cases, comes from selling food and other supplies to his own chicleros. Thus it is not surprising that so many contractors also are merchants. In the past merchant-contractors used to buy stock, also on credit, from wealthier merchants, at first in British Honduras and then after 1930 in Guatemala City. Because direct control and supervision of chicleros is so difficult and because other contractors are willing to buy a chiclero's chicle, any particular contractor must gain the chiclero's loyalty, beyond the obligation incurred by indebtedness. Certainly, government agents have been used to force chicleros to honor their debts to contractors (especially during Ubico's reign), but in the vast forests of Petén this has never been truly effective. Contractors have relied more on the loyalty of the chicleros, hence the importance of extending credit to them.

The most celebrated form of credit is the *enganche*, a cash advance made to chicleros at the opening of the tapping season. At this time, patrons (merchant-contractors) treat chicleros as friends, encouraging them to buy supplies and to drink, on credit, at their stores. Having recruited a labor force, the patron continues to supply his men in the forest and pays their families a monthly allowance during the tapping season. Prompt and reliable payment of the allowance is one important way to retain the chiclero's loyalty. The *enganche*, the *mensualidad* (monthly allowance) and supplies used in the forest are deducted from a chiclero's total earnings at the end of the season, during the «liquidation» period. Chicleros may find that they are still in debt to their patrons, hence they may commit themselves to working for them during the coming season. However, patrons compete with each other for chicleros with good reputations, thus indebtedness by itself will not assure a patron a reliable labor force. He must demonstrate in addition concern for his chiclero's general welfare. Patron-chiclero relations are personalized, and ambivalent. Patrons profit by dominating exchange relations with workers in debt to them, workers who are also «friends».

Although chicleros have fewer resources than patrons, they are not entirely defenseless. If a patron over-taxes the exchange relation, e. g., by excessive charges for supplies, failure to pay *la mensualidad* or short weighing a man's chicle, a chiclero can retaliate, says an older chiclero, «... by selling the chicle to another patron right there in the forest. Sometimes, the chiclero would destroy the (bad) patron's equipment, or take the *enganche* and go to Cayo. Later one could return here (to Petén), and a lot would be forgotten». Of course, a chiclero planning to return to his own community at the end of the season cannot so easily retaliate, but the very possibility limits the «abuses» (to use the chicleros' term) of prudent patrons.

Working conditions for chicleros have improved over the last decade, although with declining demand for chicle they cannot earn as much as in the past. First, chicleros now have investment opportunities for surplus earning which did not exist in Petén until about 1965. Second, the tapping season has been shortened from about six to four months. Third, the trucks used since about 1975 to bring supplies to forest camps and to remove chicle have also effectively ended the extreme isolation of the chicleros. Now, chicleros who reside in Petén can visit home on weekends without facing the legal and physical hardships of the past.

Nevertheless, the work remains hard, accidents do occur and economic outcomes are uncertain. The daily routine is arduous—walking up to 12 kilometers every day to find suitable trees, climbing tall many-branched trees while making V-shaped slashes on them, living without adequate health care in rude open-walled huts (*champas*) during the rainy season, and so on. On Sundays chicleros «rest» by chopping firewood for the week, cooking-cooling-marking (with a wooden tool called the «devil's key») chicle, and doing other chores. Despite all of this, some young men, particularly those born in Petén, feel it important to become chicleros at least for several years not only to earn cash but also as if the experience were a *rite de passage* from youth to adulthood<sup>6</sup>. In summary, la chicleria used to be of vital economic importance in Petén, and it retains cultural significance for Peteneros, certain aspects of which are reflected in popular imagery, proverbs and poetry.

## POPULAR NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE IMAGES OF CHICLEROS

Ordinary Peteneros, local elites, missionaries, explorer scholars, and others have shared common images of chicleros. Because explorer scholars publish their views, they are easier to quote, but it must be emphasized that their statements are quite typical of shared sentiments in Petén and often derived from them. Negative aspects of these images are described first.

Twice a year, at the opening and the closing («liquidation») of the tapping season, the chicleros caroused, as some do today, in the towns of central Petén. In the heyday of la chicleria, Peteneros recall, chicleros would buy silk shirts, the best cognac and fine cigars imported from British Honduras, and light the cigars with ten dollar bills. Scholars, missionaries and nonchiclero Peteneros deplored these legendary, grand *parrandas*, describing them as pointless, wasteful and immoral.<sup>7</sup> Chicleros' families wor-

<sup>6</sup> N. B. Schwartz, «Milperos, chicleros, and rituals of pasage in El Petén, Guatemala» (*Cultures et développement* 4, 1974), pp. 369-395.

<sup>7</sup> F. Blom and O. LaFarge, *Tribes and Temples* (New Orleans, Tulane University: Middle American Research Institute Publication 1, 1926-27), pp. 204-205. Anonymous, «Life in the chicle camps» (*Awake*, 22 June 1959).

ried that the men would fall deeply into debt to their patrons, and many others feared the chicleros would turn violent. Even S. G. Morley, Petén's famous friend who relied on chicleros as forest guides, shared this view, summarized by Brunhouse:

Good-for-nothing chicleros swarmed over the town (Cayo), squandering their advance pay on women and liquor, degrading the morals of the inhabitants, and setting a bad example for the conscientious native farmers.<sup>8</sup>

Citing commonly expressed beliefs, others have said that among the chicleros were «criminals and drifters from all over the world... violent hard-drinking types,»<sup>9</sup> men who do not «reckon an occasional murder as any crime: it's just a proof of manhood.»<sup>10</sup> Even those who knew from direct observation that chicleros lived a hard life denigrated them:

The tree produces gum only during the rainy season, which means that the chiclero has to spend the worst time of the year in the heart of the forest, sheltered by small palm roofs, living far from supplies, and having to buy these at exorbitant prices. Day and night it rains, and the chiclero is not far from being an aquatic animal. Generally he is a beast. All kinds of riff-raff run together in a chicle camp, mostly men who are "wanted" somewhere by the law. Fights in the camps are frequent, drunkenness is usual, and stealing and smuggling are daily occurrences.<sup>11</sup>

Some attributed all this to the nature of the chicle industry itself:

Much of the dishonesty, drunkenness and absence of morality.... are due to a depressing and adverse environment, illiteracy, and a vicious system of paying wages in advance... That there should not be more crimes of violence than there are is remarkable, for we are here dealing with an area totally impossible of police patrol...<sup>12</sup>

An elderly merchant-patron from Petén adds that «the chicleros are drunks, and when la chicleria began there were more evil spirits, goblins (*duendes*) and bad visions. They make deals with the goblins, there in the forest.»

