Reason to Hope:

Economic, Social and Ecological Virtuous Circles in Chiapas, Mexico

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by

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Declaration of Authorship

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1 Peter 3:15

ABSTRACT

Today's dominant economic system does harm and has little future; agro-food systems are a privileged lens for understanding both what is happening and what is at stake. There is reason to hope; many actors are experimenting with alternative models for a life-giving economy that combine agroecology, food sovereignty, and social and solidarity economy. This thesis is an exploration of one such initiative, the Misión de Bachajón (MB) in Chiapas, Mexico. In Chapter 1, I build a theoretical framework based on the economic anthropology of Stephen Gudeman. All economies consist of a dialectic tension between the realm of the market and the realm of mutuality. To ensure sustainability, the latter realm must be protected from the former's tendency to colonize it. Chapter 2 explains my ethnographic, collaborative research design. Chapter 3 is an account of the MB's overall project, which entails a sophisticated "middle peasant" model. On the one hand, the things that are essential for the community's reproduction are withdrawn from the market. At the same time, though, the MB's group of cooperatives and social businesses, Yomol A'tel, creatively engages global value chains (coffee and honey) from a position of strength. Chapter 4 shows how the model goes beyond "fair trade" to achieve very significant economic upgrading, in a way that benefits people and ecosystems. I argue that the MB's model generates economic, social, and ecological virtuous circles by refashioning "economy's tension" into a creative tension. Chapter 5 considers how the MB has achieved all of this by mobilizing its relationships with other actors. Its strategy of networked territories is not only a form of resistance to neoliberal globalization, but also contributes to building the "pluriverse," a world in which many worlds fit. In the Conclusion, I consider the ways in which the MB gives us reason to hope.

CHA'OXP'AHL C'OP

Ha'i chahpambil a'tel ini ya yalbey sc'oblal Misión Bachajón ta Chiapas, México. Ya scholbey sc'oblal binut'il te lum Tseltal spasoj talel tulan ta yu'untayel sbah, soc hich yac stuquimbelic ha me sbehlal a'tel ine yu'un ya scoltay yantic lum ta hich spasel tulan ehuc. Te Yochibal c'op ya stah ta halel binut'il xhu' ta chahpanel yan beh ta stojol ha'i schaplejal stahel u'elal. Ta sbahcajal, ya cac' ta na'el bin ut'il teme co'tanuc jlehbeytic yan sbehlal jlecubeltic, ma' ha'uc nax xbaht co'tantic stahel taqu'in. Ha'uc jtahtic ta ilel te jun pajal ayinel ta ha me jchahp tsoblejil ine, soc scanantaybeyel te "yoyal", te ha' binti ma' xpas ta chonel, ta scaj ha' ya yac' nahtijuc cuxlejalil. Te lequil stahel bin utslec ha' scanantayel scha'chahpal, jmanchombajel ta jehch soc nix swinquilel lum te ha' yoyal te yane. Ta scha'cajal, ya jtah ta halel binut'il laj yich' chahpanel ha'i bin johts'iyej ini, te ha' huqueb uh la joquin te Misión Bachajón. Ta Yoxchahpal, ya jtah ta halel bin ut'il te Misión Bachajón spasoj tulan ta scanantayel soc ya'beyel yich' yip te «oy», hich binut'il te lumqu'inal, c'altic, schaplejal abatinel ta jun pajal soc sc'opojel, soc yantic xan tulan sc'oblal. Ta schancajal, ya jtah ta halel bin yilel sbehlal ya'tel te Yomol A'tel ta stojol jchonmambajeletic. Ta yo'cajal, ya jtah ta halel te ya'tel Ch'ultsoblej, soc ban c'alal ay yip ta jun pajal soc scoltaywanej yantic swinquilel lum. Te slajibal yalel c'op yu'un ha'i chahpambil a'tel ini ya stah ta halel yu'un te Misión Bachajón sna'oj ya'teltayel ta slamalil o'tanil soc yaqu'el sp'ijil sjol yo'tan yu'un schahpanel hahchel te yu'untayel sbah lum Tseltal.

RESUMEN

El sistema económico dominante hace daño y no tiene futuro; los sistemas agro-alimentarios son un lente privilegiado para entender lo que pasa y lo que hay en juego. Hay razones para tener esperanza: existen ensayos de modelos alternativos para una economía dadora de vida; muchos combinan agroecología, soberanía alimentaria, y economía social y solidaria. Esta tesis considera una de estas iniciativas, la Misión de Bachajón (MB) en Chiapas, México. En el capítulo 1, construyo un marco teórico basado en la antropología económica de Stephen Gudeman. Toda economía consiste en una dialéctica entre el mercado y la mutualidad. Para garantizar la sostenibilidad, hay que cuidar la mutualidad ante la tendencia colonizadora del mercado. El capítulo 2 explica mi diseño de investigación, etnográfico y colaborativo. El capítulo 3 da cuenta del proyecto de la MB, que conlleva un modelo sofisticado de “campesino medio.” Por un lado, lo esencial para la reproducción de la comunidad se protege del mercado. Al mismo tiempo, el grupo de cooperativas y empresas sociales de la MB, Yomol A’tel, participa en cadenas de valor globales (café y miel) desde una posición de fortaleza. El capítulo 4 muestra como el modelo va más allá del “comercio justo” para lograr mejoras económicas significativas, de manera que se benefician las personas y los ecosistemas. Propongo que el modelo de la MB genera círculos virtuosos económicos, sociales y ecológicos, convirtiendo la dialéctica de la economía en una tensión creativa. El capítulo 5 considera como la MB ha logrado esto en colaboración con otros actores. La estrategia de tejer una red territorios es al mismo tiempo una forma de resistencia al neoliberalismo globalizado y una manera de construir el “pluriverso,” un mundo donde caben muchos mundos. En la Conclusión, retomo el sentido en el que la MB nos da razones para tener esperanza.

For Julienne Innocent,
and so many other victims of the economy that kills.

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Acknowledgements

Below the forest floor, fungal bodies extend themselves in nets and skeins, binding roots and mineral soils, long before producing mushrooms. All books emerge from similarly hidden collaborations.

Anna L. Tsing

I was sore from too many years of seeing migrants suffer, and frustrated with the limitations of NGOs as a means to help, when I caught my first glimpse of what it could mean to work towards "the right not to migrate." Arturo Estrada told me about the Misión de Bachajón (MB), and later welcomed me there. This thesis is a first fruit of the seed he planted during that conversation on the Belo Horizonte metro in 2012.

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Tables

Figures

Abbreviations

CEDIAC: Centro de Derechos Indígenas, A.C.

ECOSUR: El Colegio de la Frontera Sur

GVC: Global value chain(s)

Ibero: Universidad Iberoamericana

ILO: International Labour Organization

MB: Misión de Bachajón

SCAA: Specialty Coffee Association of America

SSE: Social and solidarity economy

YA': Yomol A'tel (for readability, the possessive is rendered as YA's, not YA''s)

Glossary

Yomol A'tel components

Bats'il Maya: Coffee processing plant

Capeltic: brand of roasted coffee and coffee shops

Chabtic: Honey distributor

Comon Sit Ca'teltic: Microfinance proto-bank

Canan Taqu'in: Administration

Luchiyej: Embroidery cooperative

Mesa Directiva: Board of directors of the coffee and honey producer cooperatives, which also plays a leadership role in the wider Yomol A'tel group

Ts'umbajeletic: Technical support team of the Ts'umbal Xitalha' producer cooperative

Ts'umbal Xitalha': coffee and honey producers' cooperative

(The possessive is rendered as Xitalha's, rather than Xitalha''s, for readability.)

Xapontic: brand of honey-based soaps

Yip Antsetic: Soap-making cooperative; also runs the incipient catering service

Yomol A'tel: umbrella organization for all of the above

Frequently mentioned people (with full name for those cited in bibliography)

Alberto [Irezabal Vilaclara]: executive director of Yomol A'tel (YA')

Alex: coordinator of Comon Sit Ca'teltic

Arturo: Jesuit, director of the Misión de Bachajón

Belinda: coordinator of Capeltic

Che [José Andrés Fuentes González]: interim executive director of YA' during my fieldwork

Oscar [Rodríguez Rivera]: Jesuit, co-founder of YA', coordinator of Comparte network

José [Aquino]: co-founder of YA', chief cupper at roasting plant

jXel Japón: coordinator of Ts'umbajeletic during my fieldwork

xMari: loan manager of Comon Sit Ca'teltic

Frequently used local and technical terms

cargo: a service role, part of the indigenous system of self-government

coyote: conventional trader who buys coffee from producers

green coffee: has been depulped and dehusked, but not yet roasted

fiesta: traditional communal religious celebration, sometimes lasting several days

kaxlán: non-indigenous (roughly equivalent to *mestizo* or *ladino*)

matz: 1. typical snack made of cornmeal mixed with cold water; 2. midday snack break

mestizo: non-indigenous (roughly equivalent to *kaxlán* or *ladino*)

milpa: Mesoamerican polyculture of maize, beans, squash, chili, and other species

parchment coffee: has been depulped, but not yet dehusked or roasted

specialty coffee: standardized high-quality distinction (above 80 points on SCAA scale)

tatic: respectful term of address for men, used for elders and certain *cargos*

trensipal (pl.: *trensipaletik*): elders who hold the highest authority in the *cargo* system

xuxil waj: a thick corn tortilla cooked with whole black beans embedded in it

Note on Tseltal proper names

Following Tseltal grammar, Tseltal names are preceded by an x (for women) or a j (for men).

Pronounciation guide

The “x” in Tseltal words (kaxlán, xMari, etc.) is pronounced as the English “sh.”

The “j” in Tseltal and Spanish words (ejido, jXel, etc.) is pronounced as the English “h.”

The “z” in Tseltal and Spanish words (alza, matz, etc.) is pronounced as the English “s.”

Vowels: “a” as in h<u>a</u>t; “e” as in r<u>e</u>d; “i” as in ch<u>ee</u>se; “o” as in <u>o</u>range; “u” as in m<u>oo</u>t.

The apostrophe in Tseltal words (A’tel, ch’umil) is a glottal stop, as in the English “uh oh!”

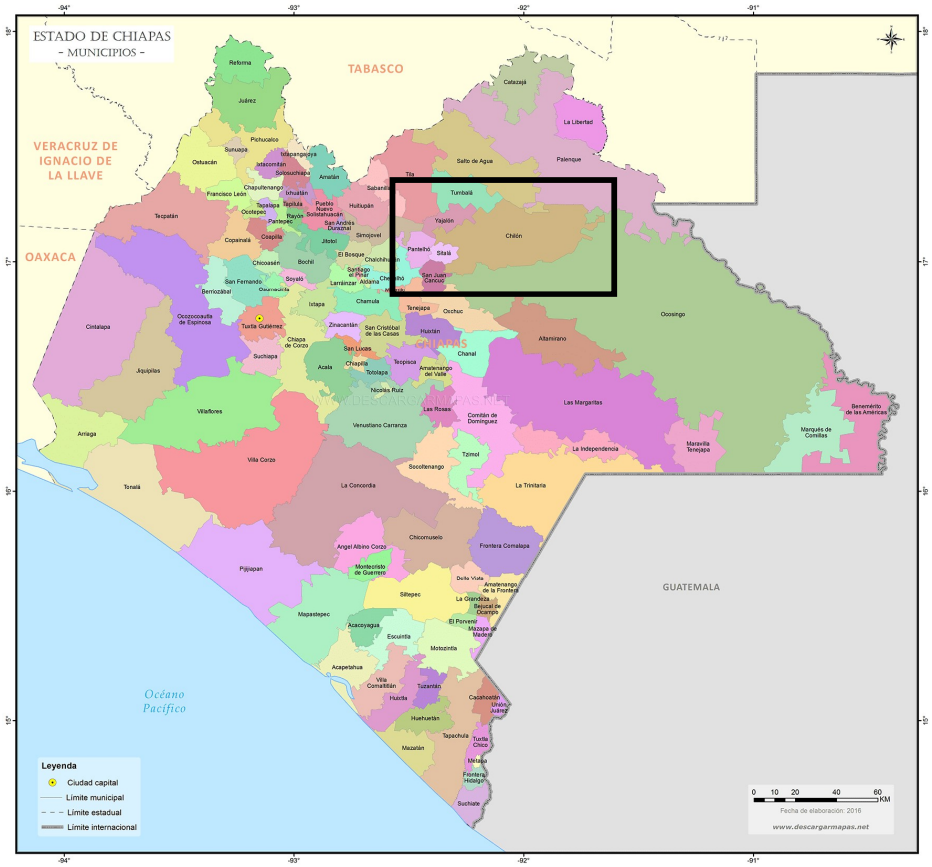
Map of Mexico

Source: https://descargarmapas.net/mexico/mapa-mexico-estados

Mexico lies between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. It borders the United States of America to the North, and Guatemala and Belize to the East and South.

The rectangle (added by author) highlights the location of Chiapas, which is Mexico's southernmost state and the focus of this thesis.

Map of Chiapas



Source: https://descargarmapas.net/mexico/chiapas/mapa-estado-chiapas-municipios.png

The rectangle (added by the author) highlights the location of the northern municipalities of Chilón and Sitalá, which constitute the core of the Misión de Bachajón's territory.

…We must pay close attention to those with another imagination…. We will soon have to admit that those people… – the people who still know the secrets of sustainable living – are not relics of the past, but the guides to our future.

Arundhati Roy

Introduction: Hope from the Margins

Unbridled capitalism is like a giant suicide bomber. The idolatry of economic growth demands the permanent acceleration of consumption, which in turn depends on extracting natural resources at a reckless pace that is highly destructive in the short term, and simply unsustainable in the long term. Entire peoples and thousands of non-human species have already been sacrificed at the altar of "progress." Those of us who are left are subject to other forms of violence, such as obscene inequality and forced displacement, not to mention heightened vulnerability due to climate change. This is all enabled by an ideological diminishment that would reduce us to *homo economicus*, and everything around us to either commodities or "waste" (Francis 2015).

We need a better system, one that is capable of recognizing the inherent dignity of every being, and of building up the common good so that all might have life in abundance. Thankfully, there are plenty of alternative proposals that, even if they are still small and incomplete, at least help to "organize hope" by prefiguring other possibilities (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012). This thesis is a critical examination of one particularly promising initiative, asking what good reasons it gives us to hope, and how exactly it intends to configure that hope.

To arrive at that, some preparation is necessary. In this introduction, I will first sharpen the focus on the issues at stake by looking at them through the lens of food systems. Then, I will argue that hope emerges from marginalized contexts with distinctive force and creativity, and I will begin to acquaint the reader with a particular organization, the Misión de Bachajón in Chiapas, Mexico, that – as will become clear throughout the thesis – embodies this principle. I will end by explaining how this thesis is structured.

The food nexus

To bring the overwhelming complexity of the challenges we face into sharper focus, it helps to look at them through the lens of food. Food is not only essential to our physical survival, but also a nexus that connects ecology, politics, culture, economy, health, technology, knowledge, and many other dimensions of any system. At once universal and intimate, tangible and charged with symbolic meaning, food is "good to think." Therefore, I will use food systems as a privileged entryway into the larger issues that this thesis is ultimately about.

I will speak of "systems" on two levels. First, we can straightforwardly define economic, social, and political systems in general – including those that involve the production, distribution, and consumption of food – as "an interacting set of institutions, actors, activities, policies, resources, power structures, values and norms that collectively influence the behaviour of actors within that system, leading to a given situation or outcome" (Thorpe 2014). At the same time, food systems in particular – because they are inseparable from agriculture and from human bodies – remind us that our human-made systems are nested in wider geophysical and biological processes with their own dynamics and rules; in this sense food systems are actually a set of interlocking systems (Gunderson and Holling 2002). It is important to take their interacting layers seriously as we consider the implications of different initiatives (Vandermeer and Perfecto 2017).

Food systems have changed drastically since the 1960s, as agriculture has become increasingly industrialized and increasingly intertwined with expanding international markets. This change in the way most of the world's food is produced and distributed has been driven by a number of factors. Demographic expectations, rising incomes leading to increased demand, the technological advances of the Green Revolution, and Cold War politics have all played a role (De Schutter 2014, Weis 2007). The main driver of the

current "food regime," though, is the capitalist economy (Friedmann and McMichael 1989; McMichael 2005).

On the one hand, industrialized agriculture using Green Revolution technology combined with market incentives has succeeded in massively increasing yields (Fuglie et al 2012). However, this system has failed to deliver on its promise of guaranteeing adequate food security to the world's population. Today, more than one in nine people in the world, 795 million in total, are undernourished (FAO et al 2015). This is the case despite the fact that the food currently produced in the world is more than three times what would be needed to adequately nourish everyone, and that a third of all food produced is wasted (De Schutter 2014: 210-211, 220). These figures illustrate the truth that distribution is just as important as production for achieving food security (Sen 1982).

The capitalist food system's single-minded dedication to profit-generating yields and sales has not only failed to solve the hunger problem, it has also created new problems, especially in terms of inequality, health, and environmental sustainability. The dominant food regime is by no means designed to guarantee equitable distribution. Rather, "the expansion of trade […] has resulted in the luxury tastes of the richest parts of the world being allowed to compete against the satisfaction of the basic needs of the poor" (De Schutter 2014: 221).

Food becomes a mere commodity, subject to financial speculation, which leads to rising and increasingly volatile prices for consumers, as well as increased risk for small producers (Isakson 2014; Ploeg 2010a; De Schutter 2014: 217). Further, the globalization of the food industry means that production, commercialization, and consumption are dispersed, connected only by trade networks in which a small number of food retailers are the dominant actors of the system (Friedman 2005; Burch and Lawrence 2005), especially in Latin America since the "supermarket revolution" that came with the

neoliberal policies of the 1990s (Isakson 2014: 752-753). These retailers have disproportionate control over the food trade, since they can impose conditions both "upstream" (on producers) and "downstream" (on consumers).

Neither is the food regime designed to provide healthy food. The food industry has incentives to sell processed foods that are high in fat, sugar, and salt. Other additives are introduced as well, since naturally perishable products must now travel long distances and keep for long periods of time. Consumers, who now import the food that they once produced, have very little power over these dynamics. Thus, even those with access to food still face serious health issues related to unbalanced diets, and obesity has become an epidemic in Mexico, the United States, and many other parts of the world (McIntyre et al 2009: 53-58; De Schutter 2014: 205-206; 210-211, 214; Garnett and Godfray 2012: 39-40).

The industrial food system also does grave harm to the environment. The "more efficient" production through Green Revolution technologies is dependent on unsustainable rates of consumption of fossil fuels and fresh water reserves, and it produces high levels of pollution while eroding soils (De Schutter 2014: 206-208; cf also McIntyre et al 2009: 59-64). The economies of scale of the current industrial model are directly responsible for the impending collapse of fisheries, biodiversity loss, and massive deforestation, itself associated with further greenhouse gas emissions (Pimbert 2009: 26-35). Most deforested land is used to raise livestock; this is the top contributing factor to climate change today (Hoffman 2013; De Schutter 2014: 209-211; McIntyre et al 2009: 46-52). Indeed, this model of agriculture is a major factor in our having brought more than one planetary boundary to near, or even beyond, its tipping point (Campbell et al 2017).

Among those most affected by all of the above factors are peasant[2] farmers, and indigenous peoples in particular. Many have been forced into a rural exodus, exacerbated by land grabs and price dumping by rich countries (De Schutter 2014: 211-213; cf also Pimbert 2009: 20-23). The plight of small farmers puts all of humanity's long-term food security at risk, because without their *in-situ* conservation of crop biodiversity, which is the only way it can continue to develop, "our food crops are dangerously susceptible to new pests, emerging plant diseases, and climate change" (Isakson 2007:2; cf also Brookfield et al 2002; Brush 2004; Rival 2012a; Rival and McKey 2008). Further, the world is quickly losing the place-based knowledge that these peoples have developed over millennia to live sustainably in their geographic contexts (Pimbert 2009: 24; McIntyre et al 2009: 71-74; Morales and Perfecto 2000; Toledo 2005). In other words, the people who might still show us a way out of the crisis created by the industrial agro-food system are the very people being pushed out by it.

Few experts would deny that we are in a crisis in need of urgent solutions. However, the defenders of the industrial agro-food system offer purported solutions that ignore the underlying problems. Generally, their propositions correspond to one or a combination of three arguments: (a) technology will make the problem go away; (b) growth is what really matters; and (c) there is no alternative.

The technological argument is well represented by Conway and Waage (2010). Characteristically, they place their trust in the innovations of Monsanto, for example (Ibid: 135, 336), without considering any questions of political economy, such as what sorts of innovations are incentivized under current conditions (cf De Schutter 2010: 17-18). Likewise, Garnett and Godfray (2012: 26) seriously entertain the proposition that

[2] By "peasant," I mean "rural producers who produce for their own consumption and for sale, using their own and family labour, though the hiring and selling of labour power is also quite possible and compatible with peasant society" (Harriss 1982a: 24).

"[…] one may support the continued application of synthetic fertilisers in the anticipation of technological developments that will mitigate their negative effects."

The second type of argument reframes the situation as an overall positive one. Its proponents dismiss agroecology as "emotional" (Garnett and Godfray 2012: 16) and suggest that food sovereignty is a passing fad (cf Dercon and Gollin 2014: 475). This "growth is what really matters" argument relies on abstracted "big picture" reasoning. Gollin et al (2013), for example, show mathematically that labour productivity increases with urbanization, and therefore fret that too many peasants are still farming, representing a "misallocation of capital" that diminishes the "aggregate output" of national economies. Questions of unemployment aside (De Schutter 2010: 11), what seems to matter to them is how much income is produced per units of labour, and not at all which things are being produced. Food is treated as just another commodity among others.

Others, like Bernstein (2014), claim sympathy with the analysis made by the dominant system's critics, but simply do not believe that it is possible to feed the world in any other way. This is the "there is no alternative" argument. It leads to fatalistic reasoning such as Garnett and Godfray's (2012: 27), when they say that the best we can do is plan for what we will do once we have exhausted non-renewable resources such as fresh water reserves.

These arguments in defence of the currently dominant system are unconvincing. Surely, technological optimism is quite a risky bet given the stakes (Thompson and Scoones 2009). Further, it ignores the fact that many problems related to the agro-food system, such as the lack of rural feeder roads for improved access to markets, do not require high-tech solutions or even large investments, only simple political will (cf De Schutter 2010: 19).

Besides their penchant for ignoring negative externalities, "growth" fundamentalists ignore that the abstract logic of economic trade-offs itself is inadequate when dealing with real natural ecosystems. For example, Garnett and Godfray's (2012: 28-33) discussion of land sparing vs land sharing ignores what scientists know about how biodiversity interacts with landscapes, which, in the context of the real geography and political economy of relevant regions, leads to very different conclusions than theirs (cf Perfecto et al 2009: esp. 200-203; also McIntyre et al 2009: 6, 61-62).[3] Likewise, abstracted "big picture" arguments hide what we know well: higher growth measured in terms of a country's overall productivity does not necessarily translate into basic elements of human development, such as food security and healthy nutrition (Sen 1999).

As for the question of alternatives, more and more policymakers – including the fifty-eight national governments that signed the landmark IAASTD report in 2009 – are realizing that "business as usual is no longer an option" (McIntyre et al 2009: 3). They are lending increasing support to innovative food system designs, such as those that prioritize the role of small farmers and agroecological modes of production (cf McIntyre et al 2009; De Schutter 2010; Altieri and Toledo 2011: 598-601, 604). Indeed, among other things, what is at stake in this "food regime crisis" is the renegotiation of development paradigms (McMichael 2009, 2005).

Alternatives

There are indeed alternatives. Since the root of the problem is an economic model that neglects (or exploits) its embeddedness in social and ecological relationships, the fundamental challenge has to do with designing a food economy that takes responsibility for its reliance and impact on the different nested systems of which it is a part. That is

[3] The mixed cropping and certain other aspects typical of smallholder farms create a matrix that allows passage for migrating organisms, in ways that large monocultures do not (Perfecto et al 2009).

what agroecology, food sovereignty, social and solidarity economy are trying to do, and they combine at this nexus in various permutations.

The first area of innovation is agroecology and food sovereignty. Agroecology aims to make agriculture as symbiotic as possible with the connections and cyclical flows of ecological processes (Jones et al 2011; Altieri 1995; Ploeg 2010a: 99-100). Productivity is increased, for example, by learning to care for the microorganisms that are part of healthy soil ecosystems. Agroecology has grown in sophistication since the 1970s, incorporating scientific and traditional knowledge along with concern for socio-cultural dimensions, and its scope as a multidisciplinary, action-oriented approach has expanded from the field level to its present concern with entire food systems (Hecht 1995; Francis et al. 2003; Méndez et al 2013).

Agroecologists also promote local food systems. This would reduce dependence on fossil fuels used to transport inputs and outputs (De Schutter 2010: 13), while also guaranteeing that food is fresh, with less need for additives that increase shelf life but can be unhealthy. Further, local food systems are more likely to be embedded in relationships of mutuality, which in turn will have an effect on distribution and access.

These factors are related to the food sovereignty paradigm, which posits the right of peoples to democratically determine the policies guiding the production, trade, and degree of self-sufficiency in their food systems, rather than being at the mercy of market mechanisms or other external forces that would determine this for them. Because these innovations call powerful regimes into question, they are manifestly political (González de Molina 2013, Holt-Giménez and Altieri 2013).

Social and solidarity economy (SSE) is another vibrant field of social innovation. Initiatives in SSE redefine the terms of economic exchange. Generally speaking, solidarity economy emphasizes reciprocity and mutuality over profit, while social

economy tries to make business useful to social objectives. The terms – and the related but distinct movements they represent – have been joined under the SSE umbrella partly as a political strategy to increase the visibility of both (Dacheux 2013; cf also Utting 2015).

Like agroecology, SSE has grown in complexity and academic rigor as well as scope and political vision, notably around the World Social Forum that first met in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001 (Hart et al 2010). Some SSE initiatives, like fair trade, are connected to sustainable agriculture, but the deeper complementarity of agroecology's environmental focus and SSE's socioeconomic one has not been sufficiently developed (cf Spratt 2015). These social innovations, in trying to achieve systemic change towards societal transformation, interact with particular regimes of political economy, which vary by region.

Hope at the margins

Hermeneutics of hope

My approach is defined by a "hermeneutics of hope." I take this term from the liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez (2012), and I intend it here as a play on "hermeneutics of suspicion." The latter phrase comes from Paul Ricoeur's (1970) description of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as the "masters of suspicion," since they look for hidden interests – money, power, sex – behind other phenomena.[4] This is the register social science is most comfortable with: we are good at unveiling the lies of our world. To be sure, there is value in critical analysis. But given the crisis we collectively face, if

[4] Ricoeur has also written extensively on hope, in dialogue with Moltmann. However, rather than pursuing a continuation of their philosophical-theological exchange, I am applying the concept of "hermeneutics of hope" here to a version of the methodology for "strategic reading of territories" by the Colombian social centres, Instituto Mayor Campesino and Suyusama, and adopted by the Comparte network (Aguilar Posada and Idárraga Quintero 2017; cf chapters 2 and 5).

social science is to "matter" (Flyvbjerg 2001), I think it is also important to reveal new promises. A hermeneutics of hope is aware of violence, but does not let it have the last word.

Hope is different from naïve optimism. It is a virtue, rooted in empirical realism and subject to rigorous scrutiny. The task of a hermeneutics of hope is to show whether, and in what sense, there is good reason to hope.

Methodologically, this begins by understanding a vision and recognizing its potential. Only then does it ask about the challenges for the potential to be realized. This is a reversal of the typical approach in development work, where one starts with a "diagnosis" and then looks for a "solution."

The point is not just about the fact that a "glass half-full" approach can be more empowering for actors. There is also an epistemological purpose to adopting, as much as possible, the empirical perspective of the subjects who espouse a creative vision. First, this method makes its situated point of reference explicit, and thereby calls attention to its relative nature with regard to other possible perspectives, rather than uncritically assuming a hegemonic frame. Further, from the particular perspective of the vision's agents, problems are problems for a reason. Some things that an outside observer might have assumed were problems could actually turn out to be irrelevant, or even advantages. Whatever problems there are, are problems precisely insofar as they stand in the way of the realization of the promise (ie, they are challenges).

By bringing out the most relevant contours of challenges in this way, the method also has strategic import for praxis and policy. In other words, a hermeneutics of hope is particularly suited to inductive empirical research that aims to understand the implications of a given initiative, with an eye to social change. I thus adopt this interpretive approach throughout the thesis.

Margins as spaces of clarity, creativity, and freedom

I also start from the assumption that hope can be found especially at the peripheries, or margins, of any given system. Periphery and centre are relational categories whose reality is socially produced.[5] While these positionalities can often be geographically mapped, it has more to do with power than with space per se.

Peripheries are by definition places of marginality and exclusion. They are also places from whence transformative social innovations often emerge, in contrast to technological innovations meant to extend a system's reach, which come mainly from its centre (cf Fu 2008). Indeed, the alternative movements described in the previous section – agroecology, food sovereignty, and social and solidarity economy – have largely originated, resonated, and gained strength in the peripheries of the dominant system (cf Altieri and Nicholls 2017; Altieri and Toledo 2011; Block et al 2012; Utting 2015).

There are, in my view, at least three important reasons for this. First, the contradictions of the centre are easier to see from a liminal angle (Gudeman 2016: 124), not least because they often cause suffering for the people who live in the centre's shadow (Ellacuría 1989). Because there is so much at stake in the centre's glaring contradictions, from a peripheral standpoint it is hard not to notice them. Margins are a place of clarity.

Second, the edges of a system are also its borders, places of encounter with other perspectives. Cross-fertilization happens naturally here; it is why the edge where two ecosystems meet is very often the most biodiverse part of both of them, and something analogous can be said of cultures (Holmgren 2017; Elizondo 2009). In other words, margins are a place of creativity.

[5] I am using these terms here in a wider sense than that found in Latin American dependency theory and world-systems theory, although their analysis of "core and periphery" is also relevant (cf chapter 4; Chase-Dunn 2016).

Finally, because of the above reasons, the centre does not have complete hegemony at the margins (cf Tsing 2015: 65). Indeed, by definition, the latter constitute the limits of the former. This affords some "wiggle room" where experimentation is possible, especially – as I will argue in chapter 5 – if there are other insulating factors that help turn these spaces into relatively protected niches where innovations can mature before having to confront adversity head-on (Haxeltine et al 2013). Margins are a place of freedom.

Latin America

Latin America is a peripheral region in the global context, and also the world's most unequal region, with large peripheries of its own. Not surprisingly, then, it has been the seedbed of many paradigm-shifting innovations. Among those related to models of development since the mid-20th century, dependency theory and structuralism (Bielschowsky 2009); liberation theology (Sobrino and Ellacuría 1994); and the concept of *buen vivir*, from the Aymara *suma qamaña* and the Quichua *sumak kawsay* (Mella 2015: 277-337), are especially prominent.

It has also produced an abundance of initiatives related to agroecology and food sovereignty, often combined with social and solidarity economy. Much is at stake in these latter movements, especially for the 65 million smallholder farmers in Latin America, most of whom are indigenous, and also for their neighbours, since it is the former who produce most of the staple food crops in several countries, including Mexico (Altieri and Toledo 2011: 593-594). Their ways of life – which not only provide livelihoods for themselves and others but also maintain and even enhance the wealth of biodiversity that characterises the region (Perfecto et al 2009; Rival and McKey 2008; Maffi 2001; Isakson

2007) – are quickly being eroded by the tendency towards further concentration of land and capital (Borras et al 2012).

As Pablo Mella (2015: 41-49) argues, evolving Latin American attempts to establish viable alternatives to neoliberal capitalism tend to cluster into two major currents. One is radical "post-development." The other is a more reformist "ethical development." Typical expressions of both have been framed in terms of *buen vivir* (Gudynas 2011; SENPLADES 2013), making the term somewhat ambiguous even as it is appropriated and translated into indigenous languages throughout the continent. In this context, Mella proposes an "ethics of post-development," which would move back and forth between a radical vision and the cracks that allow for creative action within the "world of development," which – whether we like it or not – permeates our current reality.

The Misión de Bachajón

This thesis is centred on a case study of the Misión de Bachajón (hereafter MB), which constitutes the local Catholic Church in a 3,500 km^2 area of the jungle region in the north of Chiapas. It is an especially innovative organization from an especially marginalized context. Chiapas is Mexico's southernmost state, bordering Guatemala to the East. It has a population of roughly 4.8 million people (INEGI 2010), of which 74.7% was living in multidimensional poverty in 2012, the highest rate of any state in Mexico (CONEVAL 2012). Indigenous people in Chiapas have the lowest Human Development Index value, rated at 0.61, in any of Mexico's 31 states or federal district (MRGI 2011).

The largest indigenous ethnic group are the Tseltal, whose language has over 461,000 speakers, followed by the Tsotsil, another Mayan group with some 417,000 speakers, and ten other federally recognized groups, most of which are also Mayan. Indigenous peoples in Chiapas have been the object of urbanization programmes since

the 16th century (cf Vogt 1969: 22-23), and as recently as 2007 (Wilson 2011). Despite this, 51% of the total population of Chiapas is rural, compared with 22% nationally (INEGI 2010). The proportion of rural dwellers is much higher among indigenous people.

The MB's territory comprises the municipalities of Chilón and Sitalá, and some rural parts of Yajalón, Ocosingo, Simojovel, Pantelhó, Salto de Agua, and Tumbalá. The population of approximately 300,000[6] is about 98% Tseltal; roughly 80% are Catholic (Zatyrka 2003). It is spread out in more than 650 rural villages, as well as a few small towns where non-indigenous people also live.

In the context of the Zapatista uprising in 1994, the MB and its allies achieved an unprecedented agrarian reform. Plantations were dismantled and most of the land is now collectively owned by Tseltal communities, with equitably distributed allotments for each family. Starting in the late 1990s, then, the MB has had both the opportunity and the task of designing an alternative economic system that would help them consolidate Tseltal sovereignty.