On a more positive note, many Petén townsmen and foreign observers admired the forest skills of the chicleros and their hardiness. Gann, despite his negative view of chicleros, wrote that «only chicleros venture into the dense, uninhabited, almost impenetrable» forest.<sup>13</sup> The list of adversities was long: isolation, poor diets, hurricanes, poisonous snakes, insects, chiclero's ulcer, accidents and endless rain, so in spite of relatively high wages, «the life is so rough that only the hardy and adventurous are likely to undertake it.»<sup>14</sup> In addition, «El trabajo requiere habilidad, in-

<sup>8</sup> Brunhouse, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>9</sup> Hendrickson, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> W. Cordan, *Secrets of the Forest: On the Track of Maya Temples* (London: Victor Gollancz Limited, 1963), p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> Blom and LaFarge, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>12</sup> G. C. Shattuck, *The Peninsula of Yucatan* (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie of Washington, Publication 431, 1933), p. 185.

<sup>13</sup> T. Gann, *Ancient Cities and Modern Tribes: Exploration and Adventure in Maya Land* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc. Publishers, 1972), p. 32.

<sup>14</sup> Shattuck, op. cit., p. 157. See also Br. J. L. González Sales, «Costumbres del campesino y chiclero peteneros» (*El Observador Petén* 1, 1984), p. 7.



teligencia, equilibrio del sistema nervioso, cuerpos no defectuosos y bien nutridos.»<sup>15</sup> In the famous romantic novel, *Guayacán*, which celebrates the life of the chiclero Valentín Ochaeta, the novelist praises chicleros, although not without a note of ambivalence:

Quizá encontréis un poco exagerada la figura central.... pero estad seguros que en sí encarna la ambición, la resignación fatal, el ansia de superación, el desesperado impulso de supervivencia, la crueldad y la bondad primitivas y la fuerza sublime de muchos hombres del Petén (q. d., chicleros).<sup>16</sup>

Positive sympathy for chicleros does not preclude ambivalence toward them. For example, a Petenero writes that the chiclero who lives «en el infierno... o sea la selva», used to be «el hombre poderoso de la zona, pero hoy se ha convertido en el trabajador» suffering many hardships. Yet, «Gran culpa tienen los propios chicleros, quienes se han desorganizado y sólo comentan para sí mismos. A veces tienen miedo de luchar dentro del marco de la ley por sus intereses».<sup>17</sup>

Ordinary Peteneros share sentiments mentioned above. Towsmen and merchant-contractors state that chicleros are drunks, spendthrifts, irresponsible, at times deceptive and dangerous. They add that women who work as camp cooks are sexually promiscuous. At the same time, they admire the forest skills, physical agility and (when it can be gained) loyalty of the chicleros. Chicleros, too, share these views although they phrase them in positive ways. For example, chicleros do not say they are dangerous but rather that if not «treated properly» they have ways to «defend our interests». Again, people say that chicleros squander their enganches on parrandas, hence the proverb «Eso no es nada pa' un chiclero», but chicleros see the statement as a testimony to their free ways and generosity. Thus, the two most commonly expressed images of chicleros—that they are prodigal and that they are dangerous—have positive counterparts among chicleros—that they are generous and also «hombres poderosos» who can «defend» themselves.

In this context it is interesting to note that San Simón, a once famous icon in Petén, was said to be dressed in «chiclero's clothing». The image was a wooden carved figure about four feet high, wearing rough work pants and a short-sleeved striped shirt. San Simón's curved nose and oval eyes gave his face a distinctly Mayan cast. His short, crudely carved arms and equally crude, disproportionately large hands, added to his clothing, also gave him a rustic look. He was petitioned for private favors, often with trepidation, perhaps in part because he could help one satisfy sometimes

<sup>15</sup> V. Rodríguez Beteta, *El Libro de Guatemala Grande: Peten-Belice* (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional de Guatemala, 2 tomos, 1951), p. 87.

<sup>16</sup> V. Rodríguez Macal, *Guayacán* (Guatemala: Ministerio de Educación, la segunda edición, 1967), p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> A. Galváz Mis, «Un decreto legislativo que afecta a los chicleros peteneros» (*Prensa Libre*, Guatemala, 13 August 1979).

immoral wishes. San Simón was also the subject of a public rain-making ritual, something usually associated with Mayan spirits, but in this case a ritual conducted by Ladinos. In this and in other ways, San Simón ambiguously conflated Maya and Ladino elements. Popular images of chicleros, like San Simón with whom they were associated, are also contradictory.

At the conclusion of this report an hypothesis resolving these contradictions is discussed. Here it is simply remarked that the popular images of the chicleros reflect, in exaggerated fashion, only part of the social reality to which they are linked. For example, although some chicleros are fabulous drinkers, most drink no more than other man. Whether labelled prodigal or generous, in fact chicleros until recently earned and saved more money than other laborers in Petén. Ethnographic research demonstrates that camp cooks were far more commonly sought out for something like maternal solicitude than for erotic pleasure. When theft does occur, and that is rare, goblins rather than fellow chicleros tend to be blamed, hence theft does not lead to violence. Interviews with elderly chicleros, direct observacion of chicle camps during 1974-75 and archival study indicate that although there was some violence associated with chicle in the first part of the century, stories about violence, promiscuity and theft (as distinct from smuggling) were probably as exaggerated then as they most certainly were during the 1970s.