This thesis

This thesis is about how MB leaders have tried to guarantee the economic viability of Tseltal sovereignty. My empirical interest is not only in the historical details of this struggle, but also – and especially – in teasing out the model of economy that underlies and motivates their project. In this way, the thesis speaks directly to questions that resonate with the struggles and dreams of other peoples and places; as we shall see, these connections are very much part of the MB's story.

[6] This is an approximation based on the 2010 census. The municipality of Chilón, with a population of 220,000, is the largest part of the MB territory.

Asking our questions with constant reference to food systems is a way of keeping them grounded in the way that Tseltal people think about their economy, and in a way that sheds light on the interconnections between their economy and all of the other aspects of their sovereignty mentioned above. At the same time, the questions are framed in terms of a particular theoretical model from economic anthropology, which can help account for such a wide and complex vision of the economy.

The thesis is organized as follows. In chapter 1, I build a theoretical model, based on the work of Stephen Gudeman, which can adequately encompass and illuminate the MB's economic strategy. In chapter 2, I describe and justify my research methods in light of epistemological, ethical and other considerations. In chapter 3, I show how the MB has shaped its economy into two separate domains, corresponding to the "market" and the "community" (with its base) as in the theoretical model. I focus in this chapter on the realm of community and base, showing how the MB protects its food and other essential elements from commodification as a way of enacting Tseltal sovereignty. In chapter 4, I turn to the MB's strategies in the realm of the market, showing how sovereignty entails both gaining control within the global value chain of coffee and articulating the value produced there with the social and ecological concerns of the community. In chapter 5, I discuss how the MB has been able to build its innovative economy in the midst of an adverse system, and how it aims to transform that system, both locally and beyond. Finally, in the conclusion I explore the sense in which the MB's experience might indeed give us reason to hope.

Epigraphs, photographs, and an allegory appear in the interstices of this structure. Inspired by Tsing (2015: viii), these are not necessarily meant to illustrate particular points but rather to evoke the "spirit" of the story I am telling, and of the world into which I am inviting you, the reader.

The Allegory of the Lion

If the unbridled market is like a wild animal – a lion, for example – that invades a village and eats the people, then the people have three options to defend their community. The most obvious one would be to kill the lion. This has been the strategy of communist experiments, which have tried to build economies with no market. History has taught us that this option is not very viable. Besides, the lion's ghost (an informal, inefficient market) tends to haunt communist economies.

The second possibility is to build a fence. That is, to demarcate a protected area, where the market is not allowed to enter. This is the strategy of solidarity economy, which tries to generate a space for economic life that is not mediated by money (except perhaps a strictly local currency). Solidarity economy emphasizes reciprocal practices, like barter, and generous ones, like voluntary service. The risk with this strategy is that when people build a fence to keep the lion out, they also lock themselves in, isolating themselves. This is why these initiatives tend to be small and fragile.

The third possibility is to tame the lion, and even domesticate it – using its strength for the ends of the community. In other words, to place the market at the service of the people, rather than the service of capital accumulation. This is the logic of social economy, whose typical expression is the "social business." These function with the efficiency of a capitalist enterprise, but their principal mission is to create a social good. The risk with this strategy is that it requires getting very close to the lion, and sometimes lions end up eating the people who would tame them. In other words, social economy by itself can become a Trojan horse that allows the market to sneak even further into the sphere of community, displacing other bodies like civil society and the state.

Gudeman's model, and the allegory of the lion, allow us to understand what is at stake in the repertoire of options available to those communities, such as the Tseltal, who aim to restore themselves to a position of strength vis-à-vis the globalized capitalist market. They will also allow us to appreciate the genius in the way that the MB has approached this challenge. To restore the health of its region's economy, and with it the possibility of a shared, sustainable life, the MB has creatively articulated two complementary strategies.

By the author (translated and adaped from Travieso 2016).
On the idea of SSE as Trojan horse, cf McMurtry 2013.

Chapter 1
A Life-Giving Economy: Theoretical Framework

INTRODUCTION

If the mainstream economy is an "economy that kills" (Francis 2013: par. 53), what does a healthy, life-giving economy look like? We shall not ask the mainstream economists, whose vision is behind the social and environmental crises we face today. Ecological economics would seem an obvious response, but for reasons that will become clear by the end of this chapter, it would be somewhat too narrow for our ends, and somewhat problematic insofar as it aims to commensurate environmental values with monetary ones. As for the other alternative movements I have mentioned, such as social and solidarity economy, they are normatively attractive, but missing a systematic theoretical framework to account for economy as such.

For the latter task, we might do best to turn to contemporary economic anthropology. More specifically, Stephen Gudeman has been recognized by his peers as having carried out the most sustained and systematic effort to build a general theory of economy (cf Hann and Hart 2011: 84; Gregory 2002; Hart 2017; Escobar 2008: 73; cf also Löfving 2005). Indeed, the Chicago-born anthropologist has spent the last several decades developing a general theory of economy which is at once empirically rooted in cross-cultural analysis and explicitly grounded in an ethics of sustainability and the recognition of plural values. Gudeman's interdisciplinary academic background – a combination of social and economic theory, business administration, and anthropology

in both the British and U.S. traditions – makes him uniquely positioned for this endeavour.[7]

Furthermore, Gudeman has created an elegant model, simple and yet full of explanatory power. Besides adding to the persuasiveness and usefulness of his work (cf Carrier 2009), the elegance of his framework presents an important advantage for our ends. This thesis discusses an organization's complex response to some of the world's most complicated problems. To proceed, we will therefore need to be conversant in a number of languages, from those of the social and natural sciences to those of philosophy and even theology. As we move from chapter to chapter, we will drop in on new debates at every turn. Our ongoing conversation will demand agile code-switching, occasional translation, and zooming in and out between technical or contextual points and the big picture. In that sense, Gudeman's theoretical model can offer a helpful *lingua franca*, an overarching theoretical frame of reference to ensure that the common thread of my argument does not get lost in a tangle of tangents. His framework is elegant enough to be able to host our eclectic conversation, while keeping it coherent.

In what follows, I will first briefly recount Gudeman's theoretical itinerary, showing how his ideas have developed in dialogue with both empirical phenomena and theoretical debates. Then, I will present a synthesis of his mature model, which understands economy as a dialectic between two realms, whereby one of them tends to "cascade" into the other, which leads him to take a normative stance in relation to what the model describes. Finally, I will point out a few elements of the model that will need further theoretical development in order to use it for finding hope at the margins.

[7] Gudeman's work has been brought to bear on social and solidarity economy (Rakopoulos 2014; Dash 2015), the conservation of agrobiodiversity (Rival 2018), and indigenous (food) sovereignty (McLeod 2014). To my knowledge, though, it has not been systematically explored in dialogue with those interconnected issues in the way that I am doing here.

PART I: STEPHEN GUDEMAN AND HIS WORK

In the late 1960s, Gudeman set out to conduct fieldwork in rural Panama for his doctoral thesis in anthropology at Cambridge. He wanted to study the economic decisions of rural peasants, which he assumed would take the form of the rational choice models he had learned previously at Harvard Business School. However, he soon discovered that those models were inapplicable in the village, since people simply did not make their decisions in the terms assumed by neoclassical economics (Gudeman 2001: 2).

At a loss, Gudeman ended up writing his thesis on kinship relations instead (Gudeman 1976a), but he did not let go of the puzzle that had initially stumped him. Eventually, he came to realize that he had stumbled upon the existence of an entirely different way of thinking about the economy, which he sometimes describes with the shorthand of the "house" model of economy (Gudeman in Museum of Arts and Design 2013). In the "house" model, plural incommensurable values are reproduced and shared in different ways by a community in order to achieve the reproduction of its common "base" (ie, that which sustains the community by mediating its relationships), rather than aiming for profit maximization as in the "market" model of economics. Gudeman also understood, with the aid of Latin American dependency theory, that he had witnessed the demise of this other economy in its transition to a globalized market economy (Gudeman 1978).

Having seen that there was more than one way to think about the economy, Gudeman then set out to examine a wider range of economic models. Drawing on both ethnographic literature and theoretical economics, he found several models from different times and places. This in turn led him to a more abstract, continuing reflection on how models and metaphors emerge from different cultural experiences to describe the economy (Gudeman 1986).

Recognizing something universal in it, Gudeman decided to interrogate the "house" model of economy more closely. He embarked on more fieldwork, this time in Colombia with his former student, Alberto Rivera (Gudeman and Rivera 1990). As Gudeman gradually comprehended, the "house" model can be traced at least as far back as Aristotle; it has been forgotten by mainstream economists, but not by the Latin American peasants who have kept that long tradition alive, and for whom it still makes sense.

At the same time, Gudeman noticed that various important contemporary schools of economic thought are lacking, in that they all overlook the "house." Having discovered its relevance in Panama, and later in Colombia (and Guatemala), Gudeman had begun to recognize the "house" model's empirical, if often unremarked, persistence everywhere he looked. It was not only to be found in rural Latin America, but also in "high-market" societies such as the United States, and (as he has more recently noted) in the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, albeit to different degrees and in different ways in each context. He had also confirmed its importance, and the way in which it is threatened by certain economic dynamics that are increasingly globalized.

Having reached this clarity, Gudeman began to emphasize that we should notice the "house's" presence in the midst of our economy, and that we should look after it. This message comes across clearly in his three most recent major works.[8] In 2001, his *The Anthropology of Economy* engages with three major schools of economic thought, bringing the relevance of the "house" (that is, the economic model centred on the community's reproduction of its base) to bear on them. To the economists who follow Ricardo, he does not deny the importance of trade, but he insists that trade is impossible

[8] Gudeman has produced an unending stream of publications from the 1970s to the present. His shorter publications (articles and book chapters) tend to build up a series of evolving arguments, which then cohere in his landmark books every few years. Thus, I am focusing here on Gudeman's major publications (ie, books).

without the trust that is built in community, and that the purpose of trade is ultimately to maintain the base. Addressing the anthropologist heirs to Malinowski, he argues that reciprocity is not the core of communal economies, but rather a function of expanding the base, whose reproduction is actually the central aim. Turning then to the more historically inclined Schumpeterian economists, he explains that innovation – the source of market growth – can only come from the symbolic logic of the base, not the calculative reason of the market.

In this same dialogue, Gudeman is sure to recognize the valid points of each of the above schools of economic thought. His aim is to show their compatibility with the "house," both empirically and theoretically. This mutual enrichment allows him to expand his model into an original, composite view of economy in terms of interacting parts and dynamics. (I offer a synthetic overview of Gudeman's model below.)

By 2008, Gudeman had sharpened the focus of his model in order to make it as pertinent and intelligible as possible to the particular debate with neoclassical economics.[9] This choice is understandable, since Gudeman had come to realize how the "market" model's unchecked expansion had harmful implications. Thus, his *Economy's Tension* presents a streamlined model, meant to mimic the stylistic habits of neoclassical economists (Gudeman in Museum of Arts and Design 2013). In this book, he emphasizes the harmful consequences of neglecting the "base" for the sake of the "market," and he takes a normative stance about how we should correct this state of affairs.

Eight years later, Gudeman published *Anthropology and Economy* (2016). In this iteration, the main ideas are relatively unchanged, but he has fine-tuned some aspects of

[9] Although Gudeman is still careful here to spell out the main points of his arguments in dialogue with a wide range of theorists, from Marx and Weber to Polanyi and many contemporary authors, his non-neoclassical interlocutors are engaged somewhat more succinctly in this book. (With Gudeman, I consider the new institutional economists, whom he engages at some length, as belonging within the neoclassical tradition.)

his evolving model (eg, adding a sphere to its architecture – discussed below – to distinguish between finance and meta-finance). He also updates it with reflections on current events (eg, the financial crisis that occurred while his 2008 book was in press),[10] as well as a fresh look at themes that have recurred in his work (such as "vital energy" and ritual). The normative proposal from the previous work is reaffirmed, but this time with several concrete policy recommendations.

What is newest in this most recent book, though, is its attempt to engage a wider, non-specialist audience.[11] To this end, Gudeman employs a fresh rhetorical device – an imaginary ongoing conversation between himself, an economist and an anthropologist, as he explains his theory to them and answers their objections.[12] The emphases throughout the book suggest that its intended audience is immersed in "high-market" society and its habits of thought. Again, this choice is understandable for reasons related to the urgency and scope of his normative proposal, and also because of the fact that Gudeman's teaching career has been based in the United States, the high-market society *par excellence*.

I will argue below that, given Gudeman's priority of critically analysing the dynamics of high-market society, applying his theory to the related but distinct project of searching for hope at the margins will require some adaptation. First, though, I offer a synthetic overview of Gudeman's model, which will serve as our main point of

[10] Cf Gudeman 2008: 147, footnote 17.

[11] The book is part of Cambridge University Press' "New Departures in Anthropology" series, described by the publishers as "designed equally for advanced students and a broader range of readers, inside and outside academic anthropology." Hart (2017) seems oblivious to this when he critiques Gudeman for not using a more academic style here. Hart's other major critique, regarding Gudeman's attempt to create an abstract cross-cultural model, rather than a thick description grounded in the particulars of a political economy, is also unfair in my view, since Gudeman is simply carrying out a different sort of project at this stage, based on his previous ethnographic work. In any case, his model is entirely compatible with a more fine-grained empirical approach. This thesis is precisely an attempt to apply Gudeman's model to a case in a way that takes politics and history into account.

[12] This novelty is surely inspired by an intervening conversation on the importance of rhetoric in persuasion (Gudeman 2009), and simultaneously by the metaphor that gave the title to Gudeman's 1990 book with Alberto Rivera.

theoretical reference throughout this thesis. For our purposes, it will be useful to follow the line of argument from Gudeman's 2008 book, where the model is most systematically laid out in theoretical terms, while drawing on other parts of his oeuvre to ensure a robust and up-to-date account. My synthesis of Gudeman's model will focus on the core of his theory – a model, its dynamics, and a normative proposal – while leaving out many of the corollary theories (eg about money and price) that germinate from that core. Gudeman's work is full of interesting side-conversations that are certainly worth pursuing; here, though, I will present only those that are entirely pertinent for the case study at hand. In the same spirit, where relevant I will expand on Gudeman's model by drawing on the work of other economic anthropologists.

Gudeman's framework

Economy's Tension

Gudeman's model, in essence, comprises two main theoretical arguments, which lead to a normative conclusion. The first theoretical argument has to do with the nature of economy. For Gudeman, all economies are composed of a dialectic between two dynamics, market exchange on the one hand, and mutuality on the other (2008: 4-5).

The market is the realm of impersonal exchange, where people act as competitive, self-interested rational choosers. Mutuality is the realm of community, where people share according to heterogeneous systems of value, and steward a common "base," composed of the tangible and intangible elements that allow them to reproduce their collective existence. Whereas the market realm is characterized by short-term

interactions, the realm of mutuality is about long-term relationships that extend even beyond the lifespan of individuals (Parry and Bloch 1989).[13]

The realms are not different because they have distinct ontological essences (Gudeman 2016: 13); they are different because they correspond to the social fact that people tend to organize their economic lives this way. The difference may be ambiguous and the realms inevitably overlap (Gudeman 2016: 13; Gregory 1997; Robotham 2009), but ethnographers have shown that people go to great lengths to keep them separate (cf eg Little 2004; Zelizer 2010; Day 2007; Hutchinson 1992).

It is a dialectic, because even though the two realms are irreducible to each other, they are also indissociable from each other.[14] Markets require trust and mutuality to function, while people look to the market to obtain what they need to maintain their community's base. This double bind of opposed but intertwined economic logics produces a tension between the poles, which we navigate in daily life as we move back and forth between our "disjoint" (market-oriented) and "conjoint" (community-oriented) identities (Gudeman 2016: 13). The need to creatively negotiate this tension is the motor that ultimately drives all economies.

Dynamics of debasement

The model is therefore a dynamic one, and Gudeman's second major theoretical argument addresses its dynamics. Gudeman argues that the market tends to grow at the expense of the community and its base, in two main ways. On the one hand, it takes exploitative "rents" from the realm of mutuality, and on the other hand, it "cascades" into

[13] Gudeman (2001: 19) recognizes the affinity between his model and Bloch and Parry's.
[14] With this formulation I am paraphrasing Derrida (2001), who used it in a different context.

it (Gudeman 2016: 175-183; 190-191). Perhaps both of these movements are best captured by the synonym Gudeman sometimes uses for cascading, "colonization."

Rent-taking is possible because the structural nature of the economy – connected distinction – allows for the transfer of value between realms (Gudeman 2008: 87ss).[15] More specifically, Gudeman identifies a series of increasingly abstract "spheres" of exchange that span the two realms, starting with the house and the community in the realm of mutuality, and then commerce, finance, and meta-finance as value crosses into the realm of the market.[16] Gudeman argues that the higher spheres tend to exploit the value generated in the lower spheres on which they depend. The house is forced to subsidize the market, for example, by providing uncosted resources and unpaid services, and by absorbing negative externalities without compensation.[17]

Rent-seeking is enabled at each step by different types of asymmetrical relations (Gudeman 2016: 179). Within the house and the community, the goods of the base are secured and allocated according to a hierarchy (based on gender or age, for example) that is determined through political and ideological power. In the spheres of commerce and finance, value is disproportionately captured through monopoly control of capital. Meta-financiers use both capital and insider knowledge to take rents.

To be sure, value can be transferred in the opposite direction (from the higher to the lower spheres) as well. Gudeman cites Carsten's (1989) ethnographic example of how money from the market is "cooked" in a Malay fishing village to bring it into the domestic sphere (Gudeman 2008: 109). The problem, though, is that the unconstrained market has

[15] Cf Myers (2001) for a survey of and contribution to the literature on trajectories between regimes of value. Gudeman's theory (along with Tsing's 2015) contrasts with the acritical tendency of this literature's most representative authors (cf Gregory 2005).

[16] The exact composition of spheres has evolved with the iterations of Gudeman's model (from four in 2001, to three in 2008, to five in 2016); here I am using his most recent description.

[17] For a particularly intricate example of this, cf Gudeman and Rivera 2002: 177. Similarly, "In capitalist farms, living things made within ecological processes [such as photosynthesis and animal digestion] are coopted for the concentration of wealth" (Tsing 2015: 62-63).

no internal mechanism to provoke this; the higher spheres are characterized precisely by a heightened disjoint rationality, which motivates rent-seeking. A healthy circular flow can only be ensured by the community's control over the market. When the balance is lost, the circle can become vicious, because the overgrown market also erodes the community's strength through the process of cascading.

The market tends to cascade into the realm of mutuality, first in terms of its rationality, and then through the material consequences of that. As people increasingly engage in market trade, they become accustomed to commensuration and cost/benefit analysis. The proportion between short-term impersonal interactions and long-term relations of mutuality also begins to shift. As the market gains prevalence in people's lives, the disjoint identity, with its transactional attitude, calculative reason, and accelerated pace (Bear 2017), is brought deeper and more often into the sphere of community.

Thus, the distinction between the realms weakens, and as a result, things that were once held to belong to heterogeneous realms of value suddenly become commensurable. To the degree that they become commensurable, money can mediate their exchange, and what was once part of the base is thus brought into the realm of the market. In other words, the base is made subject to commodification, or as Marx and Engels (1978 [1848]) would put it, "all that is sacred becomes profane."

Cascading occurs through the increasingly habitual experience of trade, but it is further enabled by mystification and ritual (Gudeman 2016: 83-92). Mystification is where the market cloaks itself in the language of community. For example, advertising firms often aim to provoke feelings of familial love in order to sell a product. This has the effect of blurring the distinction between community and market, and even promises that community can be attained through the market. Rituals appeal to symbolic

rationality, that is, the way humans make associations through mimicry, metaphor, and proximity. Thus, a brand endorsement by a well-loved celebrity implicitly promises a closer relationship to the beloved celebrity, or even contagious transfer of that person's charism, through commercial consumption. In other words, the market uses ritual to make the profane feel sacred.[18]

The dialectics of economy, at least in our time, has a marked tendency to "debasement." The base is eroded by both the one-way extraction of value (rent-taking) and the disadvantageous redrawing of its borders (commodification through commensuration, ie, cascading). This is dangerous, not only because the community and its base are valuable in themselves, but also because – as we have seen – the two realms need each other. The market depends on social and ecological conditions, even when (as in the derivatives market of the meta-financial sphere) it profits from their destabilization. Furthermore, economic "growth depends on mutuality and community," not least because growth comes about through innovation, which springs from the lateral thinking and relationships of the base, not from calculative reason (Gudeman 2008: 151-155; Gudeman 1992). By provoking debasement, then, the unbridled market undermines the conditions for its own possibility.

[18] Parry and Bloch (1989: 29) describe contemporary capitalist ideology as the revolutionary proposition that the two spheres can be conflated entirely, so that market relations would constitute the only form of community, and "*only* unalloyed private vice […] can sustain the public benefit." From that perspective, the distinction between "sacred" (taken here to mean that which is incommensurably valuable and held in community) and "profane" (taken here to mean that which is commensurable and subject to alienation through short-term impersonal exchange) would be meaningless. Gudeman grants space for ambiguity, as seen above, but his ultimate point is that the capitalist proposition is in fact untenable, and that manufactured illusions to the contrary are therefore a form of "cascading" with dangerous consequences.

Normative proposal

On these grounds, Gudeman makes a normative proposal. We need to restore the balance between mutuality and market. This involves, primarily, protecting and investing in the base.

Concretely, Gudeman suggests several policy measures. Asymmetries should be levelled by recognizing an economy's stakeholders (rather than only its market shareholders) and creating mechanisms for democratic decision-making among them. Measures should be taken to protect and promote alternative forms of business that are more conducive to a healthy economy, such as cooperatives. Regulations should limit the extent of rent-taking, and where it occurs, a Tobin tax can recapture that value and then reinvest it in the base (through public spending in health and education, for example) to close the circle (Gudeman 2016: 182).

More provocatively, Gudeman suggests that "we should apply 'house therapy'" to high-market economies that have lost their balance in terms of inequality, environmental degradation and financial instability (Gudeman 2016: 170). "House therapy" would entail bringing "the goals of efficiency and growth […] into relation with other values of economy, such as sufficiency, sustainability, and care for the environment" (Ibid.). In other words, it would be a reversal of neoliberal "shock therapy," both in terms of the treatment and in terms of the patients who need it (Ibid.).

Beyond these measures, Gudeman's ultimate normative proposal is that we start "a conversation about other ways of conducting our material lives that will lead to less damaging results for ourselves and the environment" (Gudeman 2008: 4). His descriptive model itself is a political implement, designed to spark that debate (Ibid.). He encourages plural, ongoing, and contextualized conversations, which he hopes will be informed by his clear description of economy's universal dialectic (Gudeman 2009: 79).

PART II: ADAPTING GUDEMAN'S MODEL TO FIND HOPE AT THE MARGINS

In this thesis, I propose to pivot Gudeman's theoretical framework, turning its attention to a project that is complementary to his, but slightly different. Whereas Gudeman targets the dynamics and mentality of high-market society, pointing out its dangerous shortcomings, I am interested in the potential of his theory for elucidating a positive vision of economy, capable of mobilizing hope where the dominant model currently produces suffering. To be sure, Gudeman's criteria already constitute a rigorous test for any such claim, and his model offers the key insights that can be used to build a hopeful account. However, this latter task will require us to pay careful attention to three particular points that, for the good reasons explained above, Gudeman has left incomplete.

Decreasing returns vs increasing returns

One important point that must be further developed in order to repurpose Gudeman's model has to do with the types of economic activities that take place in the market. While mainstream economics, following Ricardo, does not recognize any qualitative distinctions in economic activities, a much older tradition – what Erik Reinert (2007) calls "the Other Canon" – points out the crucial difference between those activities that produce decreasing returns on investment and those that produce increasing returns.[19] Agriculture and natural resource extraction are typical examples of the former, while manufacturing and advanced services are typical examples of the latter.

The difference between decreasing and increasing returns is essential for understanding "how rich countries got rich and why poor countries stay poor" (Reinert 2007). Increasing returns activities generate economies of scale; lowered costs lead to

[19] Among economic anthropologists, Keith Hart (2015) writes from this perspective.

increased market shares and thereby create a barrier for competition; this allows for accumulation of profits that can be profitably invested in further innovation of new or more efficient increasing returns activities. Meanwhile, decreasing returns activities have the opposite effects.

Gudeman frequently draws on authors who belong to this tradition of thought, such as Schumpeter, Veblen, and the Latin American dependency theorists (cf Ibid.: 21-70). Schumpeter, for example, understood that innovation only leads to profits in the context of increasing returns activities, hence his introduction of a term, "historical increasing returns," to express both concepts together (Ibid.: 280). The dependency school emphasizes the consequences of asymmetric trade between societies with different economic structures in terms of the distinction between types of economic activity (ie, declining terms of trade for those specialized in decreasing returns activities). Indeed, this argument is at the root of Gudeman's description of how debasement typically occurs in peasant societies (cf chapter 3). Despite these connections, Gudeman's model does not draw out the full implications of the distinction between decreasing and increasing returns activities.

In fairness, Gudeman's main interlocutors, as far as economists are concerned, are steeped in the Ricardian tradition and would not find the above distinction intelligible. Emphasizing that distinction might therefore detract from his model's persuasiveness. Furthermore, we have noted that his intended audience is based in "high-market" societies – also known as industrialized societies – which can take for granted the increasing returns activities that make trade so advantageous for them (which is precisely one of the main reasons they became "high-market").

From the margins, however, it is impossible not to notice that Gudeman's examples of "low-market" (or transitional) societies' commodities typically include

agricultural products such as onions, cotton, and rice, whereas the "high-market" commodities include "the Ford *car*, Hewlett-Packard *printer*, Microsoft *program*, Kenmore *dishwasher*, or Homart *appliance*" (Gudeman 2001: 148, emphasis added). While Gudeman lists the latter products to make a point about what is conveyed by their brand names, noticing their industrial nature is even more relevant for our purposes. I will expand on the implications of this distinction in chapters 3 and 4.

Politics

I have mentioned how political and ideological power shape the construction of hierarchies of incommensurable values, which translates into inequality when the community shares and allocates the goods of the base according to these values. [20] Gudeman recognizes that these relations can be oppressive (Gudeman 2008: 5). Gregory, who puts forth a similar model, expands on this by emphasizing that there is ongoing conflict with respect to the base, which is always local and historically situated (Gregory 1982, 1997, 2009).[21] It often includes negotiation over membership at the borders of the

[20] I also mentioned that gender is one very common axis of such inequality; a word on why I am not relating Gudeman's model to feminist economics is warranted here. Nancy Fraser (2016) and others have theorized the distinction between production and reproduction (and the way in which gender symbolism interacts with their asymmetrical valuation) in ways that could certainly make for a fruitful dialogue with Gudeman's realms of market and mutuality. Despite their immediate resonance, however, the two models do not map onto each other so simply. Gudeman does recognize how cascading is intertwined with the reification of gender dualism (Gudeman 2008: 71, 73 footnote 23), and he notes a gendered difference in the strength of communal commitments [or obligations] (Ibid.: 103). However, he frames gender as only one of many heterogeneous values at play (Ibid.: 38-39), and observes that cascading affects both male and female labour in households (Ibid.: 60). Further, Gudeman's model is applicable at various scales, making the issue of gender more or less relevant depending on the case. In the case that occupies this thesis, a highly gendered household economy (in Fraser's sense) overlaps and interacts with dynamics of mutuality and market (in Gudeman's sense) at the societal level. Since this thesis is primarily an account of the latter story, I will consider gender from the latter perspective, leaving our potential theoretical dialogue, and the enriched account that could result from it, for another opportunity (in the meantime, cf Gudeman and Gudeman 1997).

[21] A shorthand comparison between Gudeman's and Gregory's respective models can be expressed with the following analogy, where the left side represents Gudeman's concepts, and the right side, Gregory's: base : community : market :: goods : brotherhood : market (cf Gregory 1997: 80-89, 109-110). Gudeman (2001: 24, note 18) recognizes the resonance between the two models.

community; a distant relation, for example, might claim kinship solidarity if she is poor, and evade it if she is rich (Gregory 1997).

Multiple communities can overlap, be embedded in each other, and be more or less permeable (Gudeman 2008: 27). Distinct communities can be related to each other in other ways. Communities engage in reciprocal gift-exchange to establish trust, thereby enabling trade and renewing or expanding their common base (Gudeman 2008: 40-41). In many cases, there are stable communities-of-communities, such as (paradigmatically) the moiety systems studied by anthropologists. These systems are "objective" institutions, an external social reference that constitutes communities through their interrelatedness with each other (Gregory 1997: 53-63).

However, communities that are embedded only in the market can be detrimental to the common good, because they engage other communities through their disjoint identity. Gudeman refers, for example, to cronyism within the financial spheres (Gudeman 2016: 67-68).[22] Gregory theorizes such communities through his concept of "brotherhoods." In contrast to those that are embedded in an "objective" base, brotherhoods are "subjective" communities with no external social reference. Their only relationship to other communities is through the market itself; even their gift-giving is a mystification of "taking" (Gregory 2009). As globalization increases the reach of brotherhoods who see everything outside of themselves as a commodity, conflict and instability abound (Gregory 1997: 114-117).

In this light, I will be sure to examine the "politics of the base," and also the way in which the MB relates to communities beyond itself, as part of my empirical analysis. Gudeman and Gregory will be helpful for understanding the implications, not only for

[22] Although Gudeman is mostly making a point about how mutuality exists even within the high market, he also points out the illegality of some of this behavior, thus hinting at how it can be problematic for society.

the MB's own ends but also for the larger common good. In chapter 5 we will need to expand on Gudeman's framework even further to account for the MB's transformative politics, which mobilize various relationships in order to change the system from below.

Integral ecology

Largely in a sustained dialogue with Alf Hornborg, Gudeman has responded to challenges regarding his model's environmental implications. Hornborg's fundamental challenge is that Gudeman's model treats the "base" in somewhat abstract terms, rather than focusing on its concrete ecological dimensions (Hornborg 2005). Gudeman has responded to Hornborg both explicitly (first in the same volume as Hornborg's critique,[23] and again in a 2012 article) and implicitly (in his 2008 book).

Gudeman defends his theory on epistemological grounds. He distinguishes between the base and the "raw environment," and emphasizes that the base may be made up of almost anything, including nonmaterial information, rules, or ideas (Gudeman 2005: 140; 2008: 30). His argument against any *a priori* identification of the base with the environment, or with a calculation of its "throughput" (as in ecological economics), is that to do so is already an act of "basification," in which whichever community sees the environment this way is culturally construing it as such (Gudeman 2008: 30).

At the same time, though, Gudeman makes it clear that he does in fact see the environment as an important part of the base shared by him and his readers (Gudeman 2005: 143). In *Economy's Tension,* he unambiguously warns of environmental debasement as a primary danger of cascading (Gudeman 2008: 15, 89-90). He illustrates the concept of "debasement" with a case related to climate change (Gudeman 2008: 165,

[23] It is a book that grew out of an academic conference that was held to debate Gudeman's theory, in which Gudeman himself participated (Gudeman 2005; Löfving 2005).

note 18), and he expands on another ecological example from his previous book (cf Gudeman 2001: 156; Gudeman 2008: 36-37).

Gudeman's theoretical stubbornness vis-à-vis Hornborg is not meant to undermine real environmental concerns, then, but rather to underline an epistemological understanding of how those concerns are construed. He also spells out why it matters: emphasizing the environment as "base" is a way of keeping it distinct from "natural capital" (Gudeman 2005: 143). In other words, it is a way to resist cascading through the process of rational commensuration, which puts the real ecology at risk (Gudeman 2008: 161-162).

In his 2012 article, Gudeman returns to Hornborg's challenge by offering a more thorough account of the environmental implications of his theory. He does this by building on the economic folk model of Latin American peasant societies, discussed in his previous ethnographic work (Gudeman and Rivera 1990).[24] Gudeman finds that farmers in lowland Panama and highland Colombia use an economic model in which the central concept is "*fuerza*," or vital energy. This strength or force is at once the current of vitality in all living things and the currency of exchange between them (Gudeman 2012: 60). Humans gather, convey, and store energy from the land (primarily in the form of food) for their ends, but also expend it in work, which transfers energy to each other and back to the land.[25]

[24] Although it resonates with the way Mayan peasant economy has been described, Gudeman insists that it is a particular folk model related to "long conversations" originating in Europe, which he ultimately traces to Aristotle (Gudeman and Rivera 1990; Gudeman 2012; Gudeman and Hann 2015). Further research is warranted to investigate to what degree the Latin American model may also be influenced by indigenous (and African) conversations (cf Gudeman 1976a: 3), and to compare it to Mayan folk models in particular.
[25] This cyclical model is what connects the "house" with the wider environmental base, and it is the ultimate foundation of the "real" economy. A stronger position, not excluded by this one, would see dynamic ecosystems – as opposed to a static view of the environment in terms of "nature" – as a distinct economic sphere prior to the "house." Just as Gudeman has recently distinguished between finance and meta-finance, one could think of something analogous at the other end, in dialogue with Gudeman's theory of "vital energy." The fact that we are part of nature and derive our vitality from the same energy as do other biological beings (Gudeman 2012: 62, 71) does not necessarily imply (as in Gudeman 2008: 44) an erasure of the boundary between humans and the non-human environment, in terms of economic spheres; such an

According to Gudeman, there are several important implications of this folk model. One is that the model is rooted in materiality, meaning that the economy is a cycle limited by natural constraints, as opposed to models in which value can grow without limit (Gudeman 2012: 64). At this point, Gudeman seems to make a more explicit distinction between his relativist epistemology with regard to the base and a realist epistemology regarding nature, which is prior to – but has implications for – the question of whether the material world is construed as base or not. The Colombian house model is "realistic" in recognizing environmental limits, while ignoring them is "nonsense" (Gudeman 2012: 64). The two positions – cultural relativism and ecological realism – are not necessarily contradictory, even if their relationship is complex (Rival 2012b).[26]

Another implication of the Colombian model is that vital energy is manifested in plural and incommensurate forms (Gudeman 2012: 66-67); this reinforces his argument against calculating environmental value in market terms, for example through carbon credit schemes (Ibid.: 64).[27] Moreover, the form and use-potential of energy changes when it is transferred from one body to another (Gudeman 2012: 61). This resonates with other models that trace the value of things as they pass between regimes of value (cf

"erasure" might in fact be a form of mystification. Rather, one could conceive – even based on Gudeman's same ethnography – of a relationship between distinct actors, mediated by our metaphysical commonality, in which case it is important to be attentive to the same ethical questions as in the relationships between other spheres. I leave this as an open question here.

[26] Gudeman's point here is similar to Gregory's, who suggests (in an unpublished 2005 paper) that where there are conflicts regarding the socially constructed boundary between bases and commodities, the only way out is, quite literally, a re-grounding of theory in materiality. This common reference, even as it can be precisely what is at stake in conflicts, is also what can mediate across otherwise unbridgeable perspectives. Indeed, material realities, such as the relative lack of water in Australia compared to Monsoon Asia, can even serve as a "natural" referee (for the viability of rice farming, in his example), who judges in favour of long-term cultural adaptation to local ecology, given that such adaptation makes some bases more sustainable than others (cf also Marsden et al 2001). This relatively recent position by Gregory must be distinguished from his earlier arguments concerning land as the ultimate good for farmers. In the earlier case, Gregory is talking about land *qua* base; it is the ultimate good for farmers, just as gold and silver jewelry is the ultimate base for merchants (Gregory 1997). In 2005, Gregory speaks of the environment not so much in terms of "inalienable goods" (or base), but rather in terms of the material reality with and through which cultures are engaged.

[27] Cf also Gudeman and Rivera 2002: 184. For a more nuanced discussion – inspired by Gudeman's work (cf Rival 2018) – on the governance of the provision of environmental services, see Rival and Muradian (2012).

Myers 2001), but what is particular in the Latin American model is that the common currency that allows for transfer is the shared material composition of all natural bodies. In other words, humans can – and must – engage in reciprocal exchanges with non-humans, because we are made of and derive our vitality from the same stuff; humans and non-humans are both part of nature (Gudeman 2012: 62, 71).

Certainly, these insights constitute an important contribution to an economic anthropology that takes the environment seriously. However, the fact that Gudeman's most systematic treatment of environmental issues is rooted precisely in the "house" model, and otherwise always referred to questions about the base as such, leaves a gap to be filled if we are to construct a model of how the "market" can be articulated to the "house" in a healthy way. In other words, Gudeman has convinced us of the virtues of the realm of the mutuality, and the need to protect it from the market. But a hopeful model of the economy could also ask – after assuring the separation of the two realms – how to build virtuous circles between them, while taking into account the environmental considerations we have discussed. I address this challenge primarily in chapters 3 and 4.

Food nexus

The food nexus is where all of these issues connect. There is no economy without food. Not only is food the medium with which we transfer vital energy from the environment to our bodies (and back), commensality is also integral to every culture's way of reproducing shared identity. Food, then, can help build an analytical bridge between cultural relativism and ecological realism, allowing for an account of economic vitality in all its interconnected forms.

Pulling on the empirical thread of agro-food systems, a *sine-qua-non* of economy that has driven the expansion of trade for centuries, is also a way to arrive at the neuralgic

points of "big picture" questions of political economy (Mintz 1985, 2011; Warman 2003). In this light, it is no surprise that Gudeman's own universal model was originally inspired by his fieldwork in food-producing communities, and that he often illustrates his theoretical points with examples related to food systems (eg Gudeman 2008: 105-106). Indeed, the food nexus has long nourished economic anthropology, from its classic debates about the meaning of yams, through critical analysis of capitalism through the lens of plantations (Tsing 2012), to post-capitalist possibilities, noticed in regard to a certain type of mushroom (Tsing 2015). Throughout this thesis, I, too, will keep food systems in mind as a privileged empirical perspective on wider economic questions.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have given a synthetic and enriched account of Gudeman's economic theory. He shows how economy is made up of two realms in dialectic tension, and tells a story about how the realm of the market tends to expand and encroach on the realm of mutuality. He warns that this process is dangerous and ultimately untenable, leading him to make policy proposals for regaining economic balance. I have discussed the ecological and political dimensions of the model, and argued that food systems are a privileged lens from which to understand its dynamics.

In the remainder of this thesis, we will pick up where Gudeman has left off. He insists that the relations between market and mutuality are "shifting combinations," whereby "their relative importance varies over space and time" (Gudeman 2008: 4-5, 19, 121). His story about that change, though, is one-directional. To be fair, his analysis of how the market has expanded "to become the central force in economy's dialectic" (2008: 4) is necessary. But it is not sufficient. In our conversations "about other ways of

conducting our material lives" (Gudeman 2008: 4), we also need stories that show how his normative vision, which would entail an opposite movement, can take flesh.

With empirically rooted analysis of how specific communities have attempted to reclaim their base and establish a healthier relationship to the market, we will better understand the potential and challenges involved in such endeavours. Such research on alternative experiences can inform more refined proposals with well-founded insights. It might also encourage further and more ambitious initiatives, by demonstrating that the story of debasement through overwhelming market expansion – while historically true – need not be the final word on our economies.

Gudeman argues that peripheries are a privileged vantage point for understanding the dynamics of high-market societies (2016: 124). However, in envisioning how other possibilities might come about, he seems to assume that change will largely come from the centre and the top, in the form of policy measures. In the Introduction, I have set forth several reasons that warrant a different expectation. By bearing witness to an initiative from rural Chiapas, I aim to persuade the reader that not only critical awareness, but also transformative social innovation, can be found at the margins.

Lately I have been thinking that the point must be reached when scientists, politicians, artists, philosophers, men of religion, and all those who work in the fields should gather here, gaze out over these fields, and talk things over together.

Masanobu Fukuoka

Chapter 2
(Re)searching for Hope

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I describe my research design and account for how I implemented it. In the first part of the chapter, I define my research objectives and questions. I then make some related epistemological considerations. Based on these, I justify my choice of research methods and case study. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss how I applied this approach in the field, taking my positionality and ethical considerations into account. Finally, I conclude with some reflections on the potential and limitations of my research strategy.

PART I: RESEARCH DESIGN

Research objectives

I am looking for reasons to hope in the possibility of life-giving economies. I take Gudeman's theoretical framework, as summarized and stretched in chapter 1, as my main criterion for what I mean by "life-giving." And, for reasons explained in the Introduction, I assume that hope can be found especially at the "margins," in the form of innovative movements that are experimenting with, and prefiguring, what could be (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012).

As I have argued in both the Introduction and chapter 1, I see the food nexus as a privileged site for understanding the dynamics of an economic model, and what is at stake in it. Thus, I am particularly interested in initiatives that are aiming to build food systems that are healthy, environmentally sustainable, and socially just. In the Introduction, I have

discussed the key transformative social innovations around which these initiatives tend to mobilize: agroecology, food sovereignty, social economy, and solidarity economy.

My research objective, then, has been to approach people at the margins who are trying to combine the above elements to build a life-giving economy, in the context of food systems, and to interrogate their hope. The particular people to whom I address my query are the leaders of the Misión de Bachajón (MB) in Chiapas, Mexico, for reasons explained below. In this regard, my thesis is very much like Escobar's *Territories of Difference*, which he describes as:

> […] an ethnography of the practices, strategies, and visions of this particular group of activists, including their knowledge production [….] However, it is more than that. Infused with […the activist organization's] conceptualizations and engaging various strands in critical scholarship, the book proposes a way of analysing some of the most salient social, cultural, and ecological issues of the present day. (Escobar 2008: x).

Research questions

As I have begun to describe in the Introduction, and as I will describe throughout this thesis, MB leaders are engaged in a project that they describe in terms of "sovereignty," "autonomy," and "defense of the territory". As in other indigenous contexts, these terms are used interchangeably in a way that assumes co-existence with other overlapping communities, and does not imply a separate Westphalian state. Rather, it is about the right to a culturally appropriate way of life, free from oppression and exploitation. Because of this, the project's political aspect is interconnected with its economic and other dimensions, not least through its adoption of agroecology, food sovereignty, and social and solidarity economy.

What I am interested in here is the MB's economic model, insofar as it is designed to enable and express that wider vision. Adequately understanding the MB leaders' project for our purposes is a matter of both empirical research and theoretical reflection, in dialogue with each other. Thus, the specific research questions I bring to their initiative are as follows.

What is the MB's economic vision? In what does their model consist?

What potential does this model have for type of change that we need (as defined in the Introduction and chapter 1)?

What challenges does the MB face in implementing its vision?

How is the MB dealing with those challenges?

What are the wider implications of the MB's experience? Does it give us reason to hope?

Epistemological considerations

As I am existentially implicated, I have not aimed to answer these questions aseptically, as if I were simply a curious observer. Not only would that be dishonest and sterile, it would ignore the fact that all knowledge is shaped by values and informed by experience (Rival 2014). The specific type of knowledge I am trying to produce includes objective facts, but is ultimately aimed at what Aristotle called *phronesis*, also known as "practical wisdom." As Flyvbjerg (2001) has argued, social science is well suited to this task.

Precisely because these questions matter to me, I have aimed to answer them as rigorously as possible. My questions are qualitative in nature. To be rigorous, qualitative social science research requires logical coherence on the one hand, and empirical rootedness, on the other (De Sardan 2008). Meanwhile, the fruits of rigour in this context must be understood in terms of plausible interpretation, rather than some other, more metaphysical form of truth (Ibid.).

My questions deal with people's subjectivity as it relates to complex, contextualized processes. Empirical plausibility therefore hinges on gaining informants' trust, as well as a situated understanding of the layers of meaning and intentionality at play in what people say and do. These goals are best achieved through long-term, intimate interaction (Bensa 2008).

Political considerations

Starting with which questions are asked (or whose), and how they are framed, power relations are present throughout the entire research process (Pimbert 2009). Moreover, the topics I am researching are laden with political conflict, and since answering my questions entails entering into the world I am studying, I could not avoid positioning myself in this regard. Arriving at authentic *phronesis* in social science research requires taking these power relations into account (Flyvbjerg 2001).

Accordingly, I have chosen to centre the perspectives of actors who are trying to effect change. I chose to share ownership over the research process with these actors (my informants), by consulting with them from the early design stage, all the way through to the ways in which I am sharing my findings (cf Pimbert 2012).[28] Furthermore, I also have become personally engaged in the organization's efforts. I detail how these aspects took shape below.

Besides being a political choice, this embedded role is also a way of accessing an internally situated perspective on empirical phenomena, which is necessary to answer my research questions, as I have argued above. At the same time, it raises the question of my potential bias and blind spots. Maintaining scholarly rigour in this regard requires being especially attentive to nuance and critical views within the organization (Merry 2005) and systematically triangulating and cross-referencing empirical data.

Finally, I recognize my informants and other colleagues as subjects with whom I collaborate in the generation of knowledge. Again, there is more than one reason for this.

[28] I did not, however, attempt a full-fledged "participatory action research" approach (cf Kindon et al 2007), for two main reasons. First, my time and other constraints would not allow me to follow through responsibly. Secondly, the MB is already engaged in more than one of its own participatory action research processes, and trying to centre their attention on my own would have been a counter-productive distraction.

On the one hand, it is a political stance, meant to resist the colonization of academia by the individualist and commodifying logic of capitalism (Mella 2015: 481-487; Tsing 2015). Simultaneously, it is a way to ensure that my own interpretations are continually critiqued and enriched by people who are making sense of the same empirical phenomena from different positionalities than my own.

Research methods

I designed my research in light of the above considerations. Ethnographic research methods were appropriate. Ethnography is especially useful for qualitative, inductive questions such as my own (Brockington and Sullivan 2003). It is an empirical approach that encounters data without having pre-codified it, and emphasizes the link between observed facts and the particular context in which they occur (Baszanger and Dodier 2004). The "intentionally unstructured" nature of ethnography is meant to "maximize discovery and description [...] of the unknown and thus unexpected" (Bersson 1978, in Düvell, 2012: 6). In terms of the collaborative generation of knowledge, "the point of ethnography is to learn how to think about a situation together with one's informants; research categories develop with the research, not before it" (Tsing 2015: ix).

More specifically, I mainly used participant observation. As opposed to other techniques in the ethnographic repertoire, such as interviews, participant observation privileges the long-term immersion that affords trust and situated understanding, which I have argued are important for answering my particular research questions. Just as importantly, it is a way of observing empirical phenomena beyond those that informants consciously intend for me to observe (De Sardan 2008).

To elicit more direct reflection or information regarding particular points, I originally planned to complement this approach with semi-structured interviews and

focus groups, but only after a first stage in which I had gained trust, become embedded, and matured the questions that were worth deeper exploration (Brockington and Sullivan 2003: 62-63). I planned to use interviews with key informants, and focus groups mainly with informants from vulnerable groups, since the latter method tends to disinhibit vulnerable people, makes them more likely to use their own concepts and terms, and encourages them to elaborate on and challenge each other's accounts (Wilkinson 2004: 182-184). (This part of my original research design was adapted once in the field, for the reasons and in the ways described below. In the end I conducted only a handful of interviews and no focus groups.)

I also arranged to facilitate and observe a participatory exchange of week-long visits between actors from my case study (see below) and the Instituto Mesoamericano de Permacultura (IMAP), an indigeous (Kaqchikel Maya) group that promotes agroecology and food sovereignty in Guatemala. This methodology recognizes that peasant farmers have a type of expert knowledge which allows them to notice certain things which I, a non-peasant farmer, would not. The interaction with a setting other than their own elicits these observations, both about the place they are visiting and about their own. Unlike many other ways of eliciting information, this practice centres their priorities. It is a form of networking, aimed at building knowledge through face-to-face relationships, which has been identified as a key element in indigenous people's research agendas (Smith 1999: 156-157). Furthermore, since it is a canonical research method in the Latin American agroecology movement (Holt-Giménez 2006), I knew this "farmer-to-farmer"[29] exchange would be familiar to my informants.

[29] This is the standard English translation of the Spanish term, *campesino-a-campesino*, which could also be translated as "peasant-to-peasant."

Finally, bibliographic research is an integral part of my research design, including academic as well as grey literature, to complement and cross-reference my findings. Throughout, I have been attentive to history, political economy, and ecology as a way of keeping subjective interpretations (my informants' and my own) grounded.

Case study: the Misión de Bachajón in Chiapas, Mexico

A case study approach is appropriate for inductive questions whose answer depends on studying actors in their natural contexts (Yin 2003). Since my goal is understanding meaning and possibility rather than explanation or theory-testing, and since ethnographic methods require prolonged direct exposure to a field site, a single case study is adequate for the purposes of this thesis. There are several reasons that led me to choose the particular case of the MB, in Chiapas, Mexico, to address my research questions.

Mexico is an ideal place for studying food systems change. It was a birthplace of the Green Revolution (Conway and Waage 2010), and also of agroecology in its contemporary form (Altieri and Nicholls 2017). Both paradigms are vibrant there. It is also a Latin American country where major agrarian reform, with institutions of equitably distributed collective property, has been shown to be possible, but where its fragility in the face of neoliberal pressure has also been demonstrated (Haenn 2006).

Chiapas in particular is the site of both an economy of self-sufficiency and one oriented to global commodity markets. Much is at stake there. Chiapas is one of Mexico's states with the highest indigenous population (INEGI 2010); these peoples are stewards of place-based knowledge that can allow them to live in harmony with the local ecology. Most of them, though, live in conditions of multidimensional poverty (CONEVAL 2012). Paradoxically, Chiapas is simultaneously one of the richest states in Mexico in terms of

natural resources and biodiversity. One major expression of this is maize biodiversity, which is of capital importance for world food security, given that maize is one of the top three grains consumed on the planet. It is also Mexico's top coffee-producing state, coffee being one of the most traded commodities in global value chains. For at least five hundred years, Chiapas has been the site of conflicting projects, for indigenous sovereignty on the hand, and globalization at the service of powerful outsiders on the other. This underlying conflict had a major eruption in mid-1990s, where the Zapatista uprising came head-to-head with a neoliberal reform agenda (Harvey 1998).

Together with bishop Samuel Ruiz, the Jesuit superior of the Misión de Bachjón played a key role in mediating that conflict, especially in the negotiations that resulted in the San Andrés Accords. The Church was recognized by both the Mexican state and the Zapatista army as a credible actor, with older and deeper roots in the region than either of them, and with its own far-reaching social justice projects that mobilized tens of thousands of people, especially since the mid-1960s. The MB, founded in 1958, has continued that legacy to this day (cf chapter 3).

Though not to the same degree as the Zapatista movement, the MB has received significant scholarly attention. Many of its own members have produced a considerable collection of theses and publications on various aspects of the MB, dating from the 1960s to the present. As other academics have increasingly taken note of it, the literature on the MB is growing, mainly in Spanish, but also in English, French, Japanese, and Portuguese.[30] These studies are complemented by participatory "systematizations of the experience," which are aided by outside academics but carried out at a more grassroots level within the organization (Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010; Messina and

[30] This literature is too vast to cite here. Much of it can be found on Yomol Nohptesel's digital library, which I curate, at https://yomolnohptesel.wordpress.com/biblioteca/ya-mb/.

Pieck 2010; Pieck and Vicente Díaz forthcoming). Besides being a sign of its relevance, the existence of this body of literature enables critical cross-referencing of my own interpretations, the importance of which I have noted given my committed embeddedness in the organization.

All of the above factors make the MB a pertinent case study for my research questions. It was also an appropriate choice in my case because, as a Jesuit priest, I had privileged access to the organization, and especially to its leaders. This ensured that I would be able to gain a deep understanding of their vision and the challenges involved in its implementation.

Timeframe

I spent as much time as I could with the MB, just over seven months in total. The bulk of my fieldwork was carried out in three periods spanning over a year (September-early December 2015, January-March 2016, and August 2016); it was completed with a ten-day follow-up visit in April 2018. This was long enough to gain a sufficient understanding regarding my research questions, without interrupting the natural rhythm of the MB. In consultation with its leaders, I strategically planned my fieldwork calendar around the MB's organizational calendar, which itself is planned around the agricultural and religious calendars of the region (cf chapter 3). In particular, I made sure to arrive with enough time to get my bearings and initiate relationships before observing the intense period of the coffee harvest, and ensured that I would be present for other important events. Thus, my research was embedded in local rhythms and processes; I entered the MB's orbit, and not vice versa. Before and after fieldwork, I have remained in frequent communication with MB members about various aspects of their processes and about my own research. Additionally, I have met and conducted participant

observation with members of the MB during several international meetings, conferences, and other events outside of Chiapas throughout the past four years.

PART II: IN THE FIELD

Here I discuss how I implemented the above design and how I took into account its underlying considerations, once I was in the field. As I will describe, this process entailed some "creative fidelity" to the design, whereby some of the specific methods were adapted in order to stay faithful to the principles that led me to choose them in the first place. I also made the most of unforeseen opportunities – and found ways to negotiate other sorts of surprises – as I went. Such flexibility is entirely coherent with my research design, given the epistemological assumptions and political choices that buttress it, as laid out above.

Positionality and presentation of self

A number of my intelligible identities shaped my positionality in ways that helped define my research strategy. As a cis-gendered male in an indigenous society that is highly structured according to gender, I did not have much access to women's perspectives; this limitation was reinforced by my poor Tseltal language skills, given that women have a greater tendency to be monolingual Tseltal speakers. On the other hand, I learned at least enough Tseltal to show respect and have basic conversations, and as a native Spanish speaker, I was able to engage autonomously and deeply with the great majority of informants; where necessary, I relied on spontaneous informal translation, since there were always some bilingual people in every context. My Cuban accent and ethnicity helped to balance out whatever associations might have derived from my U.S.

American nationality; the MB often receives visitors from all over the world, so in any case my foreignness was familiar.

Perhaps my most significant identity in terms of its implications for my research is that I am a Jesuit priest.[31] Since the MB is largely coordinated by Jesuits, this gave me a degree of insider status, and I was able to establish a high degree of trust very quickly, especially among organizational elites. Indeed, I lived in Jesuit communities[32] for most of my fieldwork (except when I stayed with peasant families for a few days at a time); we ate our meals together, prayed together, travelled together, and otherwise spent a lot of time together in day-to-day life. I also participated fully in the Jesuit community's formal meetings, and had near-automatic access to all types of activities in the MB, from ritual celebrations to deliberative assemblies to high-level managerial meetings. Further, as a priest I had a defined role (*cargo*) that fit seamlessly in the local organizational structure. This role is one of high status, given the nature of Catholic hierarchy, and of high credibility, given the Jesuits' particular history in this region. Thus, being a priest certainly helped people to "place" me, and helped me gain trust and access with the population in general, but just as certainly, it boxed me into a very particular perspective which is not without its blind spots, and probably conditioned how other people presented themselves to me.

In my own "impression management" (Berreman 2007), I was explicitly clear at all times that my presence in the MB was primarily defined by my objectives as a researcher. This identity is also a familiar one, and indeed it is entirely compatible with my role as a priest. Most of the Jesuits in the MB have written postgraduate theses based on fieldwork there; in no case has their role as researchers been entirely separate from

[31] Jesuits are members of the Society of Jesus, a Roman Catholic religious order of priests and brothers.
[32] A Jesuit community is a household where Jesuit priests and brothers live communally, often on the same grounds as a church (as in Chilón and Bachajón).

their role as church ministers. Thus, I welcomed invitations to preside or concelebrate at sacraments and otherwise minister as a priest throughout my fieldwork.

Another way in which my positionalities as researcher and priest converge is my funding. As a Jesuit, I have taken a vow of "poverty," which means that I own nothing, but all of my needs are covered, for as long as I live; it is basically a form of voluntary communism. Since I am studying in the U.K., my doctoral studies have been funded by the British Jesuits. The Mexican Jesuit communities where I stayed also partly subsidized my living there. The peasant-to-peasant exchange described above was made possible by a grant from the Oxford Department of International Development for travel costs, and by the reciprocal hospitality of the participating organizations.

Living a radically unconventional economic lifestyle for the past sixteen years has convinced me that it is possible to build alternative economies, even in the midst of an adverse system. That said, inhabiting more than one economic system at the same time can be awkward. Acute diarrhoea allowed me to discover the best way of dealing with economic relationships that straddled the insider/outsider boundary during fieldwork. Natural remedies from the garden worked most of the time, but once, I needed something from the pharmacy. An employee in the Jesuit community, Consuelo, kindly brought me the medicine. When I asked how much I owed her, she refused to say, but did remark that "what's important is that we can count on one another as long as you are here." By not letting me cancel my debt – at least not immediately or with monetary precision – Consuelo added value to what could have been a zero-sum interaction by initiating an open-ended reciprocal relationship.[33]

Consuelo's response, in light of Gudeman's theory (cf chapter 1), guided my inter-personal economic interactions in the field. As someone whose presence was embedded

[33] It could also be interpreted as mutuality; Gudeman allows for ambiguity (Gudeman 2001: 23, note 9).

in community structures – but only for a certain amount of time – I tried to avoid being a burden, but I also had to avoid offending people by treating our relationship in terms of zero-balance transactions as if we were strangers. For example, three different Tseltal families hosted me more than once for several days at a time. In gratitude (and following the example of another researcher who had stayed in a different community), I gave them each a kilogram of a hard-to-get, in-demand variety of high-quality coffee seeds. I knew that they would appreciate this gesture because they were in the midst of renewing their coffee forests; my gift helped defray the family's expenses in a way that simultaneously expressed solidarity with the MB's wider collective project (cf chapter 4). A transparent bag bursting with the promise of long-lasting, fruitful additions to the pre-existing ecosystem made for a better symbolic expression of our relationship than its equivalent in cash, even though its primary value was as a source of future cash income.

Ethnography

Once in the field, I adapted my research design according to evolving circumstances, using my research questions and the related considerations above as criteria for discernment. For example, my original plan was to complement participant observation with focus groups, as a way of further disinhibiting informants after spending the first two months establishing rapport and becoming aware of community dynamics. However, upon reaching that stage, one dynamic of which I had become aware was that the MB was saturated with researchers, and that therefore, formal methods such as focus groups tended to inhibit participation and make people revert to standardized narratives about what they thought visitors wanted to hear.

Thus, I dropped focus groups from my repertoire precisely for the same reasons that I had originally planned to use them. At the same time, I was able to find other ways

to elicit the same sort of uninhibited and peer-reviewed observations, such as spontaneous group conversations in a family's kitchen or in the room with the best wifi signal at the coffee roasting plant. Over time, as people got to know me and my questions, they were often eager to bring up certain topics, whether to make sure I heard their version, or simply to think out loud together about something they themselves were trying to understand.

Likewise, I conducted less semi-structured interviews than I had originally planned to. I found that key informants were already telling the same story over and over, in countless presentations, conversations with visitors, media interviews, and even other people's theses. In many cases, all I had to do to get the sort of information I could get from an interview was to hang around, listen, and read. By not requesting many formal interviews, I was able to capitalize on my peculiar embedded positionality, saving my more challenging questions for when people were relaxed and willing to enter a long, reflexive conversation, like long road trips or rainy afternoons.

The eight formal interviews I did conduct were with key informants with whom I spent less time. These interviews were mostly designed as an efficient way to get a coherent narrative about key aspects of the MB, such as its history, from people with first-hand experience. These people included the following members of the MB: José Avilés, the Jesuit superior of the MB, who had been directly involved in the agrarian reform of the 1990s; Felipe Ali Modad, the Jesuit in charge of the MB's pastoral ministry and projects related to linguistic sovereignty; Carlos Camarena Labadie, a Jesuit who had been in the MB since 1959; Esther Cuevas, a religious sister who had been in the MB since the 1960s; José Aquino, a co-founder of the MB's business branch; and a founding member of the MB's cooperative of coffee producers, who asked to remain anonymous. On a visit to Mexico City, I also interviewed Enrique Pieck, the researcher who has

coordinated the two major participatory action research systematizations of the MB's business branch (cf chapter 4). At a meeting of the Comparte network (cf chapter 5) in Vitoria, Spain, I interviewed José Alejandro Aguilar, a key Jesuit ally and agroecological adviser of the MB (cf chapter 3).

Mostly, I stuck to participant observation with ethnographic fieldnotes as described by Emerson et al (2011). The salience of this method was confirmed early in my fieldwork by my Tseltal language teacher, who told me: "If you want to know what a Tseltal person thinks, don't ask – watch." The words were strikingly similar to what my academic supervisor had taught me the previous year, when she trained me to use ethnographic methods on an organic farm outside Oxford.

In applying this approach, I took into account that, as I have mentioned, most of my informants were well-versed in an official narrative about the MB. Rather than take their discourse at face value, I observed spontaneous interactions over time, keeping an eye out for points of friction. Where somebody insisted on doing things the hard way, despite opposition or logistical difficulties, I took this as a sign that something of value was at stake, and paid closer attention there, especially if the reason for the friction was not immediately obvious to me, or if different actors explained it in different ways. Following these tracks led me to sharpen my questions and develop initial hypotheses, which I then contrasted to the official model to identify what fit with it, what contradicted it, and what was clarified about it. The existence of the standard narrative as an acknowledged reference point – and the rapport I had established by then – allowed me to bring up my observations about their actions in dialogue with their discourse, which provoked deep and (I think mutually) helpful conversations.

Because of my positionality, most of my participant observation was with organizational elites, especially Jesuits and other high-level members of the MB. As

mentioned above, I shared all aspects of daily life – meals, prayer, travel, and plenty of informal conversations – with these informants for several months, and was given virtually total access at every level. From negotiations with the rector of a university in Puebla, to the altar at the pope's Mass in San Cristóbal de las Casas, to internal meetings where serious problems were discussed, I had the privilege of sitting literally side-by-side with Jesuit leaders of the MB. I also frequently visited with other key actors based in Chilón, including the missionary sisters who co-lead the MB, and the young professionals who run certain parts of its business wing (cf chapter 4).

To get a more socially diverse perspective and diminish dependence on key informants (De Sardan 2008), I followed "weak ties" to access intersecting networks (Collyer 2005) and people from "different walks of life" (Kubal 2013: 559). I met with scholars at two urban universities that have a long relationship with the MB, one in Puebla and one in Mexico City. I heard from literally hundreds of people from different regions in the MB's assemblies, meetings, and weeklong courses, as well as Masses, *fiestas*, and related events where the MB's larger constituency was active. I took every opportunity to accompany MB staff on both work-related and friendly visits to Tseltal villages. I also made longer visits on my own to three peasant families from two different regions, for several days at a time, twice with each family.

I arranged the latter visits during the second leg of my fieldwork, by which time I had been able to identify and build rapport with families who were not showcased on the standard "circuit" for visitors, but were nevertheless significantly involved – each from a particular positionality – in the different sectors of the MB that I wanted to explore further. One family is headed by a man who, after having migrated and returned to his village, is a catechist with the MB and a human rights promoter with the Zapatistas, as well as a member of the governing board of the Ts'umbal Xitalha' cooperative. Another

family is headed by the father of a younger man who is also a catechist in his village, and routinely travels throughout the territory in his role as an extension agent of the cooperative. Finally, I visited the family of a young woman who was an intern in the administration of the coffee roasting plant in Chilón; on weekends, she lives in the household headed by her grandfather, who has been a deacon for many decades. These choices were of course also enabled by the generous willingness of these families to host me.

As for the "farmer-to-farmer" exchange, the two organizations were delighted to participate. Because the MB had so much experience with the method, they even suggested best practices to get the most out of it.[34] In response to the MB's enthusiasm, I improvised further (if less complete) exchanges as opportunities arose. An agronomist friend of mine grew up in a honey-producing region of Haiti, where his father is a smallholder farmer; when I heard that he was in Tabasco (not far from Chiapas) finishing his master's degree in post-harvest processing of cocoa, I arranged for him to visit the MB for several days. Likewise, when the director of the MB later visited Oxford, I arranged for him to meet with an agroecology and peasant livelihoods consultant who works in Indonesia; a linguist who helps indigenous communities revitalize their endangered languages in Northeast India; and the Colombian owner of a specialty coffee shop. Similarly, when I participated as a member in my own right at the Comparte network's weeklong assemblies and other meetings (cf chapter 5), I paid special attention to the interactions between the MB actors who were present and their peers from other countries, turning these events into additional bits of fieldwork.

Listening to people "talk shop" during these exchanges proved to be a rich source of data, some of which appears throughout this thesis. For example, upon walking into

[34] It is also part of IMAP's repertoire (cf Rival 2014).

the depot at the coffee roasting plant, the Haitian cocoa specialist, Cleomé, immediately asked why there were both sacks made of natural fibre and sacks made of synthetic material – something I had seen, but had never realized was significant. José replied that the parchment coffee was stored in either type, but green coffee only in sacks made of natural fibre. Cleomé expressed satisfaction with the answer; I learned that synthetic material can contaminate green coffee with its plastic odor. This detail is mentioned in chapter 4, in the section on quality upgrading. Similarly, the pan-Mayan encounter between the MB and the IMAP, which took place in both Chiapas and Guatemala, was the occasion for the two groups to playfully quiz each other about their knowledge of plants, to learn from each other about efficient ways to fertilize their fields and forests, and to tell traditional myths and stories that have informed chapter 3, especially.

In all of the above methodologies and situations, I often carried out open jotting, especially in extended conversations or meetings. I usually transcribed formal meetings in detail, unless a particularly sensitive issue was being discussed, in which case I would write fieldnotes immediately afterwards, omitting identifying details. I generally found that as long as I was not imposing on people's time or attention, and as long as I was respectful of delicate matters, people were comfortable with my presence.

Committed, collaborative research

Shared ownership of the research process

I consulted with MB leaders regarding their own priorities, from the early stages of defining my research questions. This "upstream participation" (Pimbert 2012) is reflected in my adoption throughout this thesis of a hermeneutics of hope, in which one first asks about "potential" and then about "challenges," in an inversion of the typical "diagnostic-

solution" approach to evaluating social projects (cf Introduction). As I arrived for fieldwork, the MB was beginning to experiment with this methodological approach in its own processes, and its leaders asked me to support that effort by making my own version of what it could look like.

Sharing my interpretations with members of the MB, and asking them to critically engage with them, is not only an epistemological exercise aimed at rigour and enriched understanding, but also a political exercise aimed at empowerment, insofar as it helps the MB gain a deeper self-understanding of its own project, with its potential and its challenges. During fieldwork, I used the ethnographic methodology of observation-hypothesis-confrontation-revised hypothesis discussed above. During the write-up stage, I have shared drafts of my work with those who read English, and written summaries in Spanish for those who do not. The MB's official translators have translated one of these summaries into Tseltal.

As I neared the end of the thesis project, I had a long personal conversation with the director of the MB (during his visit to Oxford in November 2017), in which we discussed my mature insights. That conversation has significantly informed and nuanced the overall argument which I present in the Conclusion. I am told that this conversation has also contributed to the consolidation of the MB's strategic vision.

Finally, I was invited to visit Chiapas in April 2018, where I formally presented the fruits of my work to a widely representative group of MB members, including the governing board of the coffee cooperative, the executive committee of the Yomol A'tel group, and the local Jesuit community. I aimed to present in ways that were meaningful to my informants (Smith 1999: 160-161; Cahill and Torre 2007). For example, in presenting to the cooperative members, I explained the abstract concept of "reverse cascading" (cf chapter 4) through the metaphor of a dangerous river crossing, where the

strongest and bravest go across first and tie a rope to a tree on the other bank, making it easier for others to follow. My presentation in Spanish was fully translated in Tseltal, and I provided a handout with a summary in both Tseltal and Spanish. This first "viva" was also a way of exposing my work to the "extended peer review" of their co-validation (Pimbert 2012: 48-50).[35]

Willingness to serve

Throughout the process, members of the MB asked me to use my skills and networks as a researcher to help them generate new knowledge and relationships. This included, for example, a literature review and e-mail correspondence with an international specialist to identify the most effective agroecological methods of controlling the coffee rust fungus. Upon request, I also offered consultancy-type reports where I shared my developing insights on the way that the MB was managing certain key challenges. Much of the information in this thesis was elicited as a result of placing myself at the MB's service in these ways.