The sources of these exaggerations are discussed in the concluding section, but one anecdote may show how they operate. During the 1960s and 1970s, central Petén townsmen felt it best to deal cautiously with the chiclero, Fulano (for obvious reasons his real name cannot be used). Fulano, people insisted, was a murderer. He had killed several men in the remote camps of northern Petén, but the authorities had never been able to induce other chicleros to testify against him in court. During 1974-75, when I resided in the camps, I found that Fulano indeed was well know among chicleros, and some contractors would not hire him although he was an able worker. Fulano was an excellent talker, and for that reason welcome in the camps at least for short periods. He was also a clever, sly gossip who knew how to set one man against another and then leave camp before trouble could rebound on him. As one astute contractor said, «Fulano kills the harmony in a camp», but in fact Fulano, the «killer» of social accord never murdered anyone. Chicleros knew Fulano had a sharp tongue, and townsmen believed he had a sharp knife. Grossly exaggerated stories about Fulano after all did contain a social truth but not a literal one.

Chicleros, like others, have described their experiences, not all of which are completely consistent with popular imagery, and there are reported next.

## CHICLEROS' REFLECTIONS ON LA CHICLERÍA

Chicleros enjoy recounting true stories about how one of their number located some ancient Maya ruin as much as they like the more legendary tales of Rabatú, a real man now deceased. For example, it is said that Rabatú walked so fast through the forest that he could reach certain camps before an airplane could.<sup>18</sup>

There is also the tale of a chiclero who was unable to collect any chicle because duendes repeatedly spilled his bags of latex. He tapped the trees one day, and when he returned on the next day to collect the latex, the bags were upset and the milky sap had oozed into the soil. Quite discouraged, he decided to return home only to discover that his wife had been seduced by a wealthy merchant. Although many men feared the merchant, «this was a chiclero», so after brooding several days, he beat his wife and give the merchant 24 hours to leave town. «Although he was rich and had *cuello*, the merchant left San Martín (pseudonym), and (so) this chiclero saved many women (from seduction)».

There are stories of famous chiclero drunks too, but A. Barrios, an old-time chiclero, has an answer for those who denigrate these parrandas:

*Se toma un trago un chiclero.  
El nombre de borracho sí le dan.  
Otros se ahogan en champán  
Y siguen siendo caballeros.  
Pero como yo no muerdo de empacho,  
Yo les digo en tono severo,  
Si es borracho el chiclero,  
También el rico es borracho.*

Chicleros views of la chiclería may be directly expressed, as in the following very typical statement, or in poems such as the one which immediately follows the statement. This chiclero's comments were recorded in 1974:

I quit working in chicle because it is dirty work, dangerous and hard. It is sacreligious (to tap the trees). There are many dangers, like the rattlesnakes, and limbs fall from the trees when one is high up and one must dodge them. A snake forty inches long once darted out of the trunk of a tree, at the bottom, and bit me on the left hand (above thumb). There are sancudos, mosquitos and the damage the cooking of the gum does to one's eyes. The cooking takes three hours, and then one works long hours. One gets up about 3 a. m. and eats and leaves camp by 5 a.m. and is back by 5 p.m. One goes four or five kilometers in search of good trees, for the trees are scattered about, not in a group. It is all ugly (*feo*, also used to refer to devalued old-fashioned activities). On Sundays, one does not rest and devote the time to God, but to washing clothing, bathing and chopping firewood for the week. The chicle is cooked on Sunday too. The milpero does not work so hard, from 6 a. m. until noon, and then he eats and then he goes back and works until 5 p. m., and he can rest on Sundays. It is easier. And chicleros do not have milpas. They must pay what they earn for food and other things. It is useless. The chiclero must pay Q 15 to Q 18 a month for his food, and Q 4 to the cook if she cooks for him. The milpa is better, slower and one does not have to pay for food.

<sup>18</sup> O. A. Pinelo, *Cuentos y Leyenda de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Ministerio de Educación, 1968) retells some Rabatú stories. Rabatú died in the early 1970s after many years of residence in San José, Petén.

By «sacreligious» the chiclero refers to an old belief that tapping the chicozapote drains its «blood» (the sap) so the tree dies, hence a chiclero's wages are inherently sinful, and this in turn is a justification for using them to drink to excess. Other chicleros sum up their experience in what comes close to being a proverb: «I worked 18 years in chicle and came out with nothing, just a pair of pants», and the audience understands that the pants are tattered for the chiclero was constantly in debt to his patron.

The poem, below, is a repayment or expression of gratitude for the years spent in la chicleria. Considered a «sacred poem», it is to be read but not «proclaimed... aloud before the public». The poem celebrates «el tiempo de oro», the passage of time, or perhaps time as such, and the long months of hard labor in remote forests. The poor chicleros may dislike being regarded as monkeys by others, but in fact they feel like monkeys as they climb the trees. They may suffer and experience danger in the forests but that is balanced by the pleasures of nature and the companionship among chicleros. The work is physically as well as morally dangerous. It is sad to strip the bark off the chicozapote, leaving it bare and exposed («huesudo») and thus killing it. Moral ambivalence or duality marks la chicleria, that time of «gold» when trees are killed, and therefore sins are committed. The same equivocal note, in which echoes of older Mayan themes may be heard, is struck when chicleros say that the morning coffee which warms them after the cold, damp nights in the forest always has a «bitter taste». As «Adiós tiempos» says, «Y el hombre se entusiasma pero no se fija en la mortalidad del palo».

#### ADIOS TIEMPOS

Hay un tiempo,  
 Un gran tiempo de vivir mejor  
 Donde yo doy un ejemplo  
 Cuando un árbol deja de existir.  
     Existiendo lastimadas divinas  
     Que el árbol recibe,  
     El recibir de las resinas de  
     Un pasar de neblinas del amanecer.