Overlapping learning communities

Besides building knowledge with my informants directly, I have also collaborated with other researchers who share the same commitment. The two most significant

[35] Overall, the reactions were encouraging. One coffee producer said that my presentation helped him realize the importance of the other aspects of the MB's work, such as MODEVITE (cf chapter 3), and that cooperative members should be more involved in them. Another said that my spelling out of the potential of what they are doing helped strengthen his conviction that this cooperative is "built on a rock" [as opposed to sand, as in the Biblical parable, meaning that it has firm foundations and will not fall like other cooperatives have]. Many used the metaphor of my presentation as a mirror to help them see themselves, and an executive member of YA' added that it is a mirror that reflects their flaws without making them look ugly. A member of Ts'umbajeletic said: "I did not know that what we are doing could give other people so much hope." Some of my ideas and metaphors were echoed throughout the following days' meetings. Other sorts of comments that arose from these sessions, such as those that brought further insight into the nuances and tensions of the MB's experience, or further information about specific processes, are embedded throughout the thesis as appropriate.

research communities in which this thesis is embedded are Yomol Nohptesel and Comparte. Both self-identify as "learning communities" that bring together a wide range of development practitioners and academics to collectively construct knowledge and engage in inter-cultural dialogue, at the service of an alternative vision of development.

During my fieldwork, there were no less than eighteen ongoing research initiatives (mostly postgraduate theses from a wide range of disciplines) about the MB's business branch, Yomol A'tel (YA', cf chapter 4). Recognizing that the high number of researchers could make my informants experience the arrival of yet another one as a burden, and aware of the limitations of my very specific positionality, I applied the permaculture principle of finding the solution within the problem: together with the other researchers, I co-founded the Yomol Nohptesel network (the name means "we learn together" in Tseltal). What began as an informal way for us to share bibliography and compare notes culminated in a formal group, institutionally linked to YA', and an ongoing dialogue about how best to contribute in light of the organization's priorities and complexity. Some members of Yomol Nohptesel are also members of YA'.

The Comparte network (whose name comes from the verb "to share" in Spanish) comprises fifteen alternative development initiatives from ten countries in Latin America and Spain, along with an affiliated group of doctoral researchers and allied universities. The MB is a founding member of Comparte and serves on the network's steering committee (cf chapter 5). I am a member of the network's doctoral research group.

Since we have a wide range of positionalities and have conducted our work in different but overlapping times and places, asking different but related questions, and using diverse methodological approaches to answer them, Yomol Nohptesel and Comparte have become a rich source of collaborative learning. The fruits of our collaboration include two co-authored articles, one that is currently undergoing peer

review for publication in a journal (Agostini et al), and one that will be published in an edited volume (Irezabal and Travieso forthcoming). More than these visible signs, though, the countless conversations among the members, and the energy of engaging the quest for knowledge, meaning and hope together, has produced incommensurable value that pulses throughout this thesis.

Counteracting my own bias and blind spots

This thesis aims to nourish hope, but hope is meaningless if it is not genuinely grounded in reality. Concomitantly with my engaged style, I have taken pains to ensure scholarly rigour and critical awareness through methodological discipline, combined with triangulation and cross-referencing of empirical data, both in the field and through secondary literature. To counteract any unconscious tendency on my part to portray the MB in an overly positive light, I have included chapter sections where I discuss "other challenges," beyond those that are most directly relevant to the thrust of my argument. These often include descriptions of internal tensions, and are meant to offer a full, nuanced picture of the organization, "warts and all." Likewise, I have made sure to mention (usually in a footnote) alternative versions that contradict or nuance the most commonly told narratives, whenever these discrepancies occur.

Furthermore, I have created a website for Yomol Nohptesel, the research community which I co-founded.[36] The website includes a digital library, with all of the bibliographic references of which I am aware regarding the MB, and links to .pdf versions of these documents – journal articles, books, and postgraduate theses – whenever possible. The website has a list of all of the researchers of whom I am aware that are currently engaged in ongoing research projects on the MB, many of whom have no

[36] https://yomolnohptesel.wordpress.com/

personal or institutional affiliation with the MB. The list includes the researchers' contact information (whenever I have received permission to share it) and their own descriptions of their research.

Thus, besides serving as a collaborative learning resource within Yomol Nohptesel, the website offers readers of this thesis direct access to other scholars' perspectives, data, and interpretations that can be compared to mine. In this way, the reader is invited to hold me accountable, and given tools to that end. To the degree that my positionality and my politics might understandably raise doubts in the minds of some readers, I hope that these mechanisms of transparency will reassure them insofar as they mitigate the risks of entering the "ethnographic pact" (De Sardan 2008) with this particular testimony.

Ethical considerations

Research is a form of action with consequences for people and other beings. To protect the most vulnerable people involved in my research, I complied with the guidelines of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) for research with human subjects. I also took other appropriate measures, as described in this section.

Informed prior consent

I requested informed prior consent in a culturally appropriate way that recognized the collective sphere and showed respect for my informants (Smith 1999: 118-119). Besides prior agreements with MB leaders by email, when in the field I conveyed my research intentions and received consent through Tseltal codes every time I participated for the first time in a meeting or other type of assembly. Outsiders who arrive at any gathering

are expected to greet each person individually with a handshake, or by inclining one's head for a blessing when greeting certain elders (*trensipaletik*). In the course of the event, they are invited to formally introduce themselves, with a formula that begins with a reiteration of respectful greeting, now addressed to the assembly as a whole, followed by stating one's name, place of origin, ecclesial role (*cargo*), and why they have come; the formula ends with an expression of gratitude to all of those present, and a phrase indicating that one is finished speaking (which implies an invitation for others to speak). Elders might ask some questions for clarification, and then acceptance is ratified by general applause. If the outsider will remain for some time, people will continue to elicit information and observe the person, and any concerns are conveyed through the elders or in a subsequent assembly.

People as ends in themselves

Indigenous peoples in Chiapas – as elsewhere – are aware of the ways in which social science research has historically disempowered them, not least through methodologies that treat them as means to other peoples' ends (Smith 1999). They generally, and rightfully, resent this. In the first MB assembly in which I participated, one indigenous person made a sarcastic comment to the effect that "Indians are only good for theses."[37] Soon thereafter, I learned a popular joke about the typical indigenous family structure; the punchline is "…and an anthropologist [who studies them]."

To be sure, there is a place for experimental forms of social scientific research, and for the range of available tools for objectively measuring social phenomena. However, in the case of the MB, this style of research is only deemed appropriate when

[37] The comment was not aimed at me, at least not directly. The person who made it is an anthropologist who understands the value of social science research, but also demands responsibility vis-à-vis its political implications.

it is embedded in long-term relationships that can guarantee that research subjects are in control of the process, and that the knowledge generated by it responds to their needs. For example, a missionary sister who has been in Chilón for decades, and coordinates the MB's health program with a team of community health workers, routinely weighs children to chart their nutritional progress. Likewise, the MB's microfinance institution has partnered with a closely affiliated research institute[38] to survey Tseltal peasant households about their income and expenditures, in order to evaluate the impact of the MB's financial services and design better ones. Collecting this type of data is entirely appropriate in their cases, but would not necessarily be responsible in my own, given my positionality in the post-colonial context and the temporal constraints of fieldwork for a doctoral thesis written elsewhere.

Given this sensitivity to the experience of being objectified by social science research, and my own conviction that people should be recognized as ends in themselves, I avoided methods that could be interpreted as poking, prodding, or consuming data, even though I was always transparent and open about the fact that I was doing research, and often practiced open jotting in the presence of research subjects. I especially avoided symbolically charged actions like taking photographs or audio recordings, which in this context could be seen as objectifying, intrusive, or extractive. Instead, the images presented in this thesis are all taken by members of the MB, and used with their permission. In this way, I privilege the perspective of my research subjects. The only audio recordings I made were in the context of collaborative projects that were useful to my subjects themselves, such as registering (and later transcribing) oral histories and an oral presentation about the organization. In a similar light, my slow-paced research design

[38] The Centro Internacional de Investigación de la Economía Social y Solidaria (CIIESS) is based in the Mexico City campus of the Jesuit-run Universidad Iberoamericana, and a member of the MB sits on its board; the two organizations are engaged in a long-term partnership.

was a way to ensure that care and respect were not undermined by a desire for efficiency (Mella 2015: 485-486).

Anonymity

Where appropriate, I have protected anonymity by omitting identifying details. I have not, however, used pseudonyms that seem like real names or otherwise changed identifying details. This choice is meant to avoid potential confusion when this thesis is read by people from or familiar with the MB. In cases where I have cited personal communication with informants who are also authors in my bibliography, their full names are listed in the Glossary under "frequently mentioned people."

Environmental impact

I took into account the effects of my research on vulnerable humans and non-humans by trying to minimize its carbon footprint. I used public transportation or carpooling whenever possible. In order to minimize air travel, I combined research-related flights with other necessary trips.

CONCLUSION

To close this chapter, I consider the implications of my way of proceeding, by connecting the epistemological and practical discussions above to the concerns that motivate my research questions in the first place. In this regard, perhaps the three most salient characteristics of my research design are its focus on organizational elites, its high degree of embeddedness, and its political commitments.

Focusing on organizational elites was simultaneously a constraint and an opportunity resulting from my particular positionality. Because my questions have to do

with the vision that drives the MB's many projects, it is appropriate to focus on leaders. Of course, I have made efforts to notice conflicts and tensions, and to listen to people with contrasting points of view, but mainly insofar as they illuminate my interpretation of the leaders' vision. In other words, this is not a thesis on the internal politics of the MB. I do discuss its internal politics in some detail, but I do so from the perspective of the potential and challenges of the project that its leaders are trying to implement.

The leaders' vision is more than a master plan. It is an embodied, historically conditioned, contested and evolving guide for creative action. My deep embeddedness in these relations and processes was thus an advantage, as it has afforded me a degree of Gadamerian *Bildung*, the sensibility that Geertz (1973), citing Ryle, describes as being able to tell the difference between a twitch and a wink. This is a different type of knowledge than that which aims to flatten empirical phenomena into commensurable facts.

In this light, I do not confuse rigour and critical awareness – which I have attempted to achieve through the means described above – with neutrality. I am explicitly and unapologetically on the side of the people who have been marginalized by the dominant system, and who are trying to make things better for everyone. Most concretely, the ethical principles I have applied in my research are meant to ensure that it will contribute to the MB's empowered phronesis in attempting to build Tseltal sovereignty and the wider common good, within the context of an adverse and tremendously violent system.

Because all knowledge is shaped by particular values and informed by specific experience (Rival 2014), intercultural dialogue can be immensely enriching. Thus, I hope that this thesis will also contribute to the empowered phronesis of other actors around the

world. This is one reason that I have chosen to write it in an Anglophone academic context.

Being aware of the specificity of my contribution is inseparable from awareness of its limitations. The perspective I have adopted – that of a primarily male organizational elite – undoubtedly has its blind spots. My way of proceeding is only one among many other valid styles of research. The particular times and places in which I have coincided with my informants cannot afford more than a glimpse into their ongoing lives. The words, gestures, and material things I have noticed are but my own reading of an infinite empirical reality (Weber 1977 [1904]), filtered by the frames of intelligibility and meaning that I have acquired through my socialization (Durkheim 1995 [1912]).

I have not attempted to compensate for the contingency of my findings with some sort of "watertight" research design, as if there was such a thing as a "complete" knowledge of the case at hand. Rather, I expect that my words, themselves born out of much listening, will be woven into an ongoing dialogue in which all stakeholders have something to say that can help all of us deepen our capacity for creative action. Yomol Nohptesel and the Comparte research network are privileged spaces for that, but by writing this thesis, I am inviting others into the conversation as well.

Food is at the centre of these people's attention: we see them kneeling before several varieties of corn, beans, and squash, as well as cabbage, eggs, and chives; inflorescences of chapay (Astrocaryum mexicanum) *and tender sprouts of* chi'b (Chamaedorea cataractarum)*; bananas, oranges, and sugar cane… yet clearly this gathering is about more than just food.*

The carpet of pine needles marks sacred ground. Flowers frame and organize the other objects according to the four colours of corn, which correspond to the four elements and the four cardinal directions of the Mayan worldview. The Christian cross and the Tseltal translation of the Gospels have a place on this Mayan altar, signifying a religious synthesis.

The diagonal stoles identify five deacons; off to the side, there is one Jesuit priest (stole worn vertically). Their stoles identify them as Roman Catholic clergy but do not conform to the standard monochromes approved by the Vatican; instead, they are embroidered with Tseltal symbols in an explosion of colour. Another distinct feature: the deacons' wives wear their own liturgical ornament (a white shawl), because the couples officiate together.

A trensipal *holds his staff of authority in one hand, and with the other he prepares to place the first candle; his wife is also present in ritual dress (a black shawl). String instruments accompany the words and gestures while the conch shell rests; pine-resin smoke rises from the Mayan incense burner; this is just one moment of a complex liturgy, a prayer to harmonize all into "one single heart" (*jun pajal yo'tan*).*

The balloons indicate a festive celebration, and the microphone shows that this particular prayer is intended to transcend not only to Mother Earth and to God, but also to a wider public. This is the inauguration of the Misión de Bachajón's radio station, Radio Ach' Lequ'il C'op (Good News Radio), in 2014. It is to be run by the youth, with the blessing of the elders, and at the service of the entire Tseltal people. Participating from the margins of the frame, an ally from Seattle, in Tseltal dress, and a bearded collaborator from Guadalajara.

Photo credit: Radio Ach' Lequ'il C'op

Chapter 3
"House therapy": Restoring the base

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I give an overview of the Misión de Bachajón's (MB's) historical development, positing that its consistent project since the mid-1960s has been to defend and revitalize the Tseltal "base." I then show how the various dimensions of this project are interconnected, through a synchronic description of the food nexus. While the MB prioritizes and protects the most essential elements of Tseltal societal reproduction by withdrawing them from the market, it engages the market through other products, in a way that is designed to further strengthen the base.

Furthermore, I argue that the MB's "middle peasant" model is an exemplar of Gudeman's normative proposal. However, Gudeman himself warns that such a model – in conditions like those of northern Chiapas – can be difficult to implement. Tania Li spells out ecological, economic, and social factors that reinforce Gudeman's concern. The potential of the MB's vision is tempered by this challenge.

I will argue that the MB responds by undertaking an ambitious systemic transformation to refashion adverse circumstances into virtuous circles.[39] This argument will take up the next three chapters; in this one, I begin with an examination of agroecology as a key strategy that holds the model together. To close the chapter, I will take into account specific challenges related to the complicated political economic "ecosystem" in which the MB operates, in order to more fully appreciate its process.

[39] My discussion of "virtuous circles" takes some inspiration from Jones et al 2011, but I use the concept differently.

PART I: THE MISIÓN DE BACHAJÓN'S OVERARCHING PROJECT

A history of resistance and renewal

In this section, I offer a brief history of the MB. This exercise is meant to illustrate my own interpretation of the MB's overarching economic project by situating it within the general contours of the MB's evolution. Therefore, I focus on the watershed events which punctuate the collective memory of the organization (cf Zerubavel 2003), pointing out how they are salient in terms of the theoretical framework described in chapter 1. For both structure and content, I draw largely on the MB's own accounts in Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz (2010), Misión de Bachajón (2016), and Zatyrka (2003), complemented with interviews in 2015 with two of the first missionaries, Carlos Camarena Labadie (arrived 1959) and Esther Cueva Regla (arrived 1968) and other members of the Misión who have been there for several decades. I have cross-referenced with outside sources where possible.

Pre-history and context in which the Misión de Bachajón arrived

The first Mayan inhabitants of what is now Chiapas probably came from what is now Guatemala, starting around 750 BCE in the eastern lowland region and gradually moving into the highland region starting around 500 CE, coinciding with the early Classic period of the Maya civilization (Vogt 1969: 12-13). These were probably the ancestors of the Tsotsil and Tseltal peoples. The present-day territory of the MB belongs to the Tseltal heartland.

Early efforts by the Spanish to subjugate the region's inhabitants, in 1522-1524, failed in the face of indigenous resistance. The second effort, in 1527-1528, was successful (Ibid.: 16-17). In 1528, the first Spanish city in Chiapas, Villa Real, was founded, but soon moved to the site of the present-day San Cristóbal de las Casas (Ibid:

17). From there, the Spanish crown implemented the *encomienda* system, "royal grant of land and Indians" to Spaniards in exchange for their support, throughout Chiapas (Ibid).[40]

As the Spanish settlement grew in size and status, it was afforded a bishop; Bartolomé de las Casas arrived in 1544 (Ibid: 17-18). His radical defense of indigenous rights may have been counterproductive, as it achieved little of its desired effect but polarized the local Spaniards, who did not incorporate native political institutions in their governance, in contrast to what occurred in other parts of Mexico (Wasserstrom 1983: 12).

Starting in the 1540s, the ecclesiastical and royal authorities built some towns and attempted to urbanize the indigenous peoples (Vogt 1969: 22-23). The royal decree in 1577 that "the Indians be forbidden to return to their old homes by 'whatever means necessary,'", and the fact that even today, the majority of indigenous people live in dispersed rural settlements, speak to indigenous resistance and to the failure of Las Casas' plan (Ibid).

Among the many revolts against Spanish rule, the "Tzeltal revolt" of 1712 was a major uprising in which thirty-two Tseltal towns – including the entire area that is currently part of the MB (Zatyrka 2003: 161) – and several Tsotsil villages attacked Ladino settlements, until military reinforcements from Guatemala suppressed them (Vogt 1969: 21). The rebellion was organized around religious symbols that incorporated both Catholic and indigenous elements (Ibid: 22). This would become a trademark of indigenous revolts in the region all the way into the 21st century.

Both fierce indigenous resistance and the fact that Spanish agricultural and trade interests were better served in lowland areas (Ibid: 18-19) contributed to the Tseltal being

[40] Beginning in 1720, the *encomienda* system was gradually replaced by the *hacienda* system, with little effect in terms of the lived experience of indigenous resident workers (Vogt 1969: 19).

largely left alone by outsiders for much of the 18th and early 19th centuries (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 51, 54-55). Starting in the 1850s, though, non-indigenous settlers began to occupy the Tseltal lands in the present-day municipalities of Chilón and Sitalá (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 57-61). Their occupation was aided and encouraged by the national government, which was anxious to turn Chiapas into a "governable space within the Mexican nation" (Bobrow-Strain: 52-53).

The settlers first established sugarcane plantations, several of which were thousands of hectares in size (Ibid.; Rodríguez Moreno 2011: 72-73). The cane syrup was used to make alcohol, a tool of labour coercion that was in high demand in the coffee plantations of the Soconusco region to the south (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 56; cf Rus 2003). Starting in the 1890s, German settlers arrived from Guatemala to establish their own coffee estates in the region (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 58-61). Meanwhile, non-indigenous Mexican settlers continued to arrive, and by the 1940s most of the land was under their control (Rodríguez Moreno 2011: 66s, 49s, 222-223; Bobrow-Strain 2007).[41]

Communal indigenous lands became *haciendas*; indigenous people mainly stayed in place, for reasons including deep-rooted traditional attachment to the land, a shortage of suitable land to settle, and debt peonage (Trens 1957 cited in Vogt 1969: 19-20). The new landlords subjugated the Tseltal through the *baldío* system, whereby indigenous peons were allowed to clear a section of forest and use it to grow their own food; this was framed as a debt to be repaid through labour. In reality, letting them grow their own food was a convenient way of subsidizing low wages or even replacing them altogether. A typical arrangement required seven days of plantation work in exchange for three days

[41] My account of the historical context is, to be sure, a simplification of a long period in a wide expanse. Some rural communities of Yajalón that are now part of the MB, for example, were never occupied by settlers; indigenous peasants there raised pigs, which they sold once a year in a town that took three days to reach by foot. However, the story I am telling is representative of the core area of the MB, where most of the population lives.

off for growing food; another required five days of work for one day off (Rodríguez Moreno 2011: 49s, 82, 96).

This system was widespread until the 1990s, with some changes mainly in terms of which commodities were produced. Starting in the 1940s, as import-substitution industrialization created demand for cheap meat to feed new urban workers in other parts of Mexico, the plantations gradually came to include cattle ranches (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 109-118). When governmental policy – and corresponding subsidies and other forms of support – shifted to export-led strategies in the 1980s (cf Bobrow-Strain 2007: 174), coffee production greatly expanded (Rodríguez Moreno 2011: 223).

Plantation owners oppressed the original inhabitants of the land through both economic exploitation and social exclusion. Intertwined with the *baldío* system, common mechanisms of servitude included permanent indebtedness, alcohol dependency, patronizing relationships, and payment in scrip that was redeemable only in company stores (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 61-75; Rodríguez Moreno 2011: 222). Indigenous people could be raped or murdered by plantation owners with complete impunity (Carlos Camarena Labadie interview). Indeed, landowning families were "the same thing" as the local government until the mid-1990s (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 77). Indigenous people continued to resist throughout this time, as we shall see below, but the power asymmetry made for much suffering.

The non-human environment also suffered. Whereas clearing the forest was traditionally part of swidden agriculture, a rotating system in which the forest is consistently renewed, in this case it was a way to get Tseltal peons to clear permanent pasture for cattle (Rodríguez Moreno 2011: 82).[42] Thus, biodiversity was lost and topsoil was eroded.

[42] Gudeman reports a similar practice in Panama (Gudeman 2009: 77).

1958: Arrival of the Jesuit missionaries

The Mexican Jesuits founded the MB in 1958. They had offered to go to a poor indigenous area, and the bishop of Chiapas, Lucio Torreblanca, responded by inviting them to Bachajón, because he was concerned about the influence of Protestant missionaries in the area (Carlos Camarena Labadie interview). A female religious congregation, the Hermanas Mínimas de María Inmaculada, joined them in 1963 and founded the region's first primary school. Lay missionaries also joined. Bachajón was accessible only by foot or horseback, and going to other parts of Mexico required a three-day trip to Ocosingo, where one could get a ride on the airplane that brought the mail (Carlos Camarena Labadie and Esther Cueva Regla interviews).

The MB's headquarters are in Bachajón, a town in the municipality of Chilón. Although the town of Chilón is the administrative center of the municipality with the same name, for centuries Bachajón has been considered by the Tseltal to be the area's principal town (Carlos Camarena Labadie interview). The *mestizo* (non-indigenous) minority, traditionally made up of landowners and merchants, is concentrated in the town of Chilón, especially in recent decades.[43] The MB has served both demographics since its arrival.

During the initial decade, the MB's activities centered on offering sacraments and promoting the nascent adult catechesis movement. The missionaries also fostered development projects such as potable water, electricity, and schooling. The teleological association between Evangelization and "Western civilization" in the missionaries' original mentality was expressed in their hostility to Tseltal culture. They would organize

[43] For more on mestizo-Tseltal relations in Chilón, cf. Bobrow-Strain (2007) and Medina (2018). There is also a significant non-indigenous population in the much smaller town of Sitalá. In Sitalá, many mestizo families are descendants of poor migrants from other parts of Mexico; they were local livestock traders, brick makers, small shop owners, etc. during the time when the Tseltal laboured on plantations owned by wealthier mestizos (Oscar pers. comm.). These families tend to get along well with their Tseltal neighbours, and are often bilingual.

skits in which the authority of respected elders, or *trensipaletik*,[44] was ridiculed (Oscar pers. comm.). It was assumed that Tseltal language would disappear as the people learned Spanish and generally became culturally *mestizo* (Carlos Camarena Labadie interview).[45]

1960s: Samuel Ruiz: Diocese of San Cristóbal, Second Vatican Council and Medellín

Several events in the 1960s radically changed the course and mentality of the MB. At the local level, the diocese of Chiapas was divided in two in 1964 (Zatyrka 2003). The Diocese of Tuxtla is mostly *mestizo*, and the Diocese of San Cristóbal is mostly indigenous (Tseltal, Tsotsil, Ch'ol, and Tojolabal). Samuel Ruiz, who had been named bishop of Chiapas in 1960, became the bishop of the latter new diocese, which includes the MB.

At the global level, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) marked a major turning point for the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of its mission in a plural, modern world (Casanova 2006). Samuel Ruiz actively participated in the Council's *Ad Gentes* commission, which declared that the Church should recognize the good in non-Western, non-Christian cultures, and foster the creation of "autochthonous churches" (Zatyrka 2003). He was also a leader in the 1968 meeting of Latin American bishops at Medellín, where they applied the spirit of Vatican II to their region in terms of a "preferential option for the poor." The full implications of this concept would soon be spelled out – in words, praxis, and martyrdom – by liberation theologians and ecclesial base communities (cf Gutiérrez 1971; Sobrino and Ellacuría 1994).

[44] Plural of *trensipal*, from the Spanish *principal*.
[45] The linguist specialized in endangered languages, Vijay D'Souza, remarks (in pers. comm.) that shaming is indeed a more effective cause of language extinction than outright persecution.

The worldwide superior of the Jesuits at the time, Pedro Arrupe, led a renewal of Catholic religious life along the same lines.[46] The Bachajón Jesuits enthusiastically embraced these changes, and collaborated closely with Samuel Ruiz from that point forward in building an "autochthonous church" with a preferential option for the oppressed indigenous majority (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 192-193).[47] They became fluent in the Tseltal language and began to translate the Bible. As a sign of their conversion, the missionaries got on their knees and publicly asked the *trensipaletik* for forgiveness (Oscar pers. comm.).

In 1968, another congregation of Mexican religious sisters, the Hermanas del Divino Pastor, joined the MB and began providing basic medical attention (Esther Cueva Regla interview). While the Hermanas Mínimas de María Inmaculada continued to run their Spanish-language school, the Hermanas del Divino Pastor adopted the MB's new style and became close partners of the Jesuits. By 1971, they began promoting the revitalization of traditional Tseltal healthcare.

Meanwhile, the unjust distribution of land remained a central concern for indigenous people. In response to mounting pressure, the government opened an agrarian frontier in the Lacandona forest in 1972 (cf De Vos 2002);[48] some of the missionaries accompanied the resulting exodus from Chilón and other regions, and founded the community of La Arena (Morales 1976). This let off some steam from the northern plantations, but did not solve the underlying issue; the precarious conditions in which the massive displacement was carried out only reinforced discontent with the *status quo* (Cubells Aguilar 2016: 151-155).

[46] Arrupe was general superior of the Society of Jesus from 1965 to 1983, and president of the Union of Major Superiors of Catholic religious orders and congregations for much of this time.
[47] Ruiz retired as bishop in 1999, and died in 2011. Subsequent bishops have kept his pastoral approach alive.
[48] Cubells Aguilar (2016: 151-155) cites the work of Xóchitl Leyva and others who have shown that the policy only officialised and expanded what had already been occurring spontaneously since the 1930s.

The 1974 Indigenous Congress, native clergy, and the cargo system

The following decade was decisive for channelling the new missionary attitude, combined with growing social unrest, into action. In 1974, on the occasion of the 500th birth anniversary of Bartolomé de las Casas,[49] bishop Ruiz (or jTatic Samuel, as he was affectionately known) convened the first ever Indigenous Congress. It brought together about 2,000 representatives of the major ethnicities in the diocese, after a year of consultations with approximately 1,000 indigenous communities of the diocese, where approximately 400,000 people expressed their problems and proposals (Zatyrka 2003).

> This was a dividing line in the history of the Indian communities in Chiapas. It helped them to realize the situation of poverty, isolation, and marginalization in which they lived and to see the advantages of organizing a united effort to solve their problems. Many Indian organizations resulted from this momentous event. Most important, however, was that finally there was a "pan-Indian" event, organized and run by them. Finally, the Indians were being the agents of their own common history. (Zatyrka 2003: 135)

This event sparked collective organizing efforts to promote the rights and interests of indigenous people (Medina 2011; Bobrow-Strain 2007: 118-121). The MB denounced human rights abuses committed by the plantation owners, and translated the Agrarian Law to Tseltal, using it to offer advice to communities fighting for land (Misión 2016). A Jesuit, Mardonio Morales, went to the national archives of Guatemala to find the original titles to the land, to legally buttress the Tseltal claim to ancestral rights (Rodríguez Moreno 2011: 69-70; José Avilés interview; cf Bobrow-Strain 2007: 147).

Seeking to understand the implications of the Indigenous Congress for the diocese itself, jTatic Samuel began a second consultation process in the following year. In the collective memory of the MB, the most significant moment of this consultation was when the bishop asked a group of Tseltal leaders in Tacuba (60km west of Bachajón) what

[49] Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican friar, was a famous defender of indigenous human rights and the first resident bishop of Chiapas. 1474 was thought to be his birth year until the 1970s, when researchers discovered that it was probably about a decade later.

would happen in the hypothetical case that he and all the missionaries suddenly died in an accident. A *trensipal*, Domingo Gómez, responded for the group by referring to the Scriptures. After teaching his followers for three years, Jesus left them and they were able to continue his work to the present day. However, after 15 years, the missionaries were still indispensable; something was not right. What did Christ do that the Church had not? He gave his followers the Holy Spirit, and that is what they asked of the bishop.[50]

The message was clear: the gift of the Holy Spirit is a theological allusion to the sacrament of ordination. The Tseltal wanted clergy ordained from among their own, so as to be able to continue God's work without depending on outsiders. This request was the turning point in the MB's ecclesiological identity; its leaders describe everything they have done since then as the gradual implementation of a fully autonomous Tseltal church.

One important intuition that defined the Jesuit approach (as opposed to that of other groups in the diocese) was that the struggle for social justice should be deeply rooted in a revitalization of Tseltal culture. A Jesuit, Eugenio Maurer, wrote a doctoral dissertation in anthropology to better understand Tseltal religiosity (Maurer 1978). He and other colleagues have since continued producing anthropological research to inform the MB's work.

Maurer understood that the *fiestas* in honor of each village's patron saints – a tradition brought from Spain by Dominican missionaries in the 16th and 17th centuries – had become a principal way in which communities reproduce harmony (*slamalil qu'inal*),

[50] The same story is recounted by Zatyrka (2003: 177), Ali Modad Aguilar (1999), Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz (2010: 42), and De Vos (2002); apparently the original source is an unpublished manuscript by Mardonio Morales in 1981. This historical anecdote, which Zatyrka calls the "Pentecost event of the autochthonous church," has become enshrined as a sort of foundational myth of the local church. However, Zatyrka (2003: 183-184) and De Vos (2002) also explain that it was a bit more complicated than that. The initial hesitance to form native clergy reflected a major debate between MB Jesuits who espoused different strands of Marxism. The Jesuits who were against the formation of a permanent hierarchy (ie, a vanguard of cadres) eventually left the MB under pressure, and joined the group that had migrated to La Arena.

the value at the centre of their cosmovision (Maurer 1978, 1983).[51] *Fiestas* usually entail several days of communal praying, feasting, processions, and ritual dancing, after months of intense preparation by many members of the community. *Capitanes*, who sponsor the expenses, are accorded status in exchange for redistributing their wealth.[52] However, the success of a *fiesta* is not measured in material terms, but rather by the degree to which people work together harmoniously throughout the process (Oscar pers. comm.). Thus, in one *fiesta* in which I participated, cordial teamwork was elaborately performed even in relatively simple tasks, such as decorating a statue with a string of flowers.

This appreciation for *fiestas* led the Jesuits to refrain from any dismissive attitude about "popular religiosity," even as they simultaneously adapted the sacraments to make them vehicles for political empowerment, influenced as they were by liberation theology. The MB's way of celebrating Mass, for example, is designed to maximize participation and collective reflection, rather than having the priest do and say almost everything as in the standard Roman rite (Maurer 1987). On yet another level, Maurer (1978) argued that pre-Columbian elements of Tseltal modes of Catholic worship – such as ritual offerings to the earth – were the expression of a legitimate Mayan Christian "synthesis" (as opposed to a superficial "syncretism"), and these elements were also fully incorporated into the MB's liturgical life.[53] The three layers are intertwined, for example in Sitalá's annual *fiesta* of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which commemorates – with a mix of indigenous and Western symbols – the same Marian advocation who mobilized the aforementioned rebellion of 1712.

[51] For more on the role of saints in a traditional Latin American peasant society, cf Gudeman 1976b.
[52] A similar model is found throughout other parts of Mexico (cf eg Wiggins et al 2002, Kaiser and Dewey 1991) and in Guatemala (Isakson 2009).
[53] The recognition of agrarian rituals, which had long been persecuted by the Church, has particular decolonial resonance, as well as scientific, cultural, and ecological implications (cf Hecht 1995:2).

Structurally, the MB decentralized. Five major regions were defined according to the Tseltal geography of *ts'umbalil*.[54] These are further subdivided into 23 "zones" and 622 rural chapels, which are now the fundamental platform for ministry.

To lead this ministry, the goal is to ordain Tseltal priests to serve in their own communities. The only problem is that the Vatican requires priests to be celibate, while marriage is the defining characteristic of adulthood in Tseltal culture.[55] The MB, along with the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, advocates strongly for a change in the Vatican's policy (Ali Modad Aguilar 1999; Zatyrka 2003). As an intermediate step, they have started with Tseltal permanent deacons, a type of married clergy who can administer some, but not all, of the sacraments. After close to 200 deacons had been ordained in the MB (compared to less than ten priests), Pope John Paul II ordered them to stop. The MB continued, except that the hundreds of newer recruits were called "pre-deacons," who ministered while patiently waiting for ordination. Pope Francis has finally removed the prohibition, and the "pre-deacons" are now full deacons, patiently waiting for priestly ordination.

Another far-reaching innovation was to reorganize the church according to the Mesoamerican *cargo* system, whereby the community entrusts certain people with a specific service to the community.[56] (This system overlaps with the distinct set of *cargos* that are specific to *fiestas*.) Young adults start off with simple *cargos*, such as catechists,

[54] A territorial category with pre-Columbian origins (cf Zatyrka 2003: 161) which demarcates space in relation to extended kinship groups and Tseltal dialects. Notably, *ts'umbalil* geography does not coincide with that of governmental municipalities.