Un día al atardecer me dijo un compañero,  
 «Vamos amigo, vamos, que la noche se acreda»,  
 y yo con mis espuelas sembrantes hice un bañadero  
 donde la luz del día volvió y la resina escurrió.

En cuanto un mes de noviembre  
 Llegué a un destinado campamento.  
 Luego me llegó diciembre,  
 Diciéndome, «Soy mes de chicle».

En este caso añadí, «Compañeros chicleros, yo soy  
 Único en mi vida, pero diciembre  
 Me enseñó su fortaleza.  
 Compañeros dejemos de ser obreros».

Oigamos los pájaros anuncian un nuevo verano pero en  
Más justicia para pagar las cuentas de  
Un nuevo día.  
En el pueblo no toman como baces  
Sigamos amigos siendo chicleros,  
Y con esos seremos capaces.

Cuando un miércoles al amanecer,  
Los trinos de las aves se anunciaban.  
Luego añadí yo en pleno gozosa,  
«Chicleros en hambre, chicleros  
Con dinero, pero lo que más lució el enjambre».

En seguida, Dios montaña y hombre  
Que el mes de enero sea fructífera  
Para los pobres que sufren de hambre.  
En la sabia se anota la asimilación y la paz.

Septiembre enero, como dice el refrán,  
Es tiempo de oro,  
Donde en el mes que los chicleros cantan  
En coro, porque se alivian en una nueva vida.

Arbol de chicozapote  
Que ayuda al arriesgado chiclero,  
Por eso son hermanos  
Que se ayudan unos a otros.

Viejos tiempos de goloso  
que de nuevo no volvemos a mirar,  
pero no te hagas desesperar.  
En el año pasado tú me diste un recado,  
pero te dejo recompensar.

Ahora somos pájaros trepadores,  
Pero que significa alivio,  
Y no sólo para trepar  
También para chiclear.

Nos parecemos a hombres monos,  
Pero le rogamos a San Antonio  
Que nos quita del camino los demonios  
Y que esté siempre San Antonio.

San Antonio fue fiel al  
Amigo de los chicleros  
Que decía los cuentos,  
Y ahora yo digo.

No hay competencia compañeros.  
Es mejor tener existencia para evitar  
Peligros fúnebres  
Que no tienen caso.

Los peligrosos fúnebres son peligrosos  
Pero se siente gozoso el que descansa de una vez.  
Pero el que sufre es el que no muere.

Chico zapote tú lo das y a veces lo quitas  
Porque la culpa de mecate y mecatines  
Es el que respalda el chiclero,  
Pero lo que más quiero que respaldes  
Es mi vida que si lo cortan no retoña.

Espuelas que cubren el plan del pie,  
Espuelas que tu respaldas por el chiclero  
Porque el chico zapote  
Da el pan que tomes a tus faldas.

Tus faldas al tomar no son buenas.  
Hay que tener rencor  
Para estar bien  
En todo su biografía.

Compañero chiclero, bien estas  
Pero te falta una cosa.  
Que no hay que entrar en esa raza  
Para no dejar mal la casa.

Eso es una buena idea amigo.  
Porque los chicleros  
Corren peligro en altos árboles,  
Pero en realidad más se sienten  
Ágiles monos junto a la exportación.

Es una tremenda importancia chicleros.  
Palo huesudo que el chiclero deja al zapote.  
Corriente blanco que se desliza en la torturación,  
Y el hombre se entusiasma pero no se fija de la mortalidad del palo.

There are other poems, simply called «versos chicleros» which touch on some of the themes of «Adiós tiempos». Danger, worry about families left behind and the equivocally sacred-secular aspects of la chiclería. For example:

Cuando salimos de Tuspas para este pueblo afamado  
Que gritería tan bruta formaba la chiclerada.  
Don Emilio y don José se les estaba llegando,  
Y el Santo Niño de Atoche que el barco se estaba quemando.  
Y se resaben (?) las plegarias al Santo Niño de Atoche,  
Que aunque sea de noche llegamos a tocar tierra.  
Todos estaban desesperados por sus familias queridas,  
Rogando a Dios eterno que a todos nos salvaría.

In some versions of this poem the first two lines change, for example,

Cuando salimos de San Andrés para pueblo afamado  
Que gritería tan bruta llegaba la chiclerada.

These are sacred times, hence the refrain: «En los meses de septiembre a enero, son tiempos sagrados, por lo tanto, ¡de septiembre a enero!» But there is also a secular if not simply profane aspect to la chiclería expressed by those chicleros who, despite a deep reverence for God and saints, speak often of goblins and say «my religion is my hammock». The following poem, which mentions Rodrigo Maldonado (pseudonym) a well-known still-living chicle camp foreman, is equally secular.

Cuando salimos de San Martín  
Parece pueblo afamado.  
Que gritería tan bruta  
Pegaba la chiclerada.

Rodrigo Maldonado se quedó todavía  
Junto con Agustín Ochaeta.  
Se quedaron todavía,  
Mientras lo(s) cuajosos ecurrian.

Por eso Rodrigo Maldonado  
Despedida no la da  
Porque no la dejó aquí.  
Se la dejó a la Benicia Mo  
Para que se acuerde de él.

El 31 de junio  
Cuando iba subiendo Rodrigo  
Con quinientos quetzales de deuda  
Que iban a su espinazo.

El 31 de enero  
a fines de la temporada  
Rodrigo Maldonado con  
cincuenta quintales y pachicha  
ya bahía pagado y alcanzaba.

(D. Acosta)

The chiclero's understanding of la chiclería, the forest and the cycle of his work in all their ambivalent complexity is also expressed in proverbs. The examples which follow have been arranged to conform to the structure of the tapping season. Where it seems necessary an explanation is given in parentheses immediately following the proverb.