[55] Thus, ordaining married men not only makes it easier to find recruits, it also means that leaders can be chosen from among mature adults who have already proven themselves as people of service. (This is a key difference from typical priestly seminaries, which recruit unmarried men from a relatively young age.) Another aspect, no less important, is that Tseltal deacons are ordained, serve and preside at liturgies alongside their wives, who have specific roles; they minister as a couple, reflecting the value of gender complementarity. (This aspect is not at all standard in the Roman Catholic Church; it is present only in other "inculturated" Churches that push the limits set by the Vatican, such as some Aymara Catholic communities of Bolivia.)

[56] Cf Rus and Wasserstrom (1980) on the question of whether the Mesoamerican *cargo* system is pre-Columbian or emerged as a response to colonialism.

and insofar as they are recognized for honesty, generosity and capability, they may be asked to take on increasing responsibility, and accorded its corresponding authority. Deacons, for example, hold a relatively high *cargo*. Those who have served the community well throughout their lives eventually become the community's *trensipaletik*. The MB "recovered" this indigenous system and made it the basis of its own ecclesial structure. Today there are roughly 20,000 *cargos* (ie, perhaps 20% of all adults in the MB's territory) who are engaged in over twenty-five specific types of ministry (Arturo pers. comm.).

Cargos are usually assigned to a married man with his wife's permission, and with the understanding that they will serve as a couple, supported by their whole household. Certain *cargos* can be held by single men or women. A cargo is "planted" (commissioned) in a ritual that emphasizes that the exercise of authority is only legitimate insofar as it is service. Each new *cargo* is apprenticed as a "younger sibling" (*itsinal*) to an "older sibling" (*bankinal*), who has exercised the role for at least a year. Each *cargo* cohort (ie, each type of *cargo*) has a designated *trensipal* couple who offer the group wise advice from their long experience in its respective domain, as well as a secretary (whose role constitutes a distinct *cargo*) to keep records and ensure fluid communication across the Misión's chapels, zones, and *ts'umbalil* regions.

The system is organizationally sophisticated, with mechanisms that provide checks and balances. For example, *cargos* generally work in their own respective villages, but there is a specific *cargo* (*tikonel*, or "visitor") whose role is to periodically travel to zones outside their own, in order to inquire whether the local *cargos* are providing their service well. These visitations are major events, where hundreds of people participate in earnest, and the *tikonel* is treated as a respected authority. Generally, the event is the occasion for positive encouragement of the *cargos*, but if there is a serious

problem, the offender might be formally admonished, or even given a time of "rest" from the role.

1980s-1994: Consolidating the Misión de Bachajón's organizational force

By the 1980s, this model was consolidated and the missionaries (roughly fifteen to twenty people at any given time) began to focus their efforts on giving the *cargos* a solid formation (Huerta Zavala 2013). Freirean inspiration combined well with the Tseltal way of learning and collective decision-making (Maurer 2011),[57] resulting in an innovative pedagogy known as *tijwanej*, which literally means "to shake," or to activate what is already innate (Zatyrka 2003: 141-145; Urdapilleta Carrasco and Parra Vázquez 2016; Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010). This method is used in weekly meetings and liturgies at the local level, as well as week-long *inter-zona* and *inter-ts'umbalil* courses that take place throughout the year.[58] It is explicitly aimed at empowerment and contrasted with neo-colonial modes of education (Maurer 1983, 2010).

The system is flexible: new types of *cargos* have emerged over the years to respond to needs as they arise. Today, they range from deacons and catechists to promoters of *buen vivir*[59] (who engage in sustainable development projects) and

[57] "The leadership of the diocese and the Mission were able to understand the dynamics of decision making in the Indian cultures of Chiapas. It became the functioning principle of the autochthonous Church. [….] It includes direct community participation, complemented with the weight given to the Elders (the Trensipaletik), the more experienced members of the community. One of the main responsibilities of the Elders is to ensure that everyone has his or her say. A decision is taken only when a consensus has been reached. Then the Elders make observations over the decisions made and perhaps suggest amendments. With the general approval, the decision is considered taken and binding. All the members of the community are expected to honor it. The structure of the autochthonous Church follows this 'guided democracy' pattern." (Zatyrka 2003: 255)

[58] Using this method, the deacons have completed a decade-long course in theology, anthropology and philosophy which is certified by the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. With this course, they have the necessary credentials for priestly ordination, and they are currently doing a specialization course so that they themselves will be able to train the next generation of deacons (Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010). Notably, the method allows for deep engagement with texts without requiring all participants to be literate.

[59] The Tseltal translation is *lekil kuxlejalil*, but I use the Spanish term to underline that it was adopted as part of a pan-Latin American indigenous movement, emerging from interpretations of Aymara and Quichua worldviews. Cf Mella 2015: 277-340 for a critical genealogy.

"problem fixers" (conflict mediators). The latter were originally created to reconcile internal tensions in the MB, but during the complicated period of violent conflict and institutional competition in the 1990s, their role expanded and evolved into an alternative justice system run by more than 200 people, and complete with hierarchically arranged appeals courts (Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010: 129-160; Cubells Aguilar 2016). It is attractive because it promotes reconciliation rather than retribution, and it never imposes monetary fines. Further, it is framed as a recovery of ancestral practices, in which "people took care of their own problems" without depending on the *kaxlanes* (ie, non-indigenous people)[60] for justice (Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010: 150).

Through this process of cultural revival and training of thousands of local leaders, all belonging to a decentralized but tightly knit organization with hundreds of bases throughout the region, by the early 1990s the MB had become a force to be reckoned with. In 1992, it founded an NGO, the Centro de Derechos Indígenas, AC (CEDIAC), to strengthen its work on behalf of social justice. CEDIAC created a political organization known as Yomlej, which started with 9,000 people and eventually reached a membership base of 17,000 (Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010). Yomlej affiliated with a leftist political party and successfully ended the 70-year rule of the PRI at the municipal level, replacing it – for the first time ever – with Tseltal elected officials. Also in 1992, Yomlej and the MB helped organize the Xinich' ("ants") march from Palenque to Mexico City, where the MB's Manuel Cruz Guzmán, a catechist, presented president Salinas with a list of demands (Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010).

[60] From Tseltal *kaxlán*, which in turn derives from the Spanish *castellano* (ie, Castilian). In Tseltal, the plural is *kaxlanetik*, but when speaking Spanish, it becomes *kaxlanes*. I use this form for readability, since the Spanish plural suffix is closer to the English, and because it highlights the multiple layers of history that make the concept somewhat ambiguous. *Mestizo* and *ladino* are roughly equivalent and no less problematic. I heard all three terms used interchangeably by my informants of all ethnicities during fieldwork, with *kaxlán* being much more commonly used. For a more nuanced discussion, cf Medina (2018).

The 1994 uprising and subsequent land reform

This was the context of the Zapatista uprising on January 1, 1994, the same day that the North American Free Trade Agreement took effect. The MB supported the Zapatista's demands but opted out of violence. The Jesuit superior of the MB, along with jTatic Samuel Ruiz, served as mediators of the San Andrés Accords between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government.

While the Zapatista agenda did not originally include land rights,[61] the uprising created an opportunity for Yomlej and other organizations who were focused on that issue. Land occupations, in which Tseltal peasants reclaimed their ancestral land from plantation owners, had been taking place since the 1970s, but now they took on a new vigour and scale (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 106, 122-139). To avoid further bloodshed, CEDIAC helped to negotiate the legal transfer of the land in exchange for monetary compensation to the *kaxlán* owners, with funds donated by the European Union (José Avilés interview; cf Bobrow-Strain 2007: 5, 141). A total of nearly 500,000 hectares of land, much of it in MB territory, was ultimately returned to indigenous smallholders throughout Chiapas (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 4-5). While some large estates remained partly intact, the fundamental structure of land distribution was successfully reversed (José Avilés interview; Bobrow-Strain 2007: 135-136).

Shortly thereafter, CEDIAC also ensured that the land was legally recognized as *ejidos*, a category of social property for the collective ownership of land dating to the

[61] For decades before the uprising, the Zapatistas began organizing in the Lacandona jungle – precisely the area where the people had been granted large extensions of land (20 to 40 hectares per family); this, combined with their original vision of overthrowing the national government, explains why they neglected what had long been the central demand of indigenous peasants in the rest of Chiapas (José Avilés interview; cf also Medina 2011). At the time, the Jesuit who participated in the San Andres Accords told the other Jesuits the story of how the government negotiator reacted with surprise at this omission in the list of demands, to which Subcomandante Marcos responded: "add that in as well" (José Avilés interview). To be sure, the Zapatistas did take on this issue as time went on. The village of San Marcos Avilés, named after both the Zapatista leader, Subcomandante Marcos, and the Jesuit, José Avilés (then director of CEDIAC), is a testament to their history of collaboration for land rights.

Mexican Revolution; the statutes were expressly designed to resist Salinas' neoliberal reforms (José Avilés interview).[62] Each member family is allotted between four and five hectares, distributed in a way that ensures equitable shares in terms of access to water as well as slope (the area is mountainous).[63] During my fieldwork, the MB's *inter-zona* courses and other large gatherings were used as opportunities to actively promote candidates for *ejido* governments (*regidores*) who are committed to defending their collective land tenure, in competition with PRI-affiliated, evangelical Christian candidates who would open the *ejidos* to marketization.

The MB also continues to organize resistance to the state's other neoliberal policies. Particularly threatening are those that would allow transnational corporations to extract the region's natural resources, and those that would build infrastructure to benefit globalized trade while displacing people and destroying ecosystems in Chiapas (cf Martínez Fuentes and Sandoval Forero 2011; Wilson 2014). The resistance to these policies is articulated around the wider Movement for the Defense of the Territory (MODEVITE), which includes neighboring municipalities and organizations outside the MB, but is partly coordinated by members of the MB. Even in times of relative calm, MODEVITE routinely mobilizes tens of thousands of people for "pilgrimages" which are simultaneously protest marches, as a way of showing force and keeping the networked energy alive.

[62] The Mexican Revolution introduced the first agrarian reform on the continent, which was mainly implemented during the Cárdenas presidency of the 1930s. One major legacy of this reform is the *ejido* system, a community-based form of land ownership, in which land is "viewed as having a 'social function' as opposed to merely being seen as an economic factor of production" (Barnes 2009: 394). President Salinas de Gortari's neoliberal policies included the 1992 reform of Article 27 of the Constitution, allowing the private sale of *ejido* land and halting any further governmental redistribution of land. The reasoning was that communal ownership was a factor of low productivity. Some redistributed land formally became *comunidades agrarias*, which are similar to *ejidos*.

[63] The result is that each family's holding is a collection of small, dispersed pieces rather than a single consolidated one. The estimate of typical landholding size is based on interviews and confirmed in an analysis of the records of 212 Ts'umbal Xitalha' cooperative members; an exception is in the lowland jungle area, where many families have between 20 and 30 hectares.

2000s-today: Consolidating the gains in complicated times

As the 1990s rolled into the early 2000s, the situation was increasingly complicated. The government reacted to the uprising(s) with both (para)military repression and an increase in social policies, like conditional cash transfers and the provision of basic services. Yomlej lost credibility as its leaders got involved in clientelist party politics (Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010). Communities became increasingly divided by all these forces. The penetration of roads, radio and visitors, along with an increase in cyclical migration for work, brought the mainstream consumer culture of *kaxlanes*; Tseltal youth began to lose interest in their traditions. Furthermore, the people had got their land back from the plantation owners, but now were faced with the challenge of creating a viable economy of their own.

At the same time, the Tseltal people had gained newfound confidence – expressed, for example, in the joyous expansion since 1994 of the decorative ribbons and embroidery used in women's traditional dress (Oscar pers. comm.). Through their overlapping participation in the MB, Yomlej, Xinich', the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, and *ejido* assemblies, they had acquired political awareness and organizing experience. The MB itself had solidified its profile as a powerful actor with strong moral authority and deeply rooted, extensive networks throughout the region. Since then, it has continued to advance the cause of Tseltal sovereignty on several interconnected fronts.

Having learned from the crisis of the Yomlej movement, the MB is now beginning to promote a different sort of political initiative. This time, it is taking inspiration from the experience at Cherán, Michoacán, where an indigenous community expelled the politicians, police, and other organized criminals from the municipality and set up its own government. In the Cherán model, power is more distributed and those who hold it are

more accountable than in the standard Mexican municipal government. In contrast to the Zapatista's autonomous communities (cf Mora 2015), this model of local government does recognize the legitimacy of the Mexican state as such, but makes a Constitutionally-warranted claim to indigenous self-rule by local common law (Rodrigo pers. comm.).[64] After much collective reflection and some exchange visits with the members of the indigenous government of Cherán, the MB is currently taking the legal measures to enact this form of self-rule (Arturo pers. comm.).

Meanwhile, the MB has largely consolidated Tseltal linguistic sovereignty. Spoken *and* written Tseltal is routinely used in all of its meetings, documents, rituals, and even bureaucratic forms. At a MB assembly during my fieldwork, the Tsotsil anthropologist and activist, Xun Betán, pointed out that this is the only one of Mexico's 68 indigenous languages that can claim such a feat. The MB's radio station, Ach' Leq'uil C'op, is one of only two mass media outlets in the region (along with the Zapatista's radio station) that provides its music, news, and commentary in Tseltal.[65] It is run entirely by young people and is extremely popular, partly because much of the music played is recorded locally by the MB's youth *mariachi* bands who sing original compositions in Tseltal as well as Spanish-language classics.

As for economic viability, the MB emphasizes self-sufficiency in food and medicine, but self-sufficiency has its limits (cf Gudeman and Hann 2015). Livelihoods in today's Chiapas require a cash income for clothes, tools, and transportation. If income allows, mobile phones and higher studies are also important cash expenses.

[64] In an institutional document that lays out the theoretical framework for its proposal, the MB notes that besides Article 4 of the Mexican constitution, the claim is also backed by binding international law, including Convention 169 of the ILO and a 2007 declaration of the General Assembly of the UN on the rights of indigenous peoples.
[65] For more on the political economy of mass media in Chiapas, cf Palacios Luna 2011c.

The principal source of income for most families is shade-grown organic coffee, which they grow on one or two hectares of their allotted land.[66] Since 2001, the MB has developed a strategy to achieve sovereign terms of trade in this global value chain, mainly through a cooperative that has succeeded in forward vertical integration and significant quality upgrading. This strategy is explained in detail in chapter 4.

Here, though, it is important to emphasize – following Gudeman's model as laid out in chapter 1 – that the MB's economic vision is about much more than market exchange, even as it includes it. Indeed, everything I have described so far, insofar as it represents the MB's efforts to protect and invest in the Tseltal base, is as much an economic strategy as it is political, ecclesial, and cultural.[67] Having described this holistic project in its historical evolution, I will now show the importance of food as a nexus where all of its dimensions come together. If the MB's ambitious vision can be described – in the words of one Jesuit – as "sovereignty without adjectives," food sovereignty is absolutely integral to it.

Sovereignty at the food nexus

On a tour of an informant's shade forest with some friends, he takes a moment to prune a *mumu* tree, in order to allow the right amount of sunlight to reach his coffee plants. He gathers the leaves from the cut branches to bring home as forage for his mother's chickens. Then he uses his machete to peel the branches, and offers us their tender insides as a snack. Suddenly xMari exclaims: "Poor little indigenous people!

[66] Estimate based on an analysis of the records of 212 Ts'umbal Xitalha' cooperative members. Income from wage labor is extremely scarce, except for sporadic public works projects or through migration. Cash transfers from the government are increasingly a source of complementary income, but, as I discuss below, the MB generally sees them as a form of dependency to be avoided.

[67] My claim here is based on Weber's (1977 [1904]) epistemological argument. I include the many works I have cited by members of the MB, including those that resulted from participatory processes (eg Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010), insofar as they represent an investment in collective memory, an important part of the base.

They're eating *sticks*!" The group explodes in laughter at her subversive imitation of what a patronizingly racist outsider might have thought of the scene.

Indeed, since the 19th century until at least the 1990s, Mexican government policy – often backed by pseudoscientific claims about nutrition – has tried to intervene in indigenous diets (Bertran Vilá 2005: 81-86). However, these Tseltal are eating "sticks" not because they are desperate, but just the opposite: their indigenous foodways provide abundance and variety. Whereas racist policies have shamed many Mexicans into shedding their indigenous identity by adopting an unhealthy diet full of processed foods (Ibid: 80-81), xMari's joke – and the reaction it got – point to this particular group's self-confidence regarding such a sensitive issue.

At the core of Tseltal food practices is making *milpa*, the traditional Mesoamerican polyculture of maize, beans, squash, and chili peppers, which grow alongside a plethora of other plant, animal and fungal species. Generally speaking, Tseltal peasant families allot the greatest share of their land to *milpa*.[68] Related practices, which I will consider together here, include kitchen gardens, small livestock yards, beekeeping, foraging, hunting, and fishing. They produce nearly everything they eat, with the exception of salt, sugar, and oil.[69]

The staple diet of maize, beans, chilies, and squash is not at all boring because of the tremendous diversity of those crops, besides the many ways of preparing them. Indeed, the Tseltal are veritable "foodies." Special variations on the tortilla, for example, include *xuxil waj*, a thick tortilla dotted with whole black beans, and *ch'umil waj,* a tortilla

[68] My analysis of records from 212 members of Ts'umbal Xitalha' revealed that, on average, 50% of land is dedicated to *milpa* (with half in use and half fallowing at any given time), 25% for coffee, 12.5% for primary forest, and 12.5% for some other productive use (eg fruit trees or cow pasture), which may be for self-sufficiency and/or for exchange.

[69] Bread, rice, and pasta are also occasional treats for those who can afford them.

made of cornflour mixed with ground squash, and filled with a thin layer of ground beans. Other delicacies, including different types of tamales, are served especially at *fiestas*.

People often comment on the taste, texture and color of specific varieties of beans or maize. Visits to far-away communities (often for MB-related activities) are an occasion to bring back seeds of a variety that is grown there but not yet in one's own community. In this way, practices related to the cultural appreciation of food actively enrich a much greater diversity of staple crop varieties than the few that are commercially available.

Further, many recipes make use of different parts of plants. For instance, both the shoots and the roots of the chayote squash plant are important ingredients in Tseltal cuisine. However, only the squash itself is commodified; recipes which make use of other parts would not be cooked if people did not grow their chayote themselves.

Growing one's own food also means that one can harvest crops at different stages of their life cycle. Being able to control the timing with precision is important for Tseltal gourmands. Special recipes abound, for example, for new maize, tender beans, new shoots of chayote, squash flowers in bloom, etc. In these recipes, there is no substitute for fresh, local ingredients.

Besides the crops that are intentionally cultivated, volunteer plant species thrive in the *milpa* ecosystem. Whereas Green Revolution farming treats these as "weeds," the Tseltal consider them *itá* (loosely, "greens"), each with a proper name. Rather than eliminating them with poisons, they foster and make use of the many edible and medicinal ones; plants with no other use are cut and left as mulch to protect and fertilize the soil. *Itá* add variety to the diet not only in terms of taste, but also in terms of nutrients and other properties.

Likewise, animals that are part of a healthy *milpa* ecology, but can become pests if not managed, are a source of protein. Many informants spoke of hunting opossum in

their *milpa*, for example, and at least thirteen small rodent species found in the *milpa* are consumed or traded in the Tseltal town of Santo Tomás Oxchuc (Barragan et al 2007). The *satz* caterpillar, considered a seasonal treat, is the occasion for social gatherings in October.

Food is essential to hospitality, which in turn is essential to the organizational work of building Tseltal power more broadly, as well as the reproduction of social ties that make this work both possible and meaningful. Distances are long and budgets are low, so when a group of *cargos* or cooperative members from different regions all meet in a particular community, the host community is expected to feed them. Since it is perfectly appropriate to offer a simple meal of tortillas, beans, and coffee, which are readily available (barring disaster) in any community, this is not a major burden and meetings can be held regularly.[70] After one such a meeting, a non-indigenous ally from a different part of rural Mexico commented that meeting so frequently would not be possible in his home village, because everybody would expect to eat chicken, but nobody can afford to feed it to that many people.

More significant events require more elaborate food. Thus, hosts of religious *fiestas* and other large gatherings are designated with ample time, usually a year, so that they can coordinate with relatives and neighbours to grow the right quantities and varieties that they will need to properly feed their guests.[71] The fact that this requires long-term, meticulous planning and collaboration makes the economy of food and hospitality even more deeply embedded in social relationships, and social harmony

[70] In another example of how food culture enables political struggle, I was told in a MB-affiliated Zapatista community that whenever a "red alert" is given (requiring them to be ready to flee at a moment's notice), they immediately make *xuxil waj* (see above). A complete meal in dry, portable form, it allows them to survive for days in the forest.

[71] While chicken or ducks might be slaughtered for an important guest or a medium-scale religious celebration (baptism, first communion, wedding), larger livestock, such as pigs or cows, are normally slaughtered only in the context of major *fiestas* or the Misión's inter-ts'umbalil courses, which bring together thousands of people from different regions. Communities consider it a high honor to host such events.

literally rooted in the land. These relationships provide a safety net in times of scarcity, through the practice of reciprocal in-kind gifts of grains known as *mano vuelta*.

Food production hinges on agroecological management of the *milpa* (as well as primary forests, coffee shade forests, fallowing fields, and rivers), which in turn requires specialized knowledge not only of the uses of, but also the inherent relationships between different species in the local environment, not to mention their respective life cycles vis-à-vis the changing seasons and climate (Rodríguez Moreno 2014a; Zarger and Stepp 2004; Casagrande 2004; Benz et al 2007). The family's *milpa* is where children learn this intimacy with their ecosystem (much of which is encoded in the Tseltal language), and develop their own identity in the process (Paoli 2003; Maurer 2011; Berlin et al 1974).

To be sure, some Tseltal use Green Revolution fertilizers and poisons, which have been heavily promoted by the government for decades.[72] However, this goes against the moral grain of their communities. One informant expressed that those who use herbicide to grow maize do it out of laziness. His inversion of the Green Revolution narrative about increasing productivity – and its moral implications – is reinforced by his subsequent observation, that since these people kill their own *itá* and even their squash with the herbicides, they then have to steal this food from other people's *milpas*. Another, who produces honey, complained that a neighbour's use of pesticides was killing his bees.[73] When news circulates – as it did during my fieldwork – about indebted farmers and hopeless youth having used the herbicide, Gramoxone, to end their own lives, the grim connection between buying into the Green Revolution and losing it all is implicitly conveyed.

[72] The "second wave" of the Green Revolution, starting in the 1970s, successfully targeted smallholding farmers in Mexico (Holt-Giménez 2006: 151). Supported by subsidies, easy credit, and government extensionists, this policy affected both staple crops like maize and cash crops such as coffee (Wiggins et al 2002: 181). Following short-term gains in yield, problems began to emerge: soil degradation, the "pesticide treadmill", and levelled-off or even decreasing yields (Holt-Giménez 2006: 151).
[73] This claim is not unwarranted (cf Tsvetkov et al 2017; Woodcock et al 2017).

Food sovereignty, ecology, and socio-cultural reproduction are intertwined. A high point of the religious calendar is at the beginning of May, when the *trensipaletik* hike up to sacred primary forests where there are hilltop springs, to make ritual offerings and pray for water on behalf of the community. When walking through a *milpa* with Tseltal informants, it was not uncommon for them to be reminded – by a vulture, for example, or an anthill – of a traditional myth, and to spontaneously retell it. On a visit to a *milpa* in Guatemala (cf chapter 2), our Kaqchikel Maya host explained why he plants four seeds of corn in every hole: one for the birds, one for the rodents, one for his neighbours, and one for himself. At that, jTatic Andrés' face lit up, and he explained to the younger members of the Tseltal delegation that "this is how our ancestors spoke," elaborating on the values that he hopes they will embrace.

The strong connection between Tseltal foodways and the rest of Tseltal culture and identity is widely acknowledged. Tortillas made from freshly ground corn – as opposed to the processed corn flour that is distributed by the government – are known as *bats'il waj* (true tortilla), just as the Tseltal refer to themselves as *bats'il winik* (true man) and to their language as *bats'il c'op* (true word).[74] An elder even joked that my Tseltal language skills would surely improve once I had eaten *tsui* (a particular *itá* found in the *milpa*)!

Milpa, then, is at the center of the Tseltal "base" in every way. It is fundamental to economic and ecological sustainability. It is a school of science and a source of cultural identity. It is a sacred mediator of harmonious relationships among humans, and between humans and the rest of nature. Further, much as the food practices of other indigenous contexts (Isakson 2009; Wildcat et al 2014; Simpson 2014; Kamal et al 2015; Coté 2016),

[74] Since the government has begun distributing Maseca flour as part of its social policy, some people consume this. At one home, my host mentioned that he was embarrassed to offer me Maseca tortillas, but did not have *bats'il waj* because of the recent drought.

making *milpa* is a form of "everyday decolonization" (Hunt and Holmes 2015). In other words, making *milpa* not only provides for food sovereignty; it is itself a way of *doing* sovereignty, of enacting Tseltal self-determination in the wider sense (cf Daigle 2017; Grey and Patel 2015; Desmarais and Wittman 2014).[75] Moreover, as we have seen, at a practical level it also enables other, more politically explicit efforts to build power.

No wonder, then, that the first thing that Tseltal peasants did upon regaining their land was to replace pastures with *milpa* (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 147-148). Transforming the landscape in this way was an immediate and multi-layered way to reclaim it as Tseltal territory. Since then, it has continued to be a front line in the ongoing struggle for Tseltal "sovereignty without adjectives."

Recognizing its fundamental importance, the MB makes it a priority to protect and invest in this dimension of the Tseltal base. Its strategic plan for 2016-2020 devotes an entire section to food sovereignty. In planning its annual calendar of activities, the MB assembly first takes into account the specific agricultural cycles of each of its regions, so as to not interfere with *milpa*-related work. Since 2000, all important meetings and events in the MB begin with a long ritual prayer around a Mayan altar, a symbol of cultural and religious sovereignty. The altar is typically loaded with an abundance of home-grown food, and always organized according to the four colors of maize.[76]

[75] This typically indigenous style of "co-existent sovereignty" is distinct from the Westphalian conception of territorial nation-states (McCormack 2014). I use the term "sovereignty" here in that qualified sense, interchangeable with "autonomy," as I heard it used by informants during fieldwork, and as I discuss further below. For more discussion on the particularities of indigenous self-determination within non-indigenous states, cf Deloria and Lytle 1984; Anaya 2000; Alfred 2001; Jarosz 2014; Grey and Patel 2015; Coté 2016; Daigle 2017.

[76] The Mayan altar was first brought by indigenous allies from Guatemala in 1992, for an event on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of resistance to the Spanish conquest. MB leaders found it interesting, and decided to present it to the Trensipaletik on the occasion of millennial celebrations in 2000. The elders said that they had never seen it before, yet they immediately recognized it as expressing their traditional cosmovision [the arrangement of the four colours of maize corresponds to many layers of other meanings]. The Mayan altar was fully adopted by the MB from that point on (Felipe Jaled Ali Modad Aguilar interview).

Further, the MB has incorporated "caretakers of Mother Earth" (*kanal lum k'inal*) among the formal *cargos* in its organizational structure. They are responsible for spreading agroecological practice and the doctrine of resistance to (com)modified seeds and "junk food." Besides their ongoing formation and participatory action research, the caretakers of Mother Earth are formally trained through a university diploma course on agroecology. The MB has sponsored a university degree for one young *kanal lum k'inal* who is writing a thesis on the traditional diet in his village.

In the same spirit, during my fieldwork one of the MB deacons took the initiative to restore a traditional sugar mill on his family's land. The mill is made entirely of wood, without a single nail or screw; restoring it was an occasion for elders to transmit sophisticated Mayan technology to the younger generation. Likewise, finding the right hardwood to replace the deteriorated axle required specialized knowledge and familiarity with the primary forest. Now that it is functional again, neighbours and kin bring several varieties of sugar cane from their homesteads. Children lead a horse in circles to work the mill while adults introduce the cane and get a fire going. The peel of the root of a specific plant is mixed with the cane juice to agglutinate and remove detritus. Once it is boiled, everyone who has contributed cane or work takes some syrup home with them. Any excess might be turned into *panela* (a rough block of brown sugar) for sale in local markets, but the point is not about making, or even saving, money: cheap refined sugar is readily available in stores. More than economic rationality, the deacon recognized in this food sovereignty initiative a way of nourishing the vitality of the Tseltal base – knowledge, skills, biodiversity, infrastructure, education, tradition, and relationships of mutuality – which made it incommensurably worthwhile.

PART II: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES OF THE PROJECT

The potential of a middle peasant model

In synthesis, the MB has made it a priority to defend and revitalize the Tseltal base in the face of capitalist colonization. Land, food, natural resources, and labour at the service of the community are kept off-limits to commodification. These elements of the base are managed instead through the logic of solidarity economy. Land, the fundamental means of production and a *sine qua non* of Mayan cultural reproduction, is collectively owned in the form of *ejidos*. Families make *milpa* and engage in reciprocal exchange to ensure food sovereignty. Natural resources are stewarded, and attempts to treat them as private property are assertively warded off. Important social services are delivered by volunteers who have been entrusted with a *cargo*.

The MB participates in larger overlapping communities with their respective bases, without compromising Tseltal sovereignty. For example, the Tseltal members of the MB fully identify as Roman Catholics, even as they resist pressure from the Vatican to conform their ecclesiology and liturgy to the latter's comfort zone. In contrast to the Zapatista option, the MB espouses the Cherán model of autonomous government, in which subsidiarity does not entail rupture with the nation-state. At the cultural level, the MB's mariachi bands create Tseltal music in the iconically Mexican genre. Through the MB's radio station, rural communities join the "modern world" by sharing news and culture from around the world, quite literally on their own terms. Even the adoption of pan-indigenous symbols, such as the Mayan altar from Guatemala and the Andean concept of *buen vivir*, reflects a similar logic.

In a similar "both/and" approach (Hunt and Holmes 2015), prioritizing the base does not exclude engaging the outside market, even through global value chains. The MB

sees the market as dangerous because of its tendency – as confirmed in the people's lived experience of the plantation economy – to cascade into the base, but the answer is not to eliminate the market altogether. Rather, the MB protects the base in order to keep the two realms separate, thereby restoring the proper tension between them.

Again, though, the MB is careful to do this without endangering the Tseltal base. Whereas the Tseltal base revolves around *milpa*, as I have shown, coffee is the food product through which the MB implements a separate strategy of sovereign engagement with the outside market (cf chapter 4). Coffee is consumed as a staple, but it has little nutritional value and was introduced to Chiapas by German settlers only a few generations ago; it is not in any way essential to the material or symbolic base of Tseltal society. (In Gudeman's terms, it is not part of the *sacra*, in the way that maize, for example, is.) Thus, it can be exposed to the market without undue risk.

In other words, the MB's vision corresponds very closely to Gudeman's normative advice.[77] Indeed, they have applied nothing short of "house therapy" to their economy (cf chapter 1). Far from a sign of "backwards" stubbornness, as they have long been portrayed by academics and policymakers (Barnes 2009: 394; Isakson 2009: 749; cf also Harriss 1982b: 212), the *ejido* and the *milpa* are part of an ambitious vision to build a thriving economy, which has room for the market but keeps it in its place.

The MB's model also corresponds to what Tania Li (2015: 207-208) calls the "middle peasant," a stable and ecologically balanced form of smallholding that combines production of food for consumption with production of a cash crop for sale. The middle peasant model makes perfect sense as a political and economic ideal. It gives people a degree of autonomy (Ploeg 2010b), even as it is notably efficient, creates rural

[77] To be clear, the MB has done this without being at all aware of Gudeman, to whose theory I introduced its members through my research. They have indeed recognized themselves in Gudeman's framework, and at least one member of the MB, Alberto Irezabal, has since incorporated Gudeman's theory to his own doctoral thesis.

employment, and contributes to economic growth, poverty reduction, and food security (Botella-Rodríguez 2018; Ploeg 2014). Further, it has proven to be resilient by persisting in the midst of major changes, from the days of Chayanov and Shanin to our own (Ploeg 2008).

The MB's middle peasant model for Tseltal sovereignty is also positive in terms of Gregory's (1997, 2005) concern for wider society and ecological sustainability (cf chapter 1). Whereas capitalist societies, when they assert their power, tend to debase not only themselves but also everybody else, the MB's assertion of power simultaneously reinforces the Tseltal base and the base of all societies on the planet. This is accomplished, for example, by the practice of *milpa*, with maize at its heart. Maize is one of the world's top three staple grains, but as it has become increasingly commodified, world production tends to be limited to only a handful of commercially viable varieties. This lack of diversity makes our mainstream food system vulnerable to new plant diseases or pest infestations that are increasingly likely with climate change – itself caused, in large part, precisely by industrial agriculture (cf Introduction) – not to mention that it makes us all more dependent on a few corporations who are accountable only to their shareholders. By resisting this trend and providing *in-situ* conservation of hundreds of varieties of corn and other crops, using native, naturally "open-source" seeds, the Tseltal are providing a key element of resilience in the face of shocks (cf Isakson 2009). By defending their own (food) sovereignty, then, the Tseltal are protecting the world's food security while also fostering other essential ecosystem services that are the condition for the possibility of life.

In this model, market incentives or government subsidies are not the way to achieve sustainability; those policies would represent a form of cascading, leading to

debasement.[78] Instead, the MB sees "sustainability as social power," as in the political agroecology of Víctor Toledo (Oscar pers. comm.; cf Toledo and Barrera-Bassols 2017).[79] As I have begun to show, this power does not entail a threat to others, but rather a restoration of right relationships – whether they are relationships of participation, reciprocity, or trade – with other communities.