1. Los meses de septiembre a enero son tiempos sagrados.
2. Árboles enviado por Dios que el hombre se pone en uso de ello, quiere estar entendido.
3. Montañas de grandes alturas, cubiertas de grandes riquezas que el hombre logra descubrir.
4. Resina recurso del árbol que el chiclero aprovecha para desquitar sus deudas.
5. Tiempos de oro, tiempos de brisas pero más tiempos de alegría en que el chiclero es más absoluto en sus trabajos.
6. Chicleros crueles en tiempo de chicle, son paseado como que si fueron capullo.
7. Cruelos chicleros paseado en capullo en el mes de septiembre; chicleros en rosas paseado en enero, chicleros derretidos paseado en marzo para en adelante.
8. Chicleros como pájaros de allí visto como un sapo. (Quiere decir que en tiempo de chicle sólo están los chicleros en buen estado, y después pasado algunos días se miran unos a otros como que dijeron tenemos hambre).
9. Montaña profunda trasteada por los chicleros, pero lo que más se le conoce es que es trasteado por los chicleros.
10. Hojas reservados en pagos que es más saqueado por los chicleros en tanto dejan más el verde que el morado. (A chiclero explains: quiere decir que cuando el chiclero recibe el pago en la oficina del contrato más es divertido con los billetes de cinco quetzales. A veces es dejado por los gastos los billetes de quetzal o sea el verde).
11. Eso no es nada pa' un chiclero. El chiclero no pide vuelto. (Now that he has received his «liquidation» the chiclero will be prodigal).
12. Adiós temporadas sagradas y a veces fúnebres. Adiós montes altos que tu sabía ya me remites. Adiós pero no adiós para siempre, porque nos podemos mirar en temporadas después adelante.

In sharp contrast to proverbs which compendiously express the experiences of chicleros, certain songs associated with la chiclería say nothing specific about chicleros or the forest. The only thing that connects them with la chiclería is the belief that they were composed long ago by any-

mous chicleros. Some of the songs apparently originate in Veracruz, for example, «Yo nací con la cuna de plata, yo nací lejos de Veracruz; Veracruz con tus playas lejanas tendré que volver...» Others are famous throughout the Americas, for example, «soy marinero», and the onomatopoeic «La caña de azúcar» («que rápido corren los carros del ferrocarril»). Most of the songs deal with love, usually on the assumption that the supply of love is less than the demand for it. Since the contents of the songs have no direct bearing on la chiclería, a list of titles and a brief comment is sufficient.

«El hijo de amor» is about a illegitimate child who has known only «el beso y su dolor». Equally sad is «Abandoné mi madrecita» about a son who leaves home and then returns to find his mother had died and left him «un papel bordado en llanto». «Tome y ombligo» sings of drinking and women, The gentle «El puente», like «Paloma consentida», is about unrequited love, but «El venadito» more optimistically suggests love may be returned. «Perdone señor juez» pleads for the return of a stolen heart. «Bufonas antiguas» is a lighthearted song of mutual rejection. «El gato» (*mix*, or Mayan for cat) reveals an envy of beauty. «A la caputín», an onomatopoeic song, declares that loving a woman brings troubles to a man: «Se desvela, se emborracha, y se queda sin comer». From the perspective of chiclero folklore, the interesting thing about these songs is that their explicit association with la chiclería reveals the chicleros' belief that they have a distinctive identity.

Many «chistes rojos» or «colorados» are also identified with chicleros. As in the case of the songs, they do not speak of chicleros' experiences as chicleros, but when one begins a joke with «Había un chiclero...», the Petén audience is ready to hear something risqué. Introducing a joke this way sets the mood, just as a mood is established for a U.S.A. audience by beginning a profane joke with «There once was a traveling salesman...». Here as elsewhere, there is an association between the profane and la chiclería. For example, in «El sordo», recounted below, the old man could have spent six years in almost any occupation, but by saying he had been a chiclero the audience is altered to what follows and the joke seems more humorous precisely because the old man once was a chiclero.

«El sordo: Dicen que había un viejo que tenía seis años de ser chiclero, pero lástima porque era sordo. Una vez llegó una muchacha a ofrecérsele pero el decir del viejo era de que no oía. Pues en tanto esto se fregó, Pues, que pensó que le decía que salió el ganado. Pues él dijo que su ganado está bien encerrado, que no salen. Pues, la mujer lo abrazó y le platicaba en el oído. Pues, que la dijo el vijo, "Ya me dejaste sordo", pero el brutado estaba abultando».

Two additional examples will affirm the point that there is a tacit connection between chicleros and ribaldry, and chicleros who otherwise resent being denigrated also accept this convention. There is a joke which begins with a chiclero who tears his pants and so must seek out a tailor. This introduces the audience to the tailor, and the joke says nothing more about the chiclero, rather it goes on to explain that the tailor «no podía



tomar exactamente la medida de los blumeres», so he asks a promiscuous secretary to help him. As he measures her he admires her and finally tells her to «take everything and leave nothing», and she does, leaving him «calvo» (bald or barren). In «El loro», a chiclero says «Habían dos loros que se estaban acariciando en un palo, y dice la cocinera a un hombre que si entendían entre sus idiomas habladas entre ellos. Entonces el señor contestó que “Según como se acaricián”. Pues, de esto se obtiene que dice un chiclero “Lorito seco”, y comenta otro chiclero “Lorito chulo” entonces dice la cocinera “Choriso seco”, y dice ella entonces, “Son muchas, muchas mentiras, pero los huevos se te estiran”».

In addition to «chistes rojos de los chicleros», there are «charlas de la chiclería» which are humorous but not ribald. Two examples may be given here. The meaning of the first is clear enough for some cooks cannot make the food taste good. The point of the second «charla» is obscure, but chicleros seem to understand and find it amusing.

1. Una cocinera está en el campamento (de los chicleros) y le dice a la otra, “¿Que se muere su niño a cuantos metros le pidieron que le enterraran?” La cocinera quedó pensativa, y agregó, “Unos dos metros lo más. ¿Y usted?” “Pues, si mi niño muere, le pidiera al sepulturero que no se mate en abrir tanto hueco”, pero en eso llegó un chiclero y dice, “Seguro, señora, porque si no lo terminan los gusanos, pueden terminarlo los sopos (sopas), vea” ¡Ya va!