Challenges of the middle peasant model

Even as the MB's middle peasant model, which prioritizes a strong base while including market exchange, is promising from the point of view of our theoretical framework, Gudeman himself seems somewhat pessimistic about the viability of such a model. Using evidence from his research in Panama and Colombia, he shows how the colonization of the base by the market often begins precisely when producers mix their traditional production for use with production for exchange (Gudeman 1978, Gudeman and Rivera 1990). Crucially, Gudeman argues that this is a risk for places that are "beyond the margin," in the sense that low productivity of land and distance from markets make cash cropping a net loss activity, which therefore must be subsidized by the "house" (base) economy; this subsidy is unsustainable in the long term, and the cash economy ends up debasing the community (Gudeman 2016: 128-133). His prognosis for middle peasant experiments in such places is grim: "this debasement process is usually irreversible" (Gudeman 2008: 107).

[78] This is connected to the Misión's rejection of conditional cash transfers (discussed below), precisely through an argument about their representing a threat to the territory's base of natural resources. Power, and not payments, are what the Tseltal demand as a condition for the contribution they make to the sustainability of all of humanity's (and other beings') life on this planet.

[79] Toledo has been a close ally of the MB for years, and his vision of agroecology has been a major influence on the MB through personal advice and mentoring, educational material (Toledo 2005), and shared networks.

Tania Li (2014) recounts a similar story, having witnessed the progressive debasement of the Lauje people of Indonesia in recent decades. They used to grow only their own food, but because of insecurity and the need for income, they moved to a middle peasant model where they grew both food and tobacco as a commodity. However, the income was not enough, given the value chain conditions, so they moved to growing only a commodity, cocoa.

The result of the latter shift was an increase in inequality and long-term deterioration of general conditions. The soil has become less fertile, making it hard to grow enough food, and land has become a scarce commodity. The Lauje are vulnerable to fluctuations in the prices of what they sell (cocoa) and buy (rice). Cocoa grown in monoculture is disease-prone, and requires farmers to buy external chemical inputs. Thus, they have experienced a "downward spiral" of inequality and displacement, which entails the break-up of community. Further, the above conditions make market engagement "compulsory," rather than complementary and optional as it was at first.

Li's lesson from this tragic story is that the viability of the middle peasant model depends on several factors (Li 2015). For our purposes it is useful to organize her list according to ecological, economic, and social categories. (I am using "economic" here in a stricter sense than in Gudeman's all-encompassing model.) The ecological factors identified by Li include soil quality and crop characteristics. Economic factors include availability of land; market conditions, including the ratio between the price of what one sells and what one buys; access to markets (in terms of time – given crop perishability – and ease of transportation); and availability of subsidies and wages (for mixed livelihoods). Finally, social factors include the existence of social institutions that are strong enough to maintain cohesion, promote a moral economy of mutual "insurance,"

and enforce mechanisms that reduce wealth inequality, including the concentration of land and money. (In Li's analysis, the Lauje did not have such institutions.)

The following table summarizes Li's list of factors, according to my categorization of them.

Table 1. Factors that determine the viability of a middle peasant model (Li 2015: 207-208)

Type of factor	**Factor**
Ecological	Crop characteristics
	Soil quality[80]
Economic	Availability of land
	Market conditions (price ratio between what one buys and what one sells)
	Access to markets (perishability and transportation costs)
	Availability of subsidies and wages
Social	Social institutions (for cohesion, mutual "insurance," and equity)

Li's argument is remarkably similar to Gudeman's, in that she points out the way in which certain conditions can make it hard for peasants to successfully combine food sovereignty with production for exchange. Her ecological and economic factors largely correspond to what Gudeman calls being "beyond the margin," and she brings our attention to the social factors that also play a role in the process of debasement. Together (if independently of each other), Gudeman and Li raise the question of whether the MB's vision for a strong base, rooted in *milpa*, will be undermined by their simultaneous engagement in the coffee trade. Both of them have also offered criteria that will help us to discern this question in the case at hand.

[80] Li does not explicitly include this factor in her list, but she does comment on its relevance in her discussion.

The Tseltal certainly live "beyond the margin" in many ways. The steep slopes where they grow food have lost much of their topsoil to erosion, hence the joke that Chiapas' best land is in Tabasco (a neighbouring lowland state). They are still relatively isolated in terms of roads and communications infrastructure. Jobs are scarce. Despite being two of Mexico's top coffee-producing municipalities, Chilón and Sitalá are also among the country's poorest,[81] reflecting unfavourable market conditions for their main cash crop. In the coffee economy (Stolcke 1995) as in the ranching economy (Rodríguez Moreno 2011), indigenous peasants have long had to subsidize production for exchange with unpaid family labour and self-provisioning (cf also Warman 1980). Indeed, the Tseltal of the MB were quite familiar with how cascading and debasement work, even before establishing their middle peasant model once they recovered their land. Why, then, have they insisted on such a model? Are they just naïvely reproducing an ingrained habitus, as some economists and policymakers would lead us to believe?

On the contrary, the MB's project reveals that even if the viability of a middle peasant model is indeed contingent on certain factors, *those factors are no less contingent*. In other words, what Li treats as "givens" are actually historical products that are subject to change; their complexity, however, means that change requires a collective agency that is capable of addressing structurally interconnected issues.[82] Rather than reifying its ecological, economic, and social circumstances as a matter of fate, the MB is actively trying to effect whatever systemic change is necessary in order to realize the potential of its vision for Tseltal sovereignty, embodied in the middle peasant model.

[81] In Chilón in 2010, 95.3% of the population was living in poverty, and 70.6% in extreme poverty. As for Sitalá in the same year, the rate of poverty was 96.5%, and of extreme poverty, 74.6% (CONEVAL 2012).

[82] Which perhaps explains why this is a blind spot for Li, who approaches the issue through the lens of individual rational choice. I am indebted to Laura Rival (in pers. comm.) for the insights in this paragraph.

Rebooting the system

Far from being naïve, the MB understands the enormity of the challenge. Oscar, the Jesuit who has led the MB's efforts to transform Tseltal positionality in the coffee market (cf chapter 4), often remarks: "We did not begin at zero, but at negative ten." Yet despite the unfavourable odds, they have achieved significant victories.

Interconnected factors

The most significant change by far has been the land reform of 1994. This issue was long at the top of the indigenous agenda in Chiapas, but it was also very hard to achieve. Indeed, even left-wing governments throughout Latin America have failed to redistribute land to peasants (Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017; Goodwin 2017). What the MB and its allies did is nothing less than a "people's counter-enclosure" (Borras and Franco 2012). Once they had made this a reality, anything was possible, even moving the other heavy obstacles that stood in the way of a viable middle peasant model.

Indeed, addressing those other factors was not only possible, but necessary, because the factors are all interconnected. The viability of smallholding goes hand in hand with "rebooting" the food system to ensure food sovereignty (Borras et al 2015). Protecting the *ejidos* against neoliberal pressure requires strong social cohesion, which is reproduced through a strengthened *cargo* system. Long-term productivity on the land also depends on keeping ecosystems healthy, and this in turn hinges on the reproduction of place-based ecological knowledge, encoded in Tseltal language and culture. The market must be engaged in ways that simultaneously provide enough income to complement food production and avoid undermining social institutions or harming the environment.

The MB, then, could not afford to face the remaining challenges sequentially. Rather, the interconnectedness of the factors meant that once the land reform had

happened, the entire system had to be addressed in all its complexity. Throughout the rest of this thesis, I will continue to show how the MB has strategically addressed systemic issues in order to enable the healthy middle peasant model at the heart of its vision for Tseltal sovereignty. While the MB's sophisticated strategies are aimed precisely at articulating the ecological, economic, and social dimensions into virtuous circles, I shall fill out the multidimensional picture by adopting each of these angles in turn. In the following section, I will discuss how the MB addresses the ecological concerns raised by Li through agroecology, and I will begin to point out the ways in which this strategy is connected to the other factors she mentions as well. Before ending the chapter, I will also discuss another set of challenges, besides but intertwined with Li's variables, that emerges from the MB's attempt to implement a middle peasant model.

Agroecology and a viable middle peasant model

Promoting agroecology is, most directly, a strategy for improving the ecological conditions in which Tseltal producers grow their food and their coffee. Various techniques are used, for example, to reverse the process of soil erosion, enhance soil fertility, and optimize the retention of groundwater (Altieri 1995). Caring for the soil and multi-cropping also makes crops less susceptible to disease (Altieri and Nicholls 2003). In this way, what Li presents as independent variables, as far as the characteristics of the land and the crops, become dependent variables instead.

Beyond its ecological impact, agroecology also has several economic implications. The most obvious one is that agroecology recycles nutrients and other factors of production as much as possible, rather than relying on external inputs (and producing waste), as in the linear industrial model. This makes agricultural production relatively, if not entirely, independent of the need for money. Moreover, agroecology is

labour and knowledge-intensive, rather than capital-intensive. It is also extremely productive in terms of scope (that is, if one considers the wide range of useful products and services that it produces), but less productive than industrial agriculture when considering only short-term yields of a single crop, and when ignoring the cost of negative externalities (Altieri et al 2012). All of the above factors make agroecology more conducive to smallholding,[83] in which families grow most of what they consume as well as complementary crops for exchange, than to capitalist agriculture, in which only commodities are of interest, and economies of scale tend to favour larger landholdings (Borras et al 2015). In this way, by promoting agroecology, the MB reinforces not only ecological enhancement and food sovereignty, but also the equitable distribution of land, which in turn helps to maintain social cohesion.

The fact that agroecology is knowledge-intensive (ie, it requires highly skilled labour) has more than economic repercussions. The specialized scientific and technical knowledge it entails is part and parcel of Tseltal culture; thus, agroecology has a strong affinity with Tseltal cultural reproduction. This affinity is even clearer considering the integral role of the *milpa* (itself a paradigmatic form of agroecology) in traditional Tseltal life, as described above.

Cultural reproduction, social cohesion, and a middle peasant model which affords a high degree of self-sufficiency (and thus of freedom with one's time) all contribute to the viability of the *cargo* system, which is based on unpaid work at the service of the community. In turn, the *cargo* system itself is designed to strengthen the elements of Tseltal culture that foster agroecology. This is true of the specific *cargos* with a straightforward connection to the practice – the caretakers of Mother Earth (who promote

[83] To be clear, my argument about virtuous circles, here and in chapter 4, should not be interpreted in terms of causal claims but rather of elective affinities, as in Weberian sociology (cf Löwy 2004; Howe 1978). As for the particular connection between agroecology and smallholding, I am indebted to Colin Tudge, who made this point at the Oxford Real Farming Conference in January 2017.

agroecology), the traditional healers (who use plant-based medicine), and the promoters of *buen vivir* (who implement sustainable development projects) – but beyond that, it is also true of the whole ethos of the *cargo* system itself, with its revival of Tseltal language, ways of learning, cosmology, and moral economy.

The mutual compatibility of agroecology and the *cargo* system as such thus reinforces social cohesion on many interconnected levels. To give a concrete example, my informants highlighted the fact that the MB's *cargo*-based justice system not only promotes reconciliation, but also eschews cash fines. (If there is restitution to be made, it might be in the form of chicken stew.) This is highly significant to them in part because it fits well with their middle peasant economy.

Agroecology, then, is a relatively straightforward solution to Li's worries about soil and crops as limiting factors for a middle peasant model. Moreover, it is an approach that helps the MB address other relevant dimensions in interconnected ways. The circuit-board of the MB's design for economic, social, and ecological virtuous circles is beginning to emerge, but we will have to wait until chapter 4, where I discuss the MB's strategy to reposition Tseltal middle peasants vis-à-vis the market, to see it more clearly. First, let us turn back to chapter 1 for a moment, and consider the middle peasant model in light of economy's tension.

Other challenges

Besides the economic, social, and ecological factors that can make or break a middle peasant model, the model itself entails its own internal challenges. Precisely because it is an attempt to reshape the balance between the market and the community with its base, as in Gudeman's model, the dialectic tension between these two realms is intensified, and must be managed. Furthermore, as I have argued in chapter 1, properly

accounting for the implications of the model requires some attention to the "politics of the base," as well as the wider political economy, which influence the way the MB confronts all of these challenges.

Tension between the separate realms

The MB's middle peasant model depends on first separating, and then articulating, the realm of mutuality (community and base) on the one hand, and the realm of the market (mainly through coffee) on the other. As discussed in chapter 1, these two realms are at once mutually interdependent and mutually contradictory. There is a real tension between them, and this is apparent in the life of the MB.

For example, the religious sister who coordinates the MB's healthcare program produces a nutritional supplement, made entirely with native grains and seeds, which is distributed for free to the mothers of small infants. Her work fits solidly in the realm of community and base. Meanwhile, the MB's market-engaging branch is currently looking for opportunities to diversify its social businesses. Since the cereal is quite tasty and would sell easily, members of the latter team approached the sister more than once during my fieldwork to inquire about the cost of producing it. She systematically shunned these advances by claiming ignorance, or by reminding them that "this is not about making money," until they finally stopped trying. This story shows that while the MB has so far kept the market from colonizing the base, it is partly through design and partly through an internal dialectic in which that design must be assertively and continuously defended from the tendency that Gudeman describes. (I expand on this point in chapter 4.)

More generally, there have long been rivalries and misunderstandings between the Jesuit leaders of the market-engaging dimension and the Jesuit leaders who are more invested in the base. As one Jesuit remarked when I presented my interpretation of the

MB model to the community in April 2018 (cf chapter 2), each individual's perspective is limited in daily life to a particular aspect of the MB's work, making it sometimes hard for them to see the big picture of what the MB as a whole is undertaking. He acknowledged that Gudeman's theory provides an apt description of that big picture, but noted that the MB's larger vision comes into being precisely through a dialectic process.

The collective vision has held together thanks to their deeper commitment to a shared mission; this conjoint identity is deliberately renewed in several ways. The Jesuits live communally in the same household, where they pray and share meals together on a daily basis. At the MB-wide level, they all participate in rituals such as the traditional 24-hour Tseltal fast, which – because all participants are equally tired and hungry by the end of it – is meant to relativize their differences (Irezabal 2014). More recently, the newer leaders of the dialectically opposed branches of the MB have appointed each other to their respective boards of directors, as a purposeful way of building trust and collaboration (Arturo pers. comm.).

Democratizing the politics of the Misión de Bachajón's base

The MB, like any large and complex organization, has its own internal politics, structured by various intersecting axes of asymmetrical power relations. In terms of organizational hierarchy, Jesuits, religious sisters, and the higher *cargos* have most power. In terms of intercultural relations, a handful of *kaxlán* outsiders have disproportionate influence due to their connections to the outside world, even while the focus is on building Tseltal leadership, sometimes at the expense of the local *kaxlán* minority. Men tend to have more power than women at all levels, and Tseltal culture is highly structured according to complementary gender roles in which women are assigned

primarily to the domestic sphere. As for wealth inequality, it is inseparable from the intercultural dimension, but also a point of tension within Tseltal communities.

Enacting its middle peasant vision, which is rooted in a democratic ideology of egalitarianism and empowerment, means that the MB must try to balance these asymmetries to some degree. In daily discourse, important rituals and guiding documents, authority is emphatically framed as a form of service; humility is accordingly expected of those with any power (cf eg Diócesis de San Cristóbal de las Casas 1999). Governance is largely carried out through deliberative assemblies, and consensus is at least formally required for major decisions.

While the Vatican only recognizes men as ordained ministers, in practice, the deacons – as with all Tseltal *cargos* in general – are commissioned and minister together with their wives. Likewise, the celibate missionaries (Jesuits and Sisters of the Divine Pastor) have complementary roles, including a sister who serves as the MB's assistant director alongside the Jesuit director. The MB has created the *cargo* of "promoters of gender equity," to effect gradual endogenous change in this respect (Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010).[84]

As for wealth inequality, the Tseltal moral economy tends to view it negatively. This comes across, for example, in a myth I was told on a walk through an informant's *milpa*. Originally, there were two suns, an older brother and a younger brother. They would take turns illuminating the sky. One day, the older brother saw a beehive at the top of a tree, and told his little brother to wait at the bottom while he climbed up to look for honey. The older brother began to eat the honey but sent only wax to his younger sibling, telling him there was no honey at the top. The younger sibling saw through the lie, so he

[84] Cf Cubells Aguilar (2016: 284-305) on how some Tseltal women have taken initiatives to make the *cargo* system itself less patriarchal.

used the wax to fashion a gopher with sharp teeth; the creature chewed at the roots of the tree until it fell over, bringing the older brother to his death. Now there is only one sun; darkness came into the world because of selfishness (and jealousy).[85]

In this regard, the MB's entire economic strategy is designed to minimize inequality. Direct mechanisms for this include equitable land distribution, a cooperative business model, reciprocal exchange of food in times of need, and a *cargo* system in which much is expected from those to whom much has been given. Nevertheless, some inequality is inevitable, especially as migrants to the U.S. send remittances that allow certain families to quickly invest in small businesses.

Tseltal mechanisms to counteract excessive inequality include, mainly, the "carrots" described above. These are extended to migrants, who can gain recognition when they send remittances to sponsor infrastructure or other projects that benefit the community at large. The mechanisms also include the "stick" of sorcery (cf Maurer 1979; Hermitte 1970). Particularly prosperous households are susceptible to illness caused by jealous neighbours, and simultaneously liable to being publicly accused of having immorally gained their wealth (or caused others' misfortune) through sorcery; such an accusation can be mobilized to enable violent redistribution. I witnessed both of these dynamics during my fieldwork.

Despite the ambiguities and structurally conflictive relationships that traverse the MB's reality, open conflict is relatively rare. This is partly due to the Tseltal value of harmony, whereby conflict is normatively avoided. Indeed, since all aspects of life are so intertwined in this society, the stakes of a major conflict are extremely high. Perhaps the general sense of peace within the MB and Tseltal society in general can also be taken as a sign of their success in creating social cohesion, at least in relative terms.

[85] Hermitte (1970: 23-25) recounts a slightly different version of the myth.

CONCLUSION

When Oscar says "We started at negative ten," he sometimes adds, "and now we are at negative eight." The social and ecological base is being restored and market conditions are being transformed through a sophisticated and far-reaching process. Tens of thousands of people are working together to implement their innovative model of a life-giving economy, one which enables Tseltal sovereignty and fosters the common good.[86] Yet, this requires major systemic changes, and even insofar as it is successful, the effort implies permanent tensions, which are all the more challenging given the politically complex environment.

"Political ecology"

No one group has complete hegemony in northern Chiapas. The state's failure to enforce daylight savings time provides a symbolic illustration. During my fieldwork, everyone was aware of the fact that local government offices (and the rest of Mexico) switch back and forth for daylight savings, but most people chose to keep their watches on the same time all year. Thus it was sometimes necessary to clarify whether one was setting an appointment for "the government's time" or "God's time;" if not specified, one could usually assume the latter.[87]

In the absence of a single hegemon, an entire "ecosystem" of competing actors has emerged, with various types of symbiotic relationships between them. I will refer to this, with tongue in cheek, as the "political ecology" of the MB's territory – which is simultaneously the territory of political parties, Protestant churches, the Zapatistas, the military, mercenary groups with paramilitary origins, and drug traffickers, among others,

[86] For more on the MB and the common good, cf Riordan and Travieso (forthcoming).
[87] These are the local terms for daylight savings time and the time kept by those who do not recognize daylight savings, respectively. In light of Vera's (2007) sociological history of measurement systems in Mexico, the political relevance of this seemingly superficial site of resistance should not be underestimated.

each with their own projects, which overlap or conflict with the MB's in different ways. For example, Protestants tend to affiliate with the governing PRI party, a traditional enemy of the MB; that said, many Protestants join in the communal work and religious rituals of their communities' Catholic *fiestas,* and some even have a *cargo* in the MB. Zapatistas tend to be Catholic and participate in the MB, but they have their own parallel *cargo* system (so a person might be, for example, simultaneously a catechist in the MB and a health promoter in the Zapatista Army), and they collaborate more closely with the Dominican friars in San Cristóbal de las Casas than with the Jesuits, which partly reflects their overlapping but distinct organizational geography.

The base as territory

From the MB's point of view, the other actors in the complex "political ecology" of Chiapas can be grouped according to one fundamental distinction (cf Escobar 2008: 32). On the one hand, there are those groups whose aim is to build up the Tseltal base, which – because it is rooted in a relationship to the land and its ecology – is understood in terms of "territory" (cf Palacios Luna 2011d; Escobar 2018: 173). On the other, there are rent-seekers who would colonize the base, seeing it only as capital, to be exploited for profit. At stake is not only the middle peasant model, but Tseltal sovereignty itself.

Struggle

The state has long coveted Chiapas for its "resources," and shown little regard for the majority of its residents. In the decades leading up to the land reform of 1994, the state had a pact with ranchers, as part of a project that saw the land in terms of productivity and scale – they were to provide cheap meat for urban workers, by exploiting local Tseltal workers (Bobrow-Strain 2007). Now, it has a similar pact with multi-national

corporations (Misión de Bachajón 2011a; Misión de Bachajón 2011b; cf chapter 5). Their projects again reduce Chiapas to "a mere 'parking lot' where industrialized farming is located" (Ploeg 2010b: 4), and to other forms of infrastructure designed to facilitate the extraction of commodities. Paramilitaries and violent drug traffickers can also be included in this category of deterritorializing rent-seekers.

In this context, it is highly significant that the first thing people did when they took back their land in 1994 was to dismantle plantation and ranching infrastructure and plant *milpa* where there had been cow pasture (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 147-148).[88] It was simultaneously a way of guaranteeing food in a time of upheaval, and a way of marking – and making – territory. Indeed, choosing to be middle peasants is a form of resistance to neoliberalism on many different levels (Isakson 2009; Ploeg 2010b).

If making *milpa* is the fundamental way that Tseltal peasants decolonize their territory in daily life, tens of thousands of them are also organized and mobilized through the Movement for the Defence of the Territory (MODEVITE), as described above. At one religious procession *cum* protest march during my fieldwork, participants were given a piece of paper with the list of MODEVITE slogans we would repeat throughout. The list begins with a set of *¡Vivas!* including, for example, "Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe!," "Long live the indigenous peoples!," and "Long live *jTatic* Samuel [Ruiz]!" After this, there is a series of demands: things like "respect for women" and "respect and care for Mother Earth," and also things like hospitals and universities, as well as justice for the victims of a recent government massacre. Then, there is a series of explicit rejections: the sale of alcohol, the privatization of water, and a planned superhighway are among the things met with a resounding "*¡NO!*" At first glance, the list of slogans might

[88] Just as significant, in terms of the conflict between the two ways of seeing the land, is that what former ranchers resent the most about these events – even more than having lost the land – is precisely that the land is now used for *milpa*, which they see as an unproductive waste of capital (Bobrow-Strain 2007: 159-162).

seem somewhat miscellaneous, but what unites all of these claims – heterogeneous as they are – is that they constitute a defence of the Tseltal base, understood as territory.

Friendly competition

A strong base is synonymous with Tseltal sovereignty, or autonomy,[89] which as we have seen is the MB's ultimate goal. However, the MB is not the only organization defending the territory (Palacios Luna 2011b). Among other such actors, the Zapatistas are by far the most relevant.

While the two organizations are institutionally distinct, they overlap a great deal on the ground, both in terms of geography and membership. In many ways, the MB and the Zapatistas have a symbiotic relationship, and they treat each other as allies. Oscar notes that of all the coffee producers in the MB's cooperative, the ones from autonomous Zapatista communities (*bases*) tend to have the most discipline, and can be counted on to stick with it through the more difficult times; the MB thus benefits from the experience and values these cooperative members have gained through the Zapatista movement. Likewise, the Zapatista uprising grew in part out of the liberation theology movement, of which the MB was a major agent. I have noted other examples of symbiosis throughout this thesis.

I have also noted some important differences, for example with regard to the use of violence and to the form of self-government that the two organizations espouse. I sometimes heard MB informants explicitly make these comparisons in order to point out the advantages of the MB's model; this suggests that the MB sees the Zapatista

[89] I use "sovereignty," "autonomy," and "social power" interchangeably, as MB leaders did during my fieldwork. Since "autonomy" has become so closely associated with the Zapatista movement (cf eg Palacios Luna 2011a; Escobar 2018: 172-176), using the term more loosely is also a way to avoid confusing the MB's own vision – described throughout this thesis – with the Zapatistas' particular way of understanding the concept.

movement, in part, as its main competitor. In a few cases, people also mentioned friction or tense incidents between members of the two organizations. However, it must be emphasized that the underlying relationship was never described to me in terms of opposition. On the contrary, most people would seem to agree with the way a veteran of the MB's cooperative – who also identifies as a Zapatista – put it to me, when he said "both organizations are working for the same thing, each in their own way" (Interview with founding member of Ts'umbal Xitalha').

Getting to "persuasive"

Like the cooperative member quoted above, many Tseltal peasants who participate fully in the MB simultaneously practice what – extending my ecological metaphor – we might call "multi-cropping." As in the *milpa*, cultivating more than one relationship makes people more resilient and autonomous.[90] Thus, one informant told me: "depending on whichever political party comes to visit us, that's the t-shirt I put on". He meant it literally, as he showed me his collection of t-shirts, but his statement was also a playfully subversive use of a typical Mexican expression for sincerely and enthusiastically adhering to a cause or identifying with a group.

As far as the MB is concerned, this does not always present a conflict. The *fiesta*, for example, is a community event as much as it is a Catholic one, and thus Protestants are entirely welcome to participate. Since the Zapatistas' vision largely coincides with the MB's, participation in both organizations can be fully coherent.

Other times, the "multi-cropping" strategy is clearly a way in which some Tseltal peasants hedge their bets. For instance, one prominent member of the MB was

[90] Aware of this reality, MB Jesuits tended to repeat a transportation metaphor coined by an earlier missionary, who said that Tseltal peasants will get on whichever bus will take them to their destination first. When I mentioned the "multi-cropping" metaphor to several of them, they immediately understood and affirmed that it was an even better way of putting it.

simultaneously a behind-the-scenes political operator for the PRI.[91] Another is fully identified with the MB (and the Zapatistas), but through his wife's family, is also embedded in the workings of a political party.

Faced with this reality – the threat of deterritorialization by the government and multinational corporations, some competition from the Zapatistas, and multi-cropping on the part of its membership base – the MB is challenged to reinforce the "persuasiveness" (Gudeman 2009: 2-3) of its middle peasant model.

To be sure, the MB is already a significant actor, whose moral authority is recognized throughout the region. I have mentioned, for example, the MB's role in the San Andrés Accords between the government and the Zapatistas. Other illustrations came up continuously during my fieldwork. In one instance, a fight between neighbours in Chilón resulted in one of them paying the Zapatistas to arrest and imprison his opponent in an independent Zapatista jail. In response, the opponent's family paid the Pextón mercenaries to threaten to kill the other neighbour, unless their relative was released. At that point, somebody asked the Jesuit parish priest to intervene; he helped them reconcile the underlying conflict.[92] Another time, a different Jesuit was asked to negotiate the end to a standoff between competing taxi companies that had blocked the roads for weeks.

However, the most challenging aspect for the MB has to do with the one of Li's factors we have not discussed so far: how to create the conditions for Tseltal middle peasants to make sufficient monetary income to live autonomously, without compromising the foundation of that autonomy. In chapter 4, I discuss at length the MB's

[91] This person eventually left the MB. Understanding the way his political role works, as it was explained to me by other informants, is instructive. His job is to get people in a community to vote for a candidate. Winning candidates give jobs to their supporters, as a reward (ie, with no expectation of further work to be done in exchange for the wage). However, there are many more supporters than jobs available. Therefore salaries are split into much smaller units; supporters make a certain proportion of the total salary depending on how much they helped with votes. This phenomenon reinforces the point that jobs are scarce, and even a small cash income makes a difference.

[92] It did not occur to anybody to bother appealing to the police; the state's justice system is widely seen as discriminatory, culturally ignorant, and corrupt.

strategy for this, and I show how it is consistent with the MB's holistic vision for the territory. Here, though, it is worth underlining the urgency of income in light of the "political ecology." There is more at stake than money.

"Multi-cropping" is especially fraught with ambiguity in the case of governmental cash transfers. Significant social spending began under president Salinas to mitigate the effects of neoliberal policies on the poor, and were increased to bolster the government's legitimacy after the Zapatista rebellion (Wiggins et al 2002: 182; MRGI 2011). There are currently transfers (and in-kind subsidies) available for women with children, for farmers, and for senior citizens.[93] Without going as far as to prohibit its members from taking government money (as the Zapatistas do),[94] the MB actively promotes a discourse of suspicion about these policies.

One reason is that it sees subsidies as creating dependence and fostering laziness. Another is that they stifle critical opposition, as people are reluctant to bite the proverbial hand that feeds them. Finally, the MB points to Enrique Peña Nieto's neoliberal policies that would sell the natural resources of Chiapas to the highest foreign bidder as proof that the government's cash transfers come with a cost. The cash transfers, in this view, are a sort of advance payment to the Tseltal people, in exchange for their natural resources. When the time comes to give up their land and water, they will not be able to refuse,

[93] Another government social policy has been to distribute televisions and satellite dishes in the rural villages. This is significant from our wide-angle economic perspective that includes non-material aspects of the base. I stayed with one family both before and after they acquired a television, and witnessed what Vijay D'Souza, a linguist specializing in endangered languages, calls "prime time invasion" (pers. comm.). In this form of cascading, the time and space in which families used to transmit their culture to their children is now colonized by Spanish-language television, which – through both the commercials and the soap operas that they pepper – is largely designed to stimulate "artificial wants" (cf Gudeman 2008: 82). This development began just as the MB was consolidating its Tseltal-language radio station, as if to remind the MB that it can never rest on its laurels.

[94] According to several informants, any Zapatista who belongs to a *base* (ie, an autonomous Zapatista village) and is seen waiting in line at the municipal office (where transfers are distributed) will be reported in their community and pressured to stop accepting the subsidy. The prohibition is not enforced the same way, though, for Zapatista *adherentes* (who live outside a *base*); most *adherentes* are said to accept transfers.

because they have already taken and spent the money. This interpretation, shared with me by a catechist, echoes the *enganche* mechanism through which indigenous labour was typically coerced in Chiapas, especially since the 19th century (cf Washbrook 2007; Bobrow-Strain 2007). In short, the MB interprets government cash transfers in light of colonial and capitalist history, concluding that they are directly aimed at undermining – or debasing – Tseltal sovereignty.[95]

This critical discourse is brought to the MB's inter-zonal courses for catechists, who repeat it in their respective chapels on Sundays. It is the topic of much discussion and ambivalence. One catechist, for example, explained to me that he fully agrees with the MB's critique of cash transfers, but he nevertheless accepts the money that the government gives his family on behalf of his wife and children. He sees what he is doing as detrimental to his children and his people in the long-run, but necessary to cover immediate expenses given the previous year's drought. A deacon in the same community is said to receive the aid for elderly people but publicly denies it. A middle-aged man with no *cargo* in the same community reports that he avoids going to church on the Sunday following a catechists' course, because he already knows that this topic will come up, and he is sick of hearing about it; still, he asks me if I can confirm the rumour about the natural resources. An elderly man from a different community, who is a lifelong member of the MB, refuses to take the assistance for the elderly because he says that it would oblige him to stop speaking his mind. However, he reports that his peers and family pressure him to take the assistance, arguing that since everyone else is doing it, he will not be exempt from the collective debt anyway, and might as well benefit in the meantime.

[95] I did not hear any informant bring up the interpretation that cash transfers might be an expression of their rights as Mexican citizens. In contrast, the MB's Cherán-inspired political project does postulate the collective right to federal funds for the self-governing indigenous municipality.

In practice, the MB's hard-line rhetoric is reluctantly softened by the realization that the conditions are not yet met for full Tseltal sovereignty. Paradoxically, government transfers provide a cushion that makes this sovereignty-building process viable, even as – in the MB's analysis – it threatens to undermine it in the long-term. In this view, whether the transfers will ultimately help or hinder the Tseltal base is a question of whether the MB will be able to use them in such a way as to enable their replacement with an alternative source of economic security while outpacing their negative effects.

One thing is certain: the debate about the future of the peasantry is far from over.[96] The MB and others are doing what they can to ensure its viability in the marginal territory of northern Chiapas, and so far they have shown that they are capable of more than many authors have thought possible. However, they still face important challenges, not least of which is the need for a way to make money without selling out the base.

[96] Cf Harriss 1982 and Journal of Peasant Studies (2013) for a survey of classic texts. For an updated overview, cf the special issue of JPS introduced by Borras (2009), as well as Akram-Lodhi and Kay's (2010a; 2010b) extensive survey. Cf also the ongoing debate between Bernstein (2016), McMichael (2016) and Friedmann (2016).

A group of Tseltal youth poses in front of the roasting machines in the Bats'il Maya coffee processing plant in Chilón, where they work with their mentor, José Aquino (second from right), and the caretaker, Doña Tere (sixth from left). The plant, complete with its own specialty coffee shop, is equipped to handle the entire coffee value chain from parchment coffee to gourmet beverages. The team currently processes and ships 150 tons of their own brand of roasted ground coffee per year. The coffee goes to Yomol A'tel's own Capeltic coffee shops in wealthy parts of Mexico City, Puebla, and Guadalajara, and to clients in the U.S. and Spain. The young workers and interns come from rural regions where their families produce coffee and are members of the Ts'umbal Xitalha' cooperative. In the long-term, they are expected to use their capabilities to help replicate the processing plant in each of their home regions.

Photo credit: Yomol A'tel

Chapter 4
Taming and Domesticating the Market

INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the previous chapter, the MB is engaged in a sovereignty-building project, and a certain form of the "middle peasant" model is integral to its two-pronged economic strategy. Achieving this model involves a "rebooting" not only of land distribution but also of many other factors, including the terms of market engagement. In this chapter, I will describe the MB's strategy for repositioning itself in the sphere of the market, and how it articulates this strategy with its economy's non-market sphere.

Rebooting the terms of market engagement in this context, at the end of the 1990s, was unavoidably a question of changing the Tseltal peasantry's positionality in the coffee value chain. Coffee had dominated the local cash economy for the past century (Bobrow-Strain 2007). In the municipalities of Chilón and Sitalá, nearly every peasant family produces it, and – though government cash transfers and migrant remittances have increased – it is still a main source of cash income for most families.

Engagement in the coffee trade was also a problem. The International Coffee Agreement had collapsed in 1989, which not only made prices lower and more volatile, but also shifted power away from producers and their governments, in favour of roasters and retailers in consuming countries (Cafaggi et al 2012: 41-45.50-51; Rodríguez Moreno 2014b). Concomitantly, Mexico's National Institute of Coffee, along with subsidies and other forms of state support, fell prey to Washington Consensus policies (Sánchez Juárez 2015; Rodríguez Moreno 2014b). For a people trying to consolidate the economic viability of their still-contested sovereignty, with coffee as their main cash crop, the challenges were not small.

Nevertheless, it made sense to focus on coffee. It has long been the most sought-after tropical commodity in cash-rich countries (Gemech et al 2011). Chiapas is the top coffee-producing state of Mexico, which is among the world's top producing countries. Further, development aid was increasingly focused on private-sector strategies, and especially on participation in global value chains (Staritz 2012: 10; Milberg and Winkler 2011: 341).[97] Finally, as seen in chapter 3, coffee is not an essential part of the Tseltal "base;" as opposed to maize, it can be treated as a commodity without endangering cultural or food sovereignty.

Development through the coffee GVC in Chiapas: a question of upgrading

A theoretical literature on global value chains (and related literatures on global commodity chains and global production networks), with roots in 1970s world-systems theory and 1960s dependency theory before it, emerged in this context (Staritz 2012; cf also Chase-Dunn 2016). The basic proposition is that development results follow from participation and strategic "upgrading" in global value chains (hereafter GVCs). As the development world became more conscious of the multidimensional nature of development, this proposition was nuanced to pay attention not only to the economic, but also the social and ecological results of different types of participation in GVCs (Barrientos et al 2011; Bolwig et al 2010).

Scholars of GVCs widely adopt Humphrey and Schmitz's (2002) fourfold categorization of what economic upgrading can entail (cf eg Bolwig et al 2010; Goger et al 2014, Barrientos et al 2011, Mayer and Milberg 2013, Milberg and Winkler 2011). "Functional upgrading" refers to moving up the value chain to links with more added

[97] Objectively, the global economy had become more interconnected by then, and normatively, the Washington Consensus was pushing a paradigm of development through the private sector (Staritz 2012).

value (ie forward vertical integration). "Product upgrading" deals with increasing the value of the product itself. "Process upgrading" is achieved by optimizing efficiency. Finally, "intersectoral upgrading" has to do with expanding to new, related value chains. The development challenge is how to use any or all of these economic upgrading strategies in a way that actually translates into better social conditions and environmental sustainability.

In the coffee GVC, several factors converged in the 1990s to create incentives for product differentiation.[98] In response, upgrading initiatives have clustered around product upgrading strategies, most often based on "credence" factors of differentiation – factors that are valued (with a price premium), but not easily verifiable by consumers – such as organic, fair trade, and specific-origin coffees (García-Cardona 2016).[99] In principle, these schemes make a direct link to social and ecological impact, by treating the added value (the price premium) as a subsidy from consumers for those ends.

In north-central Chiapas, development actors engaged in coffee production have largely followed this global trend to credence-based differentiation strategies for product upgrading, especially through certified organic and fair trade coffee. In their case, economic upgrading was especially motivated by the need to survive in the unfavourable conditions described above, which converged with a national financial crisis in 1994, the same year that political turmoil further affected the Chiapas economy. Moreover, local conditions made these strategies attractive. The coffee was organic anyway, because cuts in Green Revolution subsidies and low coffee prices put agrochemicals out of reach for most producers at the time (Sánchez Juárez 2015). And it was easy to enter fair trade

[98] These factors included the rise of Starbucks, which created a market for differentiated coffees; the increased competition due to the liberalization of the market after the ICA collapse in 1989; and the related fact that consumers had become the leaders of the value chain (Cafaggi et al 2012: 43-45.50-51).
[99] García-Cardona (2016) argues that these strategies correspond to more nuanced categories within the general product upgrading category, but for our purposes it is enough to consider them under the general category.

schemes, which generally require producers to be part of a cooperative, because the state was sponsoring the creation of cooperatives[100] and several NGOs were promoting the fair trade model with their projects (Sánchez Juárez 2015).

As for product upgrading in terms of characteristics that are directly verifiable by consumers, there is little incentive for Chiapas producers to invest in quality, because traders typically pay smallholders exclusively by weight. While any organic or fair trade premiums can be simply added on to measures of weight, changing to a quality-based valuation is more difficult: traders buy parchment coffee, whereas quality is determined at the following stage of processing (green coffee), which normally happens after amalgamating coffee from various producers, and far away from where they live.[101]

These barriers mean that achieving the full potential of product upgrading would require an accompanying functional upgrading strategy. However, not many actors have attempted this either (let alone any of the other forms of economic upgrading). Worldwide, 88% of coffee is exported as a commodity, in the form of green coffee (Cafaggi et al 2012: 43).[102] Historically, the fact that coffee quickly goes stale once it is roasted, and that most consumers are in non-producing countries, has shortened the reach of producing countries on the value chain. Even though vacuum seal technology and quickened transportation routes provide a potential opportunity for would-be roasters in producing countries today, a small group of corporations have by now created powerful entry barriers, especially through branding (cf Cafaggi et al 2012; Milberg 2004; Milberg and Winkler 2011; Rodríguez Moreno 2014b). The invention of instant coffee, which

[100] Sánchez Juárez (2015) argues that this policy was a way for the state to regain its political alliance with peasants after the ruptures of 1989.
[101] The international coffee industry uses several standardized measures of quality which correspond to a point system. The gourmet market recognizes specialty coffees (ie, those scoring 80 or more points on the SCAA scale) with higher prices (Cafaggi et al 2012: 62).
[102] This explains references in the coffee literature to firms that have gone from production to processing of green coffee as "fully vertically integrated" – as if going any further were simply out of the question (cf Temu et al 2001: 207). This is a good example of how "studies of coffee too often reify the international market" (Topik 2003: 21).

does not go stale, also allows for roasting prior to exporting, but it implies a capital-intensive process that is not accessible to smallholders; in Mexico as elsewhere, it corresponds to a different sort of development model, often tied to foreign direct investment by the same corporations who already control the industry (Talbot 2002).

Thus, the repertoire of coffee-based development schemes rarely extends beyond fair trade and related credence schemes, despite the saturation of the fair trade market (Bacon et al 2008; Kilian et al 2006), and increasing recognition of other problematic aspects.[103]

PART I: THE MISIÓN DE BACHAJÓN'S PROJECT VIS-À-VIS THE MARKET

Yomol A'tel

In that context, the MB has charted its own GVC upgrading path. A Jesuit brother who was one of the mission's founders, Salvador Quintero, began regulating the price of parchment coffee in the Bachajón area in the 1970s by buying it from smallholders at a slightly higher price than the market price, thereby forcing other traders to do the same (ITESO 2014; Oscar pers. comm.). By the 1990s, the MB's NGO, CEDIAC, began a small women's cooperative to roast coffee and sell it in the larger cities. When the coordinator of that project died in a car accident, CEDIAC asked an administrative employee, José Aquino, to step in as a stopgap measure.

[103] In the absence of a larger process of accompaniment, fair trade certification schemes can end up excluding the most vulnerable people, who they are meant to serve (Raynolds 2002). Even for those who do participate, the actual impact on poverty is highly questionable (Weber 2011; Méndez et al 2010). At a more political level, Sánchez Juárez (2015) argues that in Chiapas, fair trade schemes have not only tended to yield poor results in terms of economic upgrading, but have also reinforced the subservience of smallholders to the state and transnational corporations. This echoes Dolan's (2010) critique of fair trade in Kenya as ultimately serving neoliberal interests. In any case, fair trade does nothing to address the huge power asymmetry in the governance of the coffee GVC, which leaves producers at the mercy of lead firms (Bacon et al 2008; Fridell 2006).

Around this same time, Oscar Rodríguez, a Jesuit priest, returned from Colombia where he had been specializing in agroecology and rural development. Prior to that, Oscar had been involved in the struggle for land and indigenous rights in Chiapas, including the legendary 57-day march on the capital organized by the Xinich' movement in 1992 (cf chapter 3). Inspired by the energy of the Zapatista uprising and his intellectual immersion in social theory, he was ready to shift from protesting against injustice to implementing a vision of alternative development (Rodríguez Rivera 1999).[104] Before settling on a concrete project, Oscar embarked on a year's walk to visit one hundred villages in Sitalá (the municipality with the highest poverty levels in the MB), asking the people what the priority should be. The people overwhelmingly asked him to help them do something about the low and volatile coffee prices (Oscar pers. comm.).

José and Oscar joined forces and in 2000, they began working with a group of producers who were interested in starting a cooperative. The producers had previous experience in organic coffee production and social organizations including coffee cooperatives (Yomol A'tel forthcoming). José had picked up all kinds of practical skills over a lifetime of adventures; it turned out that he even had a knack for roasting coffee. Oscar brought a vision that was radical and creative, and he was determined to not let their initiative go the way of so many others that had turned Chiapas into "a graveyard of development projects" (Oscar pers. comm.). Together, they founded what eventually became YA'.

Today, YA' is a group of social and solidarity enterprises comprising a coffee and honey producers' cooperative, Ts'umbal Xitalha'; a coffee processing plant, Bats'il Maya; a chain of coffee shops, Capeltic; a microfinance institution, Comon Sit Ca'teltic;

[104] Oscar summarizes and communicates his vision as president of YA' in the form of catchy phrases that are persistently repeated in conversations, meetings, and institutional documents. I mention several of his slogans throughout this chapter. At this time, the motto was "*pasar de la protesta a la propuesta,*" to go from protest to proposal (Oscar pers.comm.).

a honey distributor, Chabtic; and the Yip Antsetik cooperative, which makes honey-based Xapontic soaps. Ts'umbajeletic is Ts'umbal Xitalha's technical support team, and Canan Taqu'in is YA's administrative team. Rather than a chronological narrative (for that, cf Yomol A'tel forthcoming; Messina and Pieck 2010), in what follows I analyse YA' from the strategic point of view of economic, social and ecological upgrading. I focus on the coffee value chain, touching on YA's other value chains mainly in relation to it.

First, I offer an account of the YA' model and the reasoning behind it, as a strategy to make the MB's project of Tseltal sovereignty economically viable. In dialogue with chapters 1 and 3, I argue that YA' is designed to "tame" the market (by gaining control over the GVC), and then "domesticate" it (by placing its force at the service of the community and its base).[105] Then, I discuss some of the challenges that YA' faces in trying to implement the model, and how it deals with them. Throughout, I consider the implications of these observations for our larger research questions.

Taming the market: economic upgrading

YA' prioritizes precisely those key economic upgrading strategies that other development actors have not addressed: functional upgrading and product upgrading based on quality (without neglecting credence-based strategies for the latter as well). It also engages in process and intersectoral upgrading. Indeed, YA' engages in economic upgrading in every conceivable way. In this section, I will discuss YA's economic upgrading strategies in detail, before showing how they are linked to its strategies for social benefit and ecological enhancement.

Functional upgrading

[105] Cf "The Allegory of the Lion" (before chapter 1) regarding the terms "tame" and "domesticate" as they are intended here.

Coffee has a relatively long value chain for a tropical agricultural commodity (Talbot 2002). Once "cherries" are harvested, they are de-pulped (the "beans" are extracted) in a process known as wet processing. After fermenting and washing, the beans are typically laid out in the sun to dry. At this stage, the dry coffee bean is still wrapped in an outer skin, hence the term "parchment coffee." This is as far as smallholder producers typically get in the value chain in Chiapas. Parchment coffee is collected, warehoused, and sold by traders (known as *coyotes*) to processors who do the subsequent dry processing, which consists of removing the outer skin, leaving "green" coffee beans. By law, this must be done within Mexico; it is usually done near the port of Veracruz (outside of Chiapas) from where green coffee is exported. Then, the beans are roasted, ground, and ultimately used as an ingredient in a beverage. This is typically done outside of Mexico, especially in the case of high-quality roasters who add the most value. It is estimated that smallholder producers who sell parchment coffee are left with less than 5% of the total value of the coffee value chain, and that no more than 20% stays in producing countries (Gresser and Tickell 2002).

This presents a major opportunity for economic upgrading, but because of the barriers discussed in the previous section, forward vertical integration by smallholder producers is exceedingly rare. In that context, it is remarkable that YA' has achieved full forward vertical integration (Irezabal Vilaclara 2011; Irezabal Vilaclara 2016). It acquired its first modern roaster in 2002, and built a complete processing plant in Chilón in 2008. The plant is fully equipped with separate areas for storage of parchment and green coffee; dry processing and sorting; roasting and grinding; quality control; packing and shipping; administration; meetings; and prayer. By exporting its ground coffee to a Japanese-owned restaurant chain in the U.S. (cf chapter 5), YA' developed sufficiently

to launch its own chain of coffee shops starting in 2010. The four coffee shops are located in Chilón, Mexico City, Puebla, and Guadalajara.[106]

YA' has its own brand for the coffee and the shops, Capeltic (meaning "our coffee" in Tseltal). This is especially significant: since coffee is a GVC where technology is standardized and not secret, brands are the main entry barrier used by lead firms to squeeze their part of the value chain, creating an hourglass shape that gives them the power to keep an unequal share of the value (Mayer and Milberg 2013: 7; cf also Milberg 2004; Milberg and Winkler 2011).

In that light, YA' invests in building a strong Capeltic brand. Its logo – coffee beans embedded in a Tseltal flower[107] – was professionally designed with help from the graphic design department of a top university, the Santa Fe campus of the Universidad Iberoamericana. The first coffee shop was strategically opened in the same university – the flagship campus of a national network of elite Jesuit universities, located in a wealthy suburb of Mexico City. Many of the students have chauffeurs and body guards who wait outside the gates in SUVs with tinted windows. Starting at this exclusive location (and then its equivalents in Puebla and Guadalajara) had several advantages. By associating the Capeltic brand with a university brand that in Mexico is synonymous with quality, wealth, and status, the coffee is marketed to young, high-end consumers.[108] After a few years, when Capeltic was ready to expand, a cohort of customers had also graduated from the university and moved into other upscale urban areas, now as young professionals who could recruit new customers from among their colleagues.

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[106] Capeltic currently runs its own brand of coffee shops at the roasting plant in Chilón; the Santa Fe (Mexico City) and Puebla campuses of the Universidad Iberoamericana; and ITESO university in Guadalajara. For some years it also ran a "coffee island" in another university in Mexico City, but this one has since closed, as I discuss in chapter 5. It recently launched a "coffee bar" inside a gourmet market in Puebla, as I discuss below.

[107] The four-petal flower is a design traditionally woven by Tseltal women, and represents the four cardinal directions which are integral to Mayan cosmology (cf Martínez Loera 2011).

[108] This is an example of what Gudeman (2016: 83-92) describes as the ritual logic of "contagion" used in marketing (cf chapter 1).

Capeltic began its expansion outside of universities by selling its ground coffee directly to high-end cafés, restaurants, and bakeries who serve it (eg Casa del Mendrugo in Puebla, and the Da Silva bakeries in Mexico City). This strategy of "downgrading" a notch from complete vertical integration allowed for fast growth in sales while reducing the risk involved in opening new Capeltic coffee shops (Alberto pers. comm.; cf Bolwig et al 2010: 177). Meanwhile, the key brand-related strategy remains intact. For example, on January 20, 2017, Capeltic's Facebook page announced that its coffee was now available at Praga 29, a café in a listed art deco building in Colonia Juárez. The next morning, an Ibero alumnus commented on the post, tagging a friend: "You never tasted the coffee from my university, […] we should go!!! […] the best 🤌". By September 2017, Capeltic was ready for a more ambitious step, and it launched its own "coffee bar" inside the gourmet supermarket, Frescura, in Puebla.

By controlling the entire value chain for its coffee, all the way through its own high-end brand of coffee shops, YA' bores a hole (however small) in the wall that prevents most smallholder cooperatives from accessing the full value of their product. This is obviously about money, but it is also political. In Oscar's words,

> With this strategy [of functional upgrading], we want to break the systemic structures of power and control that are imposed on the region through the price of coffee [….] The strategy of adding value is ultimately a way to get out of that perverse definition of price based on speculation, where by adding value, we become capable of determining the maximum price [that we can pay producers of parchment coffee] based on what the final price of sales in bags [of ground roasted coffee] or in cups [as a beverage] allows us. (Rodríguez Rivera forthcoming)

Product upgrading

Besides its long value chain, another characteristic of coffee is that its quality is socially recognized as being variable (Samper 2003). Thanks in large part to Starbucks having taught consumers to be coffee gourmands since the 1990s (Ponte 2002: 1111),

this recognition also translates into economic value. Coffee thus allows for optimizing market value through product upgrading in terms of quality.

YA' learned the importance of quality early on. It began by selling "authentic" coffee, roasted the way it is done in Tseltal homes, and packaged in a sackcloth bag embroidered with colourful designs. Tourists would buy the coffee because of the attractive bag, the product's "authenticity", and solidarity with the women's cooperative behind it. However, they also complained about the taste, since the way the Tseltal drink their coffee is so different from the standardized taste that cosmopolitan consumers expect. Because of this, the first cooperative was not able to grow, and lost clients over time (Yomol A'tel forthcoming).

José and Oscar soon realized that if their initiative was to be viable, let alone make any impact on the wider reality, their marketing strategy needed to shift "from charity to quality" (*de la caridad a la calidad*). In 2002, they brought consultants from the National Polytechnic Institute to improve the quality of their coffee processing, now with the new roaster they had acquired through a grant from the Canadian government (Rodríguez Rivera forthcoming). The consultants recommended a full-fledged strategic focus on quality upgrading: it would ensure access to high-end niche markets, which not only means higher prices, but also an environment in which a small newcomer can be competitive.[109]

For these reasons, YA' has implemented practices for optimal quality at every step of the coffee value chain. This begins on the land, with the varieties of coffee that are planted, and then with agroecological management including care for soil fertility,

[109] In contrast, attempting to compete in the mainstream market would put them up against major transnational corporations. The top coffee traders in the MB's territory are AMSA (ECOM Agroindustrial Corporation); Cafés California (Neumann Kaffee Gruppe); Expogranos (Ed & F Man); and Becafisa (Volcafé) (Rodríguez Rivera forthcoming).

management of shade, and other practices such as pruning.[110] At harvest time, cherries are picked only as they reach optimal ripeness, even if this means having to come back to the same tree over several days. Fermentation levels are controlled during wet processing, and humidity levels, along with ambient odours, are controlled throughout collection and storage. At the dry processing stage, grains are selected for size, weight, and colour. Only sacks made of natural fibre are used for green coffee, to prevent contamination with the plastic odour of synthetic material. Roasting is an art and a science involving careful management of time, temperature, and blends; laboratory tests are *de rigueur* throughout this process. At the retail end, the whole coffee shop experience, including the ambience and the service, is part of the product (Daviron and Ponte 2005), and so Capeltic shops are designed by architects and professionally managed.

YA' has achieved the quality standards of its corporate clients in Japan and the U.S., and can confidently offer a range of twenty-five standardized blends. Its chief cupper, José, has served on international panels as a judge to select judges of coffee-tasting panels. As for the coffee shops, the Capeltic at the Ibero in Mexico City consistently has the longest queues of all the competing high-end brands on campus, so much so that it is about to open another coffee shop on the same campus (Belinda pers. comm.). Both Capeltic's consumer surveys and my own impromptu conversations with students who were enjoying a Capeltic coffee one afternoon confirm that students choose Capeltic over other brands because they prefer its taste. In a separate conversation, I met a doctoral student in anthropology who studies gourmet food in Mexico, and considers himself a gourmet consumer; he declared that in his expert opinion, Capeltic has the best-quality coffee of the four available brands at the Ibero.

[110] Normal pruning is complemented by a specialized practice known as *agobio*, in which the plant is tilted to a 45-degree angle in order to provoke new vertical shoots.

Besides product quality upgrading, YA' does not neglect other product upgrading strategies, including credence-based ones. The name "Capeltic" itself communicates an indigenous identity, which in Mexico is associated with both poverty and place, thereby hinting at the social business model and specific origin that are fully explained on the side of bags and on the walls of the coffee shops. Its coffee is also certified organic through Certimex, the standard certifier in the region.

However, these latter strategies have not played a large role so far. Most customers are unaware of the social vision behind Capeltic, according to its own consumer surveys (Belinda pers. comm.). But the latent potential of credence strategies is nonetheless built into the product and the brand, and YA' treats this as a matter of sequencing. Quality was the first priority; without it there would be no loyal customers. Now the next step is to invite them into a relationship beyond their consumption (Oscar pers. comm.). In that light, YA' is evaluating the possibility of creating a new seal through the Comparte network which would guarantee a set of Jesuit-inspired principles behind the product; it would be more far-reaching than what is guaranteed by fair trade and organic labels, and it would also leverage the credibility of the Jesuit "brand" throughout Latin America (cf chapter 5).

In the meantime, the Capeltic brand carries a political message with its coffee. As a product of high quality for outside markets, it has a symbolic value as a distinguished "ambassador" of the sovereign Tseltal people, who show through their product that they do things well, and that they build value based on capabilities and effort, not financial speculation or charity from consumers. In terms that are even more personal and at least as political, Oscar often insists that producing coffee of high quality is a way for long-oppressed producers to recover self-esteem and overcome alienation.

Process upgrading

The importance of process upgrading, as a matter of rationalized efficiency, is straightforward for any industry. It is especially crucial in rural Chiapas, because YA' has chosen to compete with multinational corporations from a place where electricity is a problem, days can go by with no phone signal, the internet is excruciatingly slow and the roads are routinely blocked (cf chapter 3). To stay afloat in this context, YA' has had to be as efficient as possible.

Its process upgrading strategy includes the introduction of appropriate technology throughout the value chain. YA' has established wet processing centres in each of Ts'umbal Xitalha's ten regions. In the centres, specialized de-pulping machines from Colombia save time, effort, and water;[111] and gas-fuelled dryers are available to speed up the drying process and reduce weather-related risks. At collection, a digital humidity tester has replaced the guesswork involved in the traditional method of biting into a coffee bean to see how soft it is. A de-husking machine at the roasting plant automatically separates beans by size and weight. Specialty coffees are then selected with a machine imported from Costa Rica, which separates beans by colour. Yet another machine speeds up the process of sealing packed boxes for shipping to clients. (These capital investments are financed mainly through grants from foundations and development agencies, as discussed in chapter 5.)

Systems engineers on the team and business school consultants routinely evaluate how to make the entire process more efficient and otherwise find innovative ways to solve problems. For example, one consultant determined the most cost-efficient way to package and ship boxes, given the shipping company's price schemes. When the shipping

[111] The Penagos machines also add to product upgrading by replacing hand-cranked ones that damage the beans.

company began stealing from the boxes, YA' invented a special tape stamped with the Capeltic logo as a tamper-proof packing method.

Process upgrading, for YA', is a matter of both mathematical precision and creativity. It is also a political statement, in that it breaks with the common perception of rural Chiapas as stuck in a backwards economy, even as it calls attention to the challenges that remain (Oscar pers. comm.).

Intersectoral upgrading

Diversification is important in a context where most people's income is dependent on a single annual crop. Indeed, the coffee rust epidemic – which caught producers off-guard in 2012 and quickly destroyed up to 90% of coffee production, until they could control it or wait for newly planted trees to start producing (which takes up to three years) – underlined this fact.[112] Moreover, YA' has a vision for wider economic development in the region, and so it is constantly opening new fronts.

To understand YA's strategy for expansion into new value chains, it is necessary to clarify an ambiguity in the literature on economic upgrading. While scholars have widely adopted Humphrey and Schmitz's (2002) catalogue of upgrading strategies, which we are using here, many have changed the name of the fourth strategy from "intersectoral upgrading" to "chain upgrading," defining it as "diversifying activities into *higher value* sectors or end products" (Goger et al 2014: 4, emphasis added), or "shifting to a *more technologically advanced* production chain" (Barrientos et al 2011: 324, emphasis added). To be sure, this is one important way in which "intersectoral upgrading" can

[112] Coffee rust (*Hemileia vastatrix*) is a fungus that is devastating when coffee trees are old and poorly fertilized, as was the case in most of Chiapas. Oscar interprets the latter fact as a consequence of low farm gate prices, which disincentivize investments. YA's model, in contrast to government policy, is designed to overcome vulnerability to coffee rust by addressing power asymmetries rather than sacrificing quality or ecological sustainability (cf chapter 5). Regarding the importance of reducing risk through resilience strategies such as diversification, cf Bolwig et al 2010: 180-181.

occur, but Humphrey and Schmitz's term – and their description of it in terms of "horizontal moves" (Humphrey and Schmitz 2002: 1010) – is much more suggestive. The original concept avoids an implicit teleology that has creeped in with the idea of "chain upgrading," while the latter misses other relevant aspects besides relative value and technological sophistication across value chains, such as the synergetic linkages between them.

YA's own approach can be best understood from the point of view of Humphrey and Schmitz's original, more open-ended and relational concept. YA' does aim to move into new value chains with higher value and new capabilities, but just as crucially, it aims to complete value *systems*, by expanding into interconnected chains and cycles that mutually reinforce each other. This latter criterion means that an isolated value chain, regardless of its economic or technological potential, should not be introduced without taking into account its implications for the entire regional economy. Preference is given to value chains that are already embedded in the "logic" of the economy, even if these are less "high-value" or "high-tech" on their own than some other possible chain. In this view, capillary systems are just as important as major arteries for spreading wealth and keeping it in the region.[113] This vision is inseparable from YA's identity as an economic dynamo at the service of the MB's project of Tseltal sovereignty without adjectives (rather than simply a promoter of "economic growth").

Having clarified the way in which YA' approaches intersectoral upgrading, we can now appreciate the diversity of value chains in which it is engaged, and the way it has approached them. Honey, for example, is a traditional commodity in Chiapas, usually

[113] I am inspired here by Ronaldo Lec's comparison to the permaculture method of water conservation ("slow it, spread it, sink it") and the logic of social and solidarity economy, in August 2017 at the Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute in Guatemala, during our farmer-to-farmer exchange (cf chapter 2). Oscar prefers the metaphor of a barrel that leaks because it is full of holes. In his theory, the standard development practice is to just keep pouring water into it, while YA's strategy is to plug the holes, starting with the lowest (most urgent) ones, and moving up as the water level rises.

produced in addition to coffee.[114] It does not require much work, and bees are important pollinators in the ecosystem of shade forests and *milpa*. Thus, YA' includes a honey-producing cooperative. As with coffee, it has achieved full functional upgrading (complete with a brand, Chabtic), as well as significant product and process upgrading. Specialized technical accompaniment and equipment, jars designed to travel well, and mouthful-sized packets of flavoured honey (which are popular with consumers and have a much higher unit value than the jars) are all part of these strategies.

Honey in turn has its own set of inter-sectoral spin-offs. These include what might be considered chain upgrades – such as honey-based cosmetics, under the brand Xapontic, and experiments with honey-based sweeteners for coffee drinks – but also further horizontal expansion, with a focus on synergetic linkages. Producing honey requires not only a wooden box for beehives (*caja*), but also an additional wooden box (*alza*), that rests atop the beehive box, where the bees store surplus honey as a provision for the flowerless dry season. Without the *alza*, the bees do not produce this honey, and there is nothing to harvest. Cash-strapped farmers face a dilemma: when their bees reproduce, they must invest their scarce resources either in more *cajas*, so that the new bees stay, or in *alzas*, in order to make beehives productive; they cannot afford both. Most farmers choose to invest in new *cajas*, but the result is that they have many bees and no honey. In the dry season, they have to feed the bees sugar, turning beekeeping into a net loss activity for them. The solution was for YA' to start its own carpentry workshop, run by members of the cooperative, which makes both *cajas* and *alzas* for half the market price.[115] According to one producer I talked to, they are also of better quality. (In a further inter-sectoral possibility, the workshop has begun fielding requests for furniture.) The

[114] In my fieldwork I met only one family that produced honey but not coffee: they owned a small quarry, and their principal income came from making cement blocks.
[115] The market price at the time of my fieldwork was 120 pesos ($7); the cooperative's sold for 60 pesos ($3.50). A typical producer has at least twenty or thirty hives.

cajas and *alzas* are financed by YA's own microcredit institution, Comon Sit C'ateltic; loans are guaranteed by the future honey harvest.

Como Sit C'ateltic was founded in 2013, when the coffee cooperative had brought its price above the market average, and YA' realized that producers quickly spent the extra income paying informal lenders back for high-interest loans[116] (Oscar pers. comm.).[117] Indeed, since the coffee harvest is annual, a mid-year emergency can make people vulnerable to exploitative lending. Of course, running a microfinance institution requires more capabilities and produces more value than a carpentry workshop. But in both cases, the logic of inter-sectoral upgrading is the same: the main purpose is to plug the gaps from where value leaks out of the community, while using those weak points to identify potential synergies in the regional economy. Another case in point is YA's new catering service, activated whenever cooperative members from different regions gather in Chilón for meetings (which occurs at least several times a month). Rather than spending the cooperative's operational funds to eat in a restaurant, as they did for some time, this catering service keeps the money circulating in the many regions where the cooperative is present: ingredients are bought from cooperative members' excess *milpa* production, and some members are hired to do the occasional work.

In sum, YA's strategies for economic upgrading are ambitious, thorough, and creative. These strategies have a built-in political vision related to the goal of Tseltal sovereignty; all of them are aimed at overcoming exploitation and exclusion, and building a dynamic regional economic system in which multiple types of capability and value play an integral role. In YA's model of social and solidarity economy, strategies for "taming" the market through economic upgrading are intertwined, by design, with strategies for

[116] I was told that informal lenders typically charge 10% per month (Alex pers. comm.).
[117] A complementary version of this origin story, told to me by another informant, is that people would line up at Oscar's office door, overwhelming him with private requests for loans. Either way, he was made aware of the need for a viable large-scale source of credit connected to the overall system.

"domesticating" it; that is, the market is placed at the service of the community and its base.

Domesticating the market: social benefit and environmental enhancement

Before delving into the mechanisms by which YA' aims to articulate and "translate" value from the market sphere into the sphere of the community and base, a theoretical point about this effort as such is warranted. The market is only viable because value is already transferred in the opposite direction. Geophysical and biological processes, as well as traditional knowledge and unpaid family labour, all generate value independently of the market, which can then be converted into monetary value when it is transferred to the latter sphere.[118] In chapter 1, we have seen the exploitative tendency of the market to extract unearned rents from the spheres below it. In contrast, YA's model shows that a more ethical relationship – one that does not "cut off entanglement" (Tsing 2015: 271) – is possible. "Domesticating the market" is ultimately about recognizing and nourishing the community and ecosystem from which YA' harvests labour and commodities, rather than alienating that value for capitalist accumulation. In this way, the tension between the two spheres of the economy can be a creative one for all involved.

[118] Another example is that YA's product quality upgrading strategy depends in no small measure on José's extraordinary palate. He explained to me that he acquired the ability to distinguish nuances of taste during his upbringing in a matriarchal household in rural Oaxaca. Under the guidance of his grandmother, who was a master of traditional cuisine, his aunts would take turns cooking for the entire extended family. Over the years, José learned to be able to tell which of his aunts had made a particular meal, by the subtle differences in taste. He would regularly visit his other grandmother in a nearby village. As he walked through fields of flowers and vegetables, the workers would hand him freshly harvested crops – each with a distinct, strong smell – as gifts for his grandmother. Later in life, José worked as a driver for a politician in Chiapas, who rarely requires his service. In his ample spare time, José befriended a descendant of a German settler family, and picked up the art of roasting coffee from him as a hobby. José's senses of taste and smell, and his skill for roasting, were all refined outside of a market economy context. He never paid for a course to become a professional taster or roaster, but having acquired these talents through various instances of community, he is now able to "translate" them into monetary value through the coffee market.

Social benefit

As a business initiative founded on the principles of social and solidarity economy, YA' is designed to ensure that the benefit of economic upgrading translates into better conditions for the community and its base. The core social upgrading strategy is YA's business model itself: it is in the process of becoming entirely a "cooperative of cooperatives," directly inspired (and advised) by the Basque Mondragón Group, which is the world's largest cooperative federation (cf Altuna Gabilondo 2008). Before considering its implications, a point of clarification about this model is necessary. YA's newer ventures, like Yip Antsetic, are integrated into the YA' umbrella as cooperatives. However, as a matter of sequencing, YA' found it necessary to go ahead with the roasting plant (Bats'il Maya) and the coffee shops (Capeltic) in the form of social businesses, where the employees are not yet cooperativized (though that process is underway), because it needed to quickly establish a guaranteed market for Ts'umbal Xitalha's product on the terms it was trying to establish. For now, the interaction between these parts of YA' would technically be considered a form of "direct trade" (or perhaps a joint venture), but in practice it functions as a single organization: the Ts'umbal Xitalha' cooperative's board of directors (Mesa Directiva) participates in the governance of the entire group, and the majority of employees in the roasting plant are the children of cooperative members.[119] The clearest indicator of YA's unity is in the fact that profits

[119] Since the coffee shops are in other parts of Mexico (except for the one at the roasting plant), those employees are not from Tseltal communities. Most coffee shop employees are young people from marginalized urban neighbourhoods. YA' spent some years searching for a collective "urban subject" with an agenda analogous to Tseltal sovereignty that could be articulated with the Capeltics; in May 2018, it opened an urban "coffee school" for Capeltic managers and baristas from Santa Fe, in collaboration with the Centro Meneses (which promotes social justice in the marginalized neighbourhood near the Ibero university). The idea is to leverage YA's economic impact for social ends. At the same time, it is relevant in terms of the conjoint identity aspect discussed below in the section on "reverse cascading", because the process of conversion from a social business into a cooperative will require individuals to make sacrifices and take risks for the sake of long-term common good.

from Bats'il Maya and Capeltic are transferred (via Comon Sit C'ateltic) to members of the Ts'umbal Xitalha' producer cooperative, as discussed below.