2. Un cocinador (un chiclero) de chicle le dice al otro chiclero, “Que si cuánto tiempo le lleva una marqueta que lo cocine”. Pues, el otro tipo le dice, “Probablemente me lleve media hora o más porque peor si tienen agua”. Pues, el otro dice, “Y usted, ¿qué cuánto tiempo le lleva a usted?” Entonces, él contesta, “Pues, a mí me lleva media hora más cuarta hora más media hora, menos media hora más cinco minutos menos veinte minutos”. Entonces, dice el otro chiclero, “Vaya, no dijo nada usted porque media hora son treinta minutos, un cuarto de hora es quince minutos más cinco son veinte, menos media hora, menos veinte minutos es igual al restarlo nos quedan media hora, pero si tiene agua le resina nos lleva más, pero es cosa de fuego. (Part of the point here may be that, as chicleros say, some people talk and say nothing, while others are more quiet and accomplish more).

Finally, of the Petén folk tales about mysterious objects in the forests, spirits living beneath ancient Maya ruins, supernatural beings and so on, one type is especially associated with chicleros, namely the «duendecillo». The duende, in Petén, is a syncretic figure, combining features of European «little men», Maya *alux* and Maya «owners» of the woods. Normally it takes the appearance of a short, bearded man wearing a large, wide-brimmed hat. Duendes rarely appear in populated places; they are primarily spirits of the forests. Although they do not frighten those with «valor», many Peteneros believe that they are evil spirits linked to the Devil: «Son los espíritus malos que quedaron cuando arrojaron el mundo». One of the more frightening thing duendes do is lose people in the forest. As several men in a group discussion explain:

«Aparece en forma de que sea conocida para conquistarle. El duende se representa a usted en varias formas. Por ejemplo deja a la esposa suya sola en la orilla de la laguna y se representa es usted y la engaña y se la lleva a perderla bajo el monte. Hace lo mismo con los niños suyos. Pero los jóvenes no creen mucho porque hay menos monte ahora, y además andan juntos ellos. Para evitarlo van dos o tres juntos; si va solo uno es más débil y dos tienen más valor, pero uno cabal lo ve. El duende vive en las serranías y bota resina del chiclero. a veces silba; él está llevando el chiclero y el chiclero no mira nada, y se pierde a bastante madera. Ese duende es mal

viento, es el mero diablo, según los antiguos. Aquí no se lo mira en la población. Mucho le gusta la música; muy bonita canta. Le gusta pero no le gusta que otros tocan. No come; es mal viento, es espíritu de demonio. Es bueno para enseñarle. Los chicleros tienen valor pa' eso. Si tenga valor, le habla y le dice, "¿Qué quiere?" y le da lo que usted quiere. Le ayude animal ese. Hace pacto con algunos chicleros. Con los milperos no, menos lo hace.

Thus, a brave man wandering by himself in a remote section of the forest is more likely than others in other circumstances to encounter the duende. The following tale, recorded by Carlos A. Soza, a Petenero, is quite typical and underlines several of the points made above. The tale is called «El duendecillo».

«Contaba el abuelo que hace tiempo cuando por lo menos él tenía veinticinco años trabajaba la chiclería. En un hato habían aproximadamente diez chicleros, y entre ellos había un ancianito como de setenta años que aún trabajaba chicle. El pobre ancianito ya no le rendía el trabajo en vista de que sus años y ya la fuerzas ya no alcanzaban para aquel trabajo tan pesado como lo es el chicle. A cada vez que cocinaban la resina extraída del chico zapote todos los chicleros sacaban dos y tres quintales semanal, sólo el pobre viejito se conformaba con sacar cuarenta y cincuenta libras. El pobre se consolaba fumando su pipa.

Pasaban los días (y) el pobre viejito seguía la rutina diaria. Madrugaba más y más, pero nada, el porcentaje de chicle seguía igual. Un día como de costumbre, madrugó, se fue al trabajo, llegó al primer palo que trabajaría. Le hizo los primeros cortes. La resina salió al instante y se dijo, 'lo picaré; algo me tiene que dar', y guindando la bolsita en una pequeña orqueta que estaba al frente, empezó a trabajar el palo. Trabajaba hasta donde las fuerzas le aguantaban, y se empezó a bajar despacio, despacio sintiendo el dolor que dejaba el mecate en su cadera. Llegó al tronco del chico zapote, enrolló su mecate y agarró su pequeña bolsita donde cargaba siete puros que según él era el lonche para el día, pero que asombro al notar que de los siete puros que había dejado sólo había tres. '¿Quién sería el que los agarró?', se decía el pobre viejito. Al fin, 'los necesitaba', se dijo. En sus adentros siguió la jornada del día. Ese día se tuvo que ir muy temprano en vista de que se terminaron los puros. Llegó al hato y contó la hazaña pero nadie le creía que alguien le robado puro, si todos los del hato sólo fumaban cigarros. El día siguiente le sucedió lo mismo de los puros y así sucesivamente varios días le sucedió lo mismo. Un día mientras trabajaba un palo de chico zapote, se dijo en voz alta, '¿Quién será el que agarra mis puros porque no me los pide? Con gusto se los daría', y siguió trabajando. Para su sorpresa al bajarse encontró a un pequeño hombrecillo que le dijo, 'Yo soy abuelo quien te coje los puros. Me gusta mucho fumar'. Este hombrecillo no era más que el duende, y tomando un puro de la bolsa, se sentó en un tronco que había al frente y cruzando los pies le dijo, 'Hagamos un trato, abuelo. Tú me traes puros y yo te doy resina bastante'. El abuelo no se hizo esperar la propuesta y le dijo que estaba bien, dijo el anciano, y cuántos puros quieres. El hombrecillo alzando su gigante sombrero le dijo, 'Solamente quiero siete puros diarios'. 'Está bien', le dijo el anciano, 'así será'. 'Ya espera, abuelo', le dijo el duende, 'los puros me los dejas al tronco del palo que trabajas y ya verás que sorpresota'. Partió al hato y no contó a nadie lo que sucedió. Al próximo día partió más temprano que nunca llevando consigo los catorce puros, siete para él y siete para el duende. Dejó los siete puros prometidos al tronco del palo y empezó a trabajar. Cuando se bajó del palo la bolsa estaba llena de resina, y cambió de bolsa y así le sucedía en todos los palos. El abuelo estaba muy contento, y cuando llegó el fin de semana para cocinar (la resina) para asombro de todos el abuelo cocinó cuatro quintales. El viejito se daba gusto al sobresarilar. Siempre todos aquellos jovensotes que estaban en el hato se decían, '¿Qué pasó? Si siempre ganábamos al viejito no sé lo que me pasa'. Transcurrían los días, las semanas y los meses sucesivamente pero el viejito ya se aburría de pedir puros y más puros al patrón y también de estarlo llevando al tronco de chico zapote para que después desapareciera, y un día se dijo, 'Vaya, yo no llevo los puros. Voy a ver si quiere el duende que me ayude sin interés de nada', y el próximo día no llevó nada, y como por arte de magia ese día los palos no le dieron casi nada. Volvía a lo de siempre. El viejito se dijo, 'Vaya seguiré trayendo los puros', pero ya era tarde. El duende ya no le ayudó más, y siguió sacando sus cincuenta libras semanales. '¿Qué pasa abuelo ahora?', decían sus compañeros, y el abuelo para sacarlos de duda les contó su gran aventura. Fin».

Perhaps the most interesting thing about «El duendecillo» is that the old chiclero does not suffer for canceling his bargain with the duende, ex-

cept that he returns to the status quo ante. In contrast, a similar tale about a milpero ends differently. The milpero has to pledge his soul, not cigars, to the duende and when the milpero breaks the pact he does not return to his former situation, rather he loses his soul for all eternity. The difference is significant. In Petén, the milpero lives in a community and raises plants. He works with nature, but suffers when he deals with forest spirits. The chiclero lives in remote places and kills trees. He works against nature, but may benefit in transactions with forest spirits. The milpero, working in harmony with nature, is harmed by nature spirits; the chiclero, doing the opposite, is helped by them. Underlying this seeming paradox may be that the chiclero like the duende is not simply *in* the forest, as is the milpero when he makes milpa, but *of* the forest.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Many Peteneros were and some still are chicleros part of the year and milperos the other part. They have two roles, expressed as contrastive identities in folktales. There is an empirical and historical basis for the chiclero's identity, but the reality is greatly exaggerated in popular images of him. Moreover, many of the exaggerations project ambivalent attitudes about chicleros. The ambivalences are manifest in popular images, in chiclero proverbs and in chicleros' poetry. Both the magnification and the equivocality call for an explanation even if in view of the limited sample given here that explanation is considered tentative.

By exaggerating the proverbs, popular images and so on, implicitly but sharply distinguish chicleros from milperos. Precisely because any given man may play both roles, marking the difference may prepare him to shift from one role to another. But even if this is granted, many contradictions or ambivalences, for example, the sinfulness during the «sacred» tapping season or the image of the deceptive-and-loyal chiclero, remain unexplained. To account for this, the hypothesis outlined here is that they represent exchange relationships in la chicería.

Unlike other capitalist activities, in la chicería ownership of the means of production is not the key to labor control. The means of producing chicle are relatively inexpensive, and chicleros, sub-contractors, contractors and, in the past, manufacturing firms, have owned them. Thus, to recruit and control labor, employers and in particular contractors working with credit, now from the state and formerly from private, firms, must manipulate exchange relationships with chicleros. This is not only a result of the chiclero's control over the means of production but also of the necessary territorial dispersion and mobility of the labor force. Dispersion and mobility have always made it extremely difficult to supervise closely the work of chicleros. This, in turn, is a direct consequence of tropical forest ecology—the dispersion of chicozapotes and the prac-

tical impossibility of establishing chicozapote plantations. To recruit and control chicleros, merchant-contractors have to extend credit to them in return for their chicle. Despite the many changes in la chicleria between 1895-1985, the basic outline of the patron-chiclero relationship has remained the same.

The patron or merchant-contractor attempts to control the chiclero (to win his loyalty) by extending him credit in the form of an *enganche*, la *mensualidad*, provision of supplies during the tapping season and perhaps small off-season loans, in return for the chiclero's promise to deliver chicle to the patron in the future. The credit arrangement is personal, and a patron gives different amounts of credit to each of his chicleros. In this he must compete with other patrons for the chiclero's loyalty. The patron takes risks, for a chiclero may run away, sell his chicle to another patron during the season, or simply be unable to produce enough chicle to repay his patron. A chiclero, of course, cannot be completely irresponsible for then neither his immediate patron nor any other will extend him credit. In the past the state tried to force chicleros to be steadfast, but owing to the mobility of the chicleros, the vastness of Petén and limited resources, the government was never a very effective instrument of labor control in la chicleria although chicleros considered it «abusive». To capture the chiclero's surplus value and control him, patrons had to rely on manipulation of the credit arrangement. This was an exchange in which each party tried to get the best bargain for himself, although normally the patron's bargaining position was stronger than the chiclero's. The patron-chiclero relationship is inherently ambiguous in that it was and is simultaneously a calculated, impersonal economic transaction and also a personalized moral bond. The morality appealed to is personal and assumes that each party is conscientious about his actions, but the interest appealed to is economic and assumes that each party will try to gain an advantage over the other.