It is also necessary, at this point in our discussion, to bring in a conceptual framework that is capable of accounting for YA's social impact. YA's goals go well beyond providing good jobs; it is meant to build up a good life (*lekil kuxlejalil*, or *buen vivir*) through the rupture with injustice and alienation, and through the construction – in collaboration with the rest of the MB's initiatives – of Tseltal sovereignty. This overarching vision surpasses the literature on GVCs and social "upgrading;" it points to social justice. In that light, where Barrientos et al (2011) discuss social upgrading in terms of the ILO's "decent work agenda" – including wages, basic rights, and the absence of gender discrimination – we might expand those criteria through the more fundamental categories behind them: distribution and recognition.[120] These are precisely the categories developed in one of the most fecund contributions to contemporary thinking about social justice – the 2003 debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth.[121]

For our purposes, it is useful to proceed with a hybrid framework that combines the categories from Fraser's and Honneth's respective theories.[122] Fraser proposes that any social reality should be evaluated from two perspectives, economic redistribution and social recognition (Fraser 2003: 62-64). Honneth defines recognition in terms of three aspects that are necessary for social justice: recognition of unique individuals as worthy

[120] To be sure, the ILO framework adopted by the Capturing the Gains literature is helpful in that it is easily relatable to policy implications. Bolwig et al (2010) propose a more nuanced conceptual framework which is also worth consideration, even if it seems more applicable to value chains as such than to particular cases. The wider framework I am proposing allows accounting for a case that escapes standard categories, due to its complex articulation of engagement and non-engagement with the market, and its radical agenda.

[121] Fraser and Honneth's common search for a theory of social justice is presented as a critique of capitalism as a "totality" (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 4). Their rootedness in Critical Theory (as opposed to more liberal theories of justice) makes their framework all the more appropriate for understanding YA's vision, which is about using social and solidarity economy to help create a radically alternative system.

[122] My framework is a hybrid, not a synthesis: it does not purport to reconcile the differences between Fraser and Honneth. Note: I have similarly used Fraser and Honneth's categories to operationalize an evaluation of labour conditions in a previous publication (Adames, Travieso and Amézquita 2008). I am indebted to Pablo Mella for the original suggestion.

in themselves, recognition of all individuals as the subjects of equal rights, and merit-based recognition of unique contributions. Combining these – and considering the latter sphere of recognition at both the individual and collective levels[123] – provides a lens for thoroughly understanding all the ways in which YA' is designed to contribute to social justice.

Distribution[124]

YA' is designed to have a positive impact on economic distribution in five different ways. The first is by establishing a stable price for parchment coffee. Normally, the price is extremely volatile because coffee is sold as a commodity. As such, its price is subject to financial speculation and other external factors, such as worldwide levels of supply and demand. Among commodities, coffee in particular is subject to very high price volatility (Mohan and Love 2004, cited in Gemech et al 2011). YA' is able to stabilize the price of parchment coffee by entirely circumventing the commodities market through its strategy of forward vertical integration. Obviously, YA' remains aware of market trends to stay competitive, but it is no longer at the mercy of those trends. Instead, it determines three stable price tiers (based on quality standards, as incentive for product upgrading) for parchment coffee at the beginning of each harvest. This is important to

[123] Honneth excludes collectives from the latter sphere, but not as a matter of principle. He is simply sceptical of the empirical ability of any "minority culture" to provide "material evidence" of an "indispensable achievement" that would constitute "an essential contribution to the reproduction of society" (Honneth 2003: 167). Despite his prejudice, I include merit-based collective recognition in this framework because the MB demands this for Tseltal culture, precisely on the grounds that the Tseltal worldview and way of life contributes something unique and valuable to wider society. One objective way Tseltal culture does this is through its *in-situ* conservation of maize biodiversity, which is crucial for world food security but threatened by the practices and worldview of settler culture (cf chapter 3).

[124] Here, I will use "distribution" in place of Fraser's "redistribution," because YA's strategies for improving the economic conditions of its members include mechanisms of both re-distribution and "pre-distribution." This distinction is meant to underline the complexity of YA's strategy; it is not meant as a critique of Fraser. Her theory has room for the language of "pre-distribution" (which was coined years after her publication, in Hacker 2011), as it accounts for the distinction between "transformative strategies" that address the root cause of injustice, as opposed to "affirmative strategies" which only address the unjust outcome (Fraser 2003: 74, 77).

producers, because it makes their income more predictable. At a normative level, building its "own" price is important to YA', because it makes the price a better reflection of the value of the producers' work than when the price is determined by factors entirely outside their control (Oscar pers. comm.).

To be sure, a stable price is only meaningful if it is higher than the market price, at least on average. This is the second distributive aspect of the design. The two are possible together because the same mechanism that allows for price stability (functional upgrading) also gives YA' control of the entire value produced along the chain. This value in itself is higher than the market average by volume, because of YA's product upgrading strategies that place it in a high-end gourmet niche, with conditions of (dynamic) imperfect competition. In principle, the only obstacle to higher prices for parchment coffee, then, could be one of governance (whereby some people would attempt to use power asymmetries for their own disproportional benefit), but the whole purpose of YA' is to facilitate, rather than impede, equitable distribution of value along the chain.

Thus, while there is some negotiation about the exact price tiers, the shared goal is always to set them as high as is feasible. This goal is built in to the system with two mechanisms that limit potential rent-seeking by "bosses." YA's cooperative business model sets a proportional limit on income inequality: the highest salary cannot be more than 6.5 times higher than the lowest, which means that top-level salaries are kept relatively low. Further, profits return to the producer cooperative.

Reinvestment of profits is the third channel through which YA's model is designed to have an impact on economic distribution. Profits from the processing plant and the coffee shops, at the high end of the chain, return to the bottom. Rather than simply being distributed, though, the profits return in the form of social property: a capital fund, managed through YA's microfinance entity, to which individuals have access in

proportion to the amount of coffee they have sold to the cooperative (ie their respective contribution to the total value of the profits). Money is disbursed from this fund in the form of loans for new productive investments.[125] The point of organizing it this way is that it generates collective wealth – beyond individual income, but still incentivizing individual effort – while also stimulating the regional economy by investing the capital in productive – rather than speculative – initiatives. All of these aspects align with the project of Tseltal sovereignty.

The microfinance proto-bank, Comon Sit C'ateltic, offers a fourth economic impact. Besides the capital fund discussed above, Comon Sit C'ateltic gives cooperative members access to financial services (savings and loans). This service is not designed so much to generate profits as it is to provide a safety net and keep money circulating in the community. Therefore, Comon Sit C'ateltic's 4% monthly interest rate on loans is reduced to 2% when the loan is for a food or health emergency.

Finally, YA's economic upgrading strategies also serve to create new, relatively skilled jobs. Certifying, collecting, transporting, processing, roasting, packing and shipping 150 tons of coffee a year requires a whole team. So does processing honey, making soap, and running a carpentry workshop, a microfinance institution, and a catering service. Administering all of this is a job for several more people. Given the intercultural context (and the emphasis on Tseltal linguistic sovereignty), yet another person is employed as a full-time document translator.

[125] The governance of this element is still maturing; it was first decided in a meeting during my fieldwork. Oscar (pers. comm.) expects that towards the future (as the capital and their capabilities grow), they will be able to do more with it, eg collective investments besides personal ones. Also, as Bats'il Maya and Capeltic enter the cooperative umbrella, the new structure will likely entail a renegotiation of the distribution to include the new members.

Besides the elements of YA's design that are meant to benefit people in economic terms, there are also several elements that are designed to provide recognition in every one of its dimensions.

Recognition of unique individuals as ends in themselves

YA' is designed to re-embed the market economy in community relationships, and place it at their service. To this end, cooperative members and employees are acknowledged as part of a wider family and community, and encouraged to make those relationships a priority. Friendship in the workplace is fomented through daily *matz*[126] breaks and occasional celebrations.

But beyond respecting the primacy of unmediated interpersonal relationships as the providers of love, this form of recognition is also incorporated into YA's management style. Two high-level advisors are formally entrusted with helping to ensure that the "logic" of social and solidarity economy – "a more human economy, with the person at the center" – permeates all operations. They keep meetings focused with constant reminders that "we are not here for the coffee." Perhaps where this logic comes out most clearly is in how YA' deals with problems.

In one high-level meeting, YA' leaders were discussing a case from one of the coffee shops, involving some money that had gone missing and a subsequent cover-up. There was enough evidence not only to fire the employee who was responsible, but even to involve the police and prosecute the person. The whole discussion, however, centred on how to act in a way that would prioritize the employee's best interests, which they repeatedly contrasted to what capitalist management would do. When the possibility of

[126] A typical snack made of cornmeal with water; the term is also used generically, the way "coffee break" is used in the U.S. context.

bringing lawyers on board was brought up, they decided that they would only consult with lawyers from an NGO that defends workers' rights; they preferred to defend this value above all other considerations. Eventually, they found a solution that addressed the problem but also showed compassion and helped the person deal with some issues that had led to the theft in the first place.

Another time, there was a drunken fight between young men affiliated with YA'. Though this occurred outside of work, it violated the MB's code of conduct, which prohibits its members from drinking alcohol because of its historical role as a tool of the oppression from which the Tseltal are liberating themselves. Furthermore, violence between members of the organization could not be ignored. In this case, the Tseltal method of dealing with problems in the *cargo* system reinforced the management principles of social and solidarity economy. The Mesa Directiva convened a meeting where they listened to all sides and finally asked those who had misbehaved to "rest" for a month or two, to reflect, work in their family *milpa* and reengage with their community before returning to work. The elders emphasized to the young men that had YA' been a "normal" [capitalist] company, they would have been simply fired, but that YA' was different. Those who had fought were invited to make a public gesture of reconciliation before taking their rest. The respected elders of the Mesa Directiva then delivered speeches emphasizing that nobody is perfect, and that this was a matter of learning and growing through the process, to make the whole team stronger. During the "rest," the other members of the team would work extra to cover for their colleagues' temporary absence; in this way, all shared the burden of restoring harmony.

Recognition of individuals as equal subjects of universal rights

YA' promotes equity in various dimensions, including gender. In the Tseltal context, the MB systematically promotes gradual, endogenous change towards greater gender equity, while still respecting some highly gendered aspects of the culture, in which male and female roles are understood as complementary (Crispín Bernardo and Ruiz Muñoz 2010: 185-218).[127] As part of that wider process, YA' has begun various parallel interventions, which have not yet ripened into an overarching strategic vision, but are all aimed at increasing women's access to income and participatory parity. Ts'umbal Xitalha' statutes prohibit male members from selling their land[128] without their wife's permission. Women have access to high-value and non-traditional jobs; there are both Tseltal and *kaxlán* women working in YA's productive, banking and administrative structures.[129] This is extremely rare in the case of Tseltal women, so any representation is notable;[130] however, men still make up a large majority of employees. With this in mind, yet another strategy, which turned out to be a short-lived experiment, was to create a group for the wives of male Ts'umbajeletic and Bats'il Maya staff, called EYAs (Esposas de Yomol A'tel); the idea was for them to get involved in the organization through their husband's work, and to learn and share useful skills with each other. A more successful strategy has been to create new businesses under the YA' umbrella that are run entirely by women: the soap-making cooperative (Yip Antsetik, literally "the force of women"), and the catering service. In the same spirit, YA' is helping the MB's entirely female embroidery cooperative, Luchiyej, to increase its sales through product upgrading

[127] Cf my note in chapter 1 on why I am not developing this point further in the terms of feminist economics.
[128] Land can be bought and sold internally among members of the *ejido*.
[129] This is an explicit strategy by YA' to improve the economic conditions and opportunities for women, as opposed to the capitalist strategy of feminizing certain sectors in order to lower costs (cf Honneth 2003: 153; Milberg and Winkler 2011: 357).
[130] This was my impression and several informants made comments to the same effect.

and access to external markets.[131] Finally, in a reframing of the EYAs experiment, YA' is shifting its focus from producer cooperative members (who are mainly male heads of households) to their entire families, as a way of giving visibility to women's and children's work.[132]

Other dimensions, such as equity in terms of governance, go beyond the tendency in the literature on social upgrading to assume a capitalist paradigm. YA's cooperative model is designed not only to share economic gains, but also power. While its governance structure is evolving (especially in terms of the transition from a group of cooperatives and social businesses to a true "cooperative of cooperatives"), the enterprise takes pains to ensure participation and accountability. The Mesa Directiva of the producer cooperative has a say even in decisions regarding the social businesses, though these are technically still outside their purview. Detailed economic reports of all of YA's businesses are regularly presented, in Tseltal, in all ten regions where the producers are organized.

Any type of participatory parity requires capabilities. YA' has designed all of its processes with this in mind; it is a main way in which the force of the market economy is "domesticated," channelled into an investment in the community's "base" of knowledge, skills and experiential wisdom. The Bats'il Maya coffee roasting plant is officially called "the coffee school." It is used as a platform for producer families to learn everything there is to know about the coffee industry – from evaluating product quality

[131] The decades-old group was founded mainly to involve women in an organization outside their homes; its current repertoire of products, mainly liturgical stoles and pencil cases, generates little income.

[132] At the time of my fieldwork, Oscar was promoting the slogan, "from the producer to the family", among others (including "from the product to the homestead"). After many years of focusing on the coffee value chain, the latter two slogans represent a return (Oscar represents it with a spiral) of YA's energy and focus to the original concern with family livelihoods and the Tseltal household economy, as well as the urgency of diversification due to the coffee rust epidemic. Although this shift was only beginning to appear in YA's discourse during my fieldwork, and it is mainly symbolic for now, it is not insignificant: cf Stolcke (1995) on the implications of "family-blind" and "gender-blind" visions of coffee production.

to negotiating large contracts to brewing the perfect cappuccino – by doing it.[133] The pedagogy follows the MB system (cf chapter 3), combining Freirean methodology and the Tseltal practice of pairing novices with more experienced mentors (cf Maurer 2011; Urdapilleta Carrasco and Parra Vázquez 2016).[134] YA' also invests in formal education, including university degrees and diplomas, for its members.

Recognition of valuable difference

Individual achievement is also recognized. Producers are paid individually for the amount and quality of coffee they sell to the cooperative, and they have access to loans from the capital fund derived from their profits in proportion to the value they have personally contributed. Interns at the roasting plant are trained in all aspects of the work, and then those who have demonstrated a special talent for something in particular are given preference for that job.

At the collective level, YA' demands that *kaxlanes* recognize Tseltal culture as especially valuable. While most people in YA' are bilingual, discussions are preferentially conducted in Tseltal and informally translated for monolingual Spanish-speakers, rather than the other way around. Business meetings begin with a prayer around a Mayan altar, and biannual strategic planning is conducted in the Tseltal manner, with a twenty-four-hour ritual fast.[135]

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[133] Contrast this with Illy's capability-building strategy in Brazil. Illy is an Italian specialty roaster which buys about half of its coffee from Brazil (Cafaggi et al 2012: 54). To ensure quality standards in its supply chain, it created a "University of Coffee" in partnership with the University of Sao Paulo. However, the training it offers is limited to "the know-how needed for the cultivation of high-quality coffee" (Ibid.: 57) while it strategically maintains the entry barrier to forward vertical integration. "Illy does not teach its producers … the precise characteristics that have to be valued in the drink and how to perceive them [….] The producers work blindly … and those that obtain good results in the selection process and through Illy do not know how to repeat the same performance since they don't have access to … the important criteria…" (Ibid.: 63).

[134] The multidimensional human capabilities YA' aims to build, which go beyond specific skills, are "mapped" in (Comunidad Comparte 2015).

[135] The MB's normative preference for Tseltal culture is enforced whenever the latter comes into conflict with *kaxlán* ways of doing things. For example, the above-mentioned meeting to address an alcohol-infused

The positive valuation of Tseltal culture goes beyond a matter of equalizing asymmetrical power relations. The MB's institutional discourse, and YA' leaders specifically, explicitly emphasize the unique contributions of Tseltal culture, especially with regard to ecological sustainability (Capeltic 2013; Fuentes González 2017; Fuentes González 2016). This leads us to the third dimension of interest, how YA's upgrading strategies themselves are designed with regard to the environmental base.

Environmental enhancement

The MB is aware that its project of long-term reproduction of Tseltal society depends in part on receiving continued ecosystem services from its base. Thus, ensuring environmental sustainability through the care and renewal of that base is a priority for YA' (Rodríguez Rivera 1999; Rodríguez Rivera 2011; Mena Parreño 2012; Mena Parreño 2013). Ts'umbal Xitalha' not only employs a full-time staff member to enforce compliance with the requirements of organic certification, but also a full-time agroecological engineer to help coffee producers go beyond those requirements in providing "cultural services to ecosystems" (Comberti et al 2015). The agroecologist works with the cooperative to articulate their shade-grown organic coffee with the other elements of their farming systems, including *milpa*. When a coffee producer asked Comon Sit C'ateltic for a loan to invest in two cows, one condition for the loan was that he work with the engineer to integrate this new productive element into a sustainable homestead design.

altercation followed the Tseltal assembly method for decision-making: everybody had a chance to speak, the elders spoke last, and the consensus decision was ratified by general applause. However, some *kaxlanes* who were present openly second-guessed the final decision after the meeting had ended; for their cultural codes, it was normal to continue presenting arguments and negotiating a different outcome. This became a major point of contention. YA' leadership appealed to respect for Tseltal culture as the main reason that it would follow through with the original decision. The argument was not only deployed rhetorically in public, but also central in "hidden transcript" conversations where opponents were not present (cf Scott 1990).

The ecological impact of value chains should be analysed not only locally, but also in terms of global processes (Bolwig et al 2010: 182). At this scale too, YA's design contributes to environmental sustainability. While Mexico is a top exporter of green coffee, most roasted coffee consumed in the country is imported. By roasting domestically, YA' reduces greenhouse gas emissions from transporting coffee back and forth. By producing its coffee in shade forests that are intermingled with *milpa* in a patchwork of smallholdings, YA' protects the biodiversity of both local and migratory species (cf chapter 3).

The model in synthesis

To recap, YA's innovative business model aims both to "tame" the market – through thorough economic upgrading – and to "domesticate" it – through built-in mechanisms that directly benefit the community and its base. All of these strategies are ultimately at the service of Tseltal sovereignty, which itself contributes to the wider common good. The following table summarizes YA's strategies.

Table 2. Summary of Yomol A'tel's economic, social, and ecological upgrading strategies

"Taming" the market (capturing value)			
Goal	*Dimensions*		*Strategies*
Economic upgrading (Humphrey and Schmitz 2002)	Functional upgrading (forward vertical integration)		Wet/dry processing
			Roasting
			Coffee shops
			Brand
	Product upgrading (differentiation)	Quality-based	Specialty coffee
			Range of blends
		Credence-based	Organic certification
			Origin coffee
			Explicit social justice goals
	Process upgrading (efficiency; technology)		Calculations to reduce shipping costs
			Theft prevention
			Wet processing machines in all ten regions
			Humidity tester
			Colour-selecting machine for specialty roasting
	Intersectoral upgrading (linkages)		Microfinance community bank
			Honey products
			Cosmetics production
			Carpentry workshop
			Catering service
"Domesticating" the market (transferring value from market to community/base)			
Goals	*Dimensions*		*Strategies*
Social upgrading (Fraser and Honneth 2003)	Distribution		Stable price for parchment coffee
			High price for parchment coffee
			Capital fund from collective profits
			Access to loans for personal needs
			Jobs
	Recognition as unique		Acknowledgement of workers as members of a family and community
			Fostering friendship at work
			People-centred management style
	Recognition as equal		Democratic governance
			Gender equity policies
			Investment in capabilities
	Recognition of valuable difference	Individual	Access to capital fund is proportional to contributions
			Roles based on proven competence
		Collective	Use of Tseltal language and style
Ecological upgrading (Comberti et al 2015)	Do no harm		Organic compliance (no chemicals)
			Domestic roasting (less shipping)
	Cultural services to ecosystems (agroecology)		Agroecological engineer integrates new initiatives (eg cattle) to sustainable homestead design (*milpa,* etc.)

PART II: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES OF THE VISION

Potential

The importance of the MB's market-engaging project, as described above, can now be understood in light of the challenges for establishing a viable middle peasant model as described in chapter 3. The main difficulty identified by both Gudeman and Li is that producing cash crops in marginal areas is economically unprofitable because of low prices, long distances, and diminishing productivity due to the erosion that comes with increased pressure on the land. Indeed, cash cropping has long been identified with diminishing returns on investment, because higher yields are obtained by unsustainably squeezing more and more out of a resource with fixed limits (Reinert 2007).

The MB, however, has introduced diverse economic activities that produce increasing returns by lending themselves to economies of scale, innovation, learning, and division of labour (cf Ibid.).[136] Through YA', Tseltal middle peasants reposition themselves in the market to overcome the challenge identified by Gudeman and Li. Moreover, by systematically promoting linkages and widespread capabilities, they plant the seeds for a helpful restructuring of their regional economy (from specialized and heterogeneous to diverse and homogenous, in the terms of Latin American structuralist economics).[137]

Insofar as the market is intertwined with the community and its base, YA's strategies for "taming" the market have other major implications for the MB's overall

[136] In Gudeman's case study in Panama, sugar was also industrialized, but not by the peasants who produced it (Gudeman 1978). Furthermore, the globalized sugar industry lost its "Schumpeterian" qualities long ago (Reinert 1996). Meanwhile, branded specialty roasted coffee has many of these qualities (cf Reinert 2007: 151, 317).

[137] A specialized and heterogeneous structure (with few productive sectors and large gaps in productivity between sectors) is typical of [(post-)colonial] "peripheries," while a diverse and homogenous economy (a large number of sectors with similar levels of productivity) is typical of [rich] "core" countries. The latter structure fosters linkages, spillovers, and synergies that dynamize well-distributed economic growth (cf Bielschowsky 2009).

economic vision. For instance, we have seen how YA's functional upgrading strategy opens up the possibility of a price premium for quality, which in itself is important for YA's product upgrading strategy. Crucially, coffee quality upgrading is achieved through agroecological practice.[138] There is therefore a market incentive for agroecology built in to YA's business model, and this elective affinity reinforces the virtuous circles I have begun to describe in chapter 3, in ways that we can now appreciate more fully.

Virtuous circles

At the production and harvest stage, two main variables improve the quality of a given coffee tree's yield: achieving high bean density and picking the cherries when they are optimally ripe.[139] Bean density is important in the specialty market because it is what gives the coffee its special characteristics of flavour. (It also contributes to efficiency upgrading at the harvest and early processing stages, in terms of the ratio between the total weight of the cherry and the weight of its commodifiable part.[140])

There are three ways to increase density: planting at higher altitude, because it slows down the tree's metabolism; shade, because it slows down the rate of photosynthesis; and organic fertilizer, because it guarantees a balanced diet of micro and

[138] The following discussion on coffee and agroecology is based primarily on my interview with the Jesuit agroecologist, José Alejandro Aguilar. He completed his doctoral studies under Miguel Altieri, has worked in agriculture with peasant communities in Colombia for decades, and now runs an experimental research farm which produces specialty coffee. Among other recognitions, his Villa Loyola coffee won the internationally recognized "cup of excellence" prize in Colombia in 2008. Besides his scientific and professional credentials, the fact that he is one of YA's closest advisors regarding coffee production (cf chapter 5) means that his understanding has largely informed YA's own vision and practice.

[139] The variety of coffee is also a factor in market-recognized quality. Generally speaking, higher quality varieties (eg *arabica*) tend to prefer shade, while lower quality varieties (eg *robusta*) need more sunlight and can be planted densely together as monoculture. Again, agroecology, multi-cropping, and quality go together.

[140] The coffee "cherry's" pulp and the hull are not useful to buyers (they can be used as organic fertilizer by producers); only the bean is of commercial interest. Therefore, the density of beans is a factor in the cost efficiency of harvest and wet and dry processing, as well as transportation. The denser the bean, the more cost efficient the process. To be sure, most buyers do not reward producers for this, just as they do not incentivize quality. YA's ability to recognize this factor again depends on its having achieved forward vertical upgrading. In other words, YA' has designed its circuit to make the most of this link between market value and agroecology.

macronutrients ingested at a natural rate, as opposed to the artificial fertilizers which are designed to pump the bean exclusively with macronutrients. (The difference is analogous to that between a free range chicken, whose meat is leaner but "gamier," and an industrially farmed chicken, plump but insipid.) Of those three variables, altitude is hard to change, but shade and organic fertilizer are proper to agroecology.

As for picking cherries when they are optimally ripe (as opposed to the conventional practice of "milking" branches of all their cherries at once), it requires careful, skilled labour. On the other hand, it spaces out the demand for labour for this specific task, because the cherries ripen at uneven times; trees must be visited frequently over the course of weeks or months. This combination would be a problem were it not for the MB's agroecological, middle peasant model. Because it prioritizes economies of scope and enables multi-cropping, the MB's model can make efficient use of such labour by combining it with other tasks on the same site (cf Altieri et al 2012). Witness, for example, the story in chapter 3 about my visit to an informant's coffee shade forest, in which he simultaneously optimized the quality of his cash crop, harvested fodder for his mother's chickens, and offered hospitality to his guests. In addition to those elements, his shade forest provides fruit, firewood, and other useful products; it also conserves a natural spring which supplies water to several households.

In reinforcing this particular form of efficiency, YA's upgrading strategies make it difficult to expand coffee production beyond a small scale. The small scale is a problem for producers who sell their coffee for a low and volatile price by weight, but it is viable for Ts'umbal Xitalha' producers, thanks to the social business model that recognizes their work with a better price. This aspect of the model is important because it mitigates pressure to extend production to less fertile land, let alone to land that is currently used for food self-sufficiency.

The fact that YA's upgrading strategies are intensive rather than extensive with regard to land use is especially significant given the growing Tseltal population. This aspect of the model is reinforced by YA's creation of non-agricultural jobs in increasing-returns activities, which serves to increase the demographic carrying capacity of Tseltal territory (cf Reinert 2003). Because the new jobs still depend on agricultural (or more precisely, agroecological) products, they are conducive to sustainable rural livelihoods.

By enabling smallholder families to live this way, YA' fosters a patchwork landscape of different types of land use, including relatively small and interspersed plots of *milpa*, coffee shade forests, and primary forest. This is ideal for biodiversity, not least because it creates an archipelago of habitats that migratory species need to move through the territory (Perfecto et al. 2009). Enhanced biodiversity allows honeybees to thrive, which not only feeds back into a healthy ecosystem through their role as pollinators (Nicholls and Altieri 2013), but is also ideal for high-quality honey production – a key part of YA's intersectoral upgrading strategy.[141]

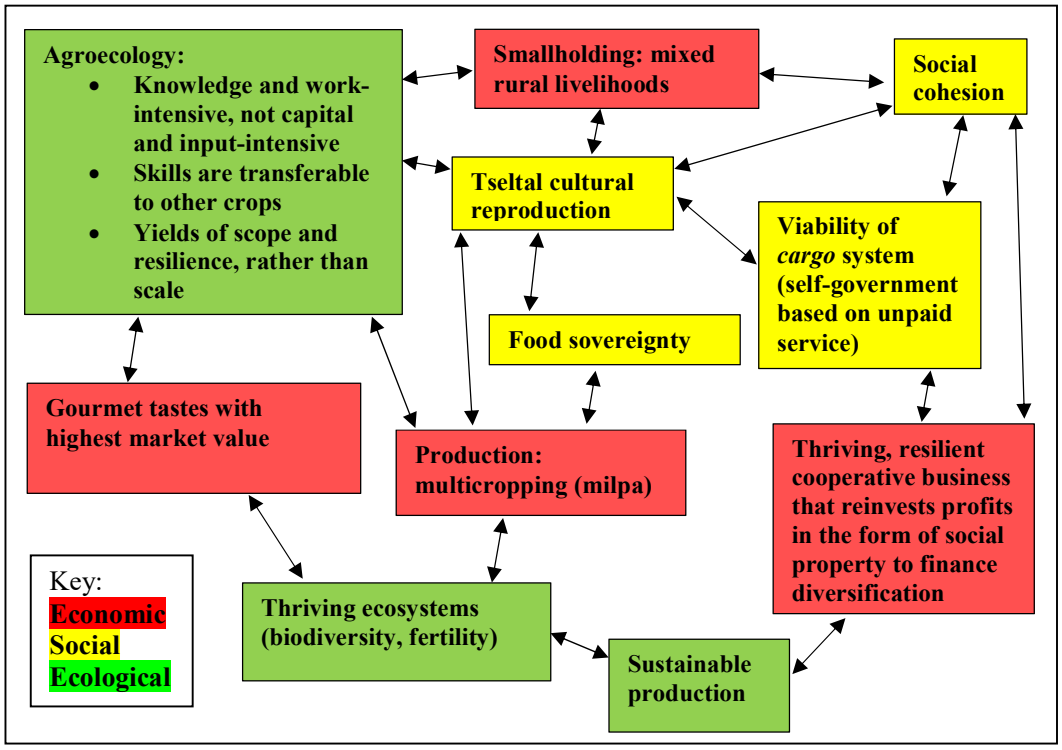
The implications of the MB's model are even clearer when contrasted with those of the industrial, input-dependent, shadeless monoculture that characterizes coffee production in other parts of Chiapas. Conventional plantations produce mediocre coffee that ripens all at once, and therefore must be harvested within a narrow window of time. It then requires a high volume of short-term, unskilled – and thus low-paid, alienated, and often coerced – labour (Rus 2003). It yields no other benefit but coffee, and requires more capital to produce it (both in terms of agrochemicals and because trees treated this way have shorter life expectancies, and need to be replaced more often). Meanwhile, it causes significant ecological damage: biodiversity loss, soil erosion, and greenhouse gas

[141] The coordinator of Chabtic during my fieldwork, who is a specialist from an established honey-producing family in San Cristobal de las Casas, explained (in pers. comm.) that there are price premiums for honey from biodiverse regions such as Chiapas, because the bees' access to a wide range of flowers makes for a distinguished flavour.

emissions from fertilizer production and transport which contribute to climate change. This debasement reduces the long-term viability of production. Finally, this model will tend to increase inequality, because it lends itself to economies of scale even as it deteriorates food sovereignty and cultural reproduction, thereby weakening social cohesion (cf Thorp 1998).

Instead, the MB capitalizes on the economic incentive for a style of production that not only minimizes conflict between its market-engaging and base-protecting strategy, but conjugates them in mutually reinforcing ways. Indeed, the economic calculus regarding the "triple bottom line" of economic, social and ecological aspects is not so much about trade-offs as it is about circuits: depending on how the dots are connected, a system produces either vicious or virtuous circles. The MB's model is designed to produce the latter, as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Virtuous circles between economic, social, and ecological aspects.



To be sure, the possibility of setting up these virtuous circles rests to some degree on a lucky confluence of factors outside the MB's control, but collective agency is clearly a major part of the story; we have reason to be wary of Li's fatalism. For example, Li considers the inherent "characteristics" of crops as a key factor in determining the viability of a middle peasant model. However, we have seen that coffee, which became the region's main cash crop independently of the MB, can lend itself to either a plantation economy with vicious circles or to a smallholding, agroecological one with virtuous circles. Indeed, the same is true for cocoa (cf Burnyeat 2018). In the case at hand, the MB's deliberate collective action is what has made the difference.

The holistic model as seen from the ground

At the same time that it ensures economic growth by "taming" the market, the MB's business model channels that value into the community and the base, through its strategies for "domesticating" the market. A narrative from my fieldwork shows how many of these aspects intertwine, both with each other and with the rest of the MB's project for Tseltal sovereignty (as described in chapter 3), in the context of daily experience. I once accompanied jAlfredo, of Ts'umbajeletic, and xMari, who manages loans for Comon Sit C'ateltic, to buy coffee and collect debts in a remote community. After a long drive and then a long hike down *milpa*-carpeted hills, we arrive at the house of the *acopiador*, the Ts'umbal Xitalha' producer who coordinates the collection in that community as an unpaid service analogous to a *cargo*.

jTatic Xel is off working in his beehives when we arrive, but his family welcomes us. We sit in the shade of a mango tree, snacking on tangerines and *matz*. When jTatic Xel appears, he shows jAlfredo the thirteen 70-kg sacks of coffee that he has collected. We will be spending the night, so there is no rush; the process of testing the humidity,

weighing the sacks, and then sewing them shut is interspersed with conversation and a break for some slices of ripe papaya. jAlfredo shows one of jTatic Xel's sons how to sew the sacks, letting him finish the last three. Meanwhile, xMari fills out labels and teaches another of jTatic Xel's sons to complete the collection receipts. Then jTatic Xel's wife and daughter-in-law treat us to a large meal of eggs, beans, greens, tortillas, and coffee.

As dusk falls, two men from the village, one of whom is jTatic Xel's *compadre*,[142] arrive to discuss a problem with xMari and jAlfredo. Ts'umbal Xitalha' pays producers a partial advance through the local *acopiador* to guarantee that they will sell their coffee to the cooperative. After receiving this advance from jTatic Xel, both men had family health emergencies, and needed more money fast. They felt they had no choice but to sell their coffee to a *coyote*, despite their contract with the cooperative. Now they have no coffee with which to pay their debt to Ts'umbal Xitalha', and jTatic Xel is caught in the middle.

xMari comes up with a creative solution. In today's collection, jTatic Xel is selling the cooperative a relatively large amount of coffee, more than what he had promised.[143] From the money due to him, jAlfredo will discount the 3,300 pesos (US$195) that had been advanced to the two men who failed to provide the equivalent in coffee. Simultaneously, xMari grants the men a micro-loan from Comon Sit C'ateltic for the same amount. When the check comes out, the money will not actually go to the men (who have already spent it), but will be used to reimburse jTatic Xel