Thus one may hypothesize that many of the apparent contradictions about chicleros expressed in proverbs, poetry and popular images reflect the realities, and anxieties, of an ambiguous exchange relationship. They also alert each party to the relationship about what to expect from the other and justify mutual attempts to win the advantage in the transaction. Thus, if chicleros are dissolute, deceptive, rootless, ribald and violent, then patrons and others are justified in taking advantage of them. At the same time, the obversions of these characteristics express chicleros' need for credit (for they are dissolute squanderers), their mobility (for they are rootless), and their effectiveness in dealing with untamed forests (for they are violent, ribald, wild, and able to summon forest spirits for aid). In short, chicleros possess just those qualities patrons want in client-workers, although this is not all they possess. Chicleros must accept the negative aspects of their image if they are to benefit from its positive aspects: chicleros are generous and loyal (or prodigal, dissolute), capable of self-de-

fense (or violent and deceptive) and at home in the untamed forest (wild, ribald, able to deal with duendes with impunity). All this also warns patrons and others that they may not «abuse» their exchange relations with chicleros. Contradictions such as generosity/prodigality, bravery/violence, sacredness/sinfulness, and so on, mutually imply and sustain each other. They have some empirical basis, but they are exaggerated, equivocal metaphors about la chiclería.

There is, of course, more than this in these expressive productions. The proverbs, for example, celebrate the chiclero's various experiences—physical hardship, moral peril, closeness to nature, and a sense of competence—all of which are implicated in the exchange relationship, but which also have their own independent significance. La chiclería—those «temporadas sagradas y a veces fúnebres»—gave thousands of mostly unknown men and hundreds of unknown women a distinct identity in society and in the forest. That identity and the complex experience were reflected in and further refined by their expressive, self-reassuring poetry, songs and sayings.

With the decline of la chiclería in Petén, the image of the chiclero has softened. At the opening and closing of the temporada men still drink heavily, the work remains hard despite improved living conditions, and chicleros make the same old credit arrangements with patrons, but la chiclería is fast becoming a minor element in the economy of Petén. The chiclero is no longer «el hombre poderoso de la selva», but rather an ordinary, «humble» worker. Thus, just as the figurines chicleros used to fashion from the latex are no longer extant, it is strongly probable that much of chiclero folklore will fade from memory. One hopes that this sample of chiclero folklore and folklore-like material will be augmented by others before that happens. Additional material will increase our knowledge of how folklore and political economy contextualize each other, of how folklore can sustain people engaged in difficult, complex activities and of one type of human experience—the chiclero's.

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TABLE I  
GUATEMALAN CHICLE PRODUCTION, 1919-1982

| Year    | Amount in quintales | Year    | Amount in quintales | Year    | Amount in quintales |
|---------|---------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|---------------------|
| 1919    | 99                  | 1940/41 | 28,306              | 1961/62 | 19,547              |
| 1920    | 79                  | 1941/42 | 36,770              | 1962/63 | 13,679              |
| 1921    |                     | 1942/43 | 32,888              | 1963/64 | 13,005              |
| 1922    | 13                  | 1943/44 | 34,000              | 1964/65 | 18,569              |
| 1923    |                     | 1944/45 | 42,000              | 1965/66 | 22,240              |
| 1924    |                     | 1945/46 | 39,000              | 1966/67 | 18,084              |
| 1925    |                     | 1946/47 | 38,000              | 1967/68 | 21,449              |
| 1926    |                     | 1947/48 | 37,000              | 1968/69 | 16,938              |
| 1927/28 | 13,899              | 1948/49 | 27,000              | 1969/70 | 18,066              |
| 1928/29 | 10,020              | 1949/50 | 16,000              | 1970/71 | 16,613              |
| 1929/30 | 18,353              | 1950/51 | 26,800              | 1971/72 | 13,360              |
| 1930/31 | 11,986              | 1951/52 | 25,000              | 1972/73 | 20,003              |
| 1931/32 | 6,414               | 1952/53 |                     | 1973/74 | 12,654              |
| 1932/33 | 3,440               | 1953/54 | 7,800               | 1974/75 | 11,384              |
| 1933/34 | 4,143               | 1954/55 | 24,000              | 1975/76 | 8,635               |
| 1934/35 | 5,277               | 1955/56 | 15,500              | 1976/77 | 15,729              |
| 1935/36 | 5,932               | 1956/57 | 17,000              | 1977/78 | 13,109              |
| 1936/37 | 12,924              | 1957/58 | 26,800              | 1978/79 | 15,619              |
| 1937/38 | 13,729              | 1958/59 | 23,200              | 1979/80 | 8,350               |
| 1938/39 | 23,266              | 1959/60 | 13,618              | 1980/81 | 5,483               |
| 1939/40 | 15,052              | 1960/61 | 25,238              | 1981/82 | 7,000               |

<sup>19</sup> FYDEP, *Memorias Anuales* and *Memorias Laborales* (Santa Elena, Flores, El Petén, 1978, 1979, 1980); K. J. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo: The Regime of Jorge Ubico, Guatemala 1931-1944* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), p. 151; H. M. Hoar, «Chicle and chewing gum» (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), p. 19; F. D. Parker, *The Central American Republics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 117; *Prensa Libre* (Guatemala, 16 March and 22 June 1977, 14 November and 22 December 1980, 19 July and 23 November 1982, 9 August 1985); *Revista Petén Itzá* (Flores, Petén, 1971) p. 27. For several reasons —loss of chicle through smuggling particularly prior to Ubico's presidency, inadequate statistical controls within Guatemala, and disagreement among cited sources— the figures are not completely reliable, but they do adequately represent the general trends in Guatemalan chicle production. Wherever possible, figures are given for first class chicle. By 1976-77, Mitsui of Japan was the chief purchaser of Petén chicle (first class chicle by this time cost Q 213 per quintal and second class chicle or chiquibul cost Q 137 per quintal). By 1979 international market demand for Guatemalan chicle declined precipitously, and in 1985 FYDEP had 7,000 quintales of chicle in its warehouses which it was unable to sell until Mitsui agreed to purchase 3,000 quintales in August 1985. FYDEP may be able to sell the remainder to an Italian company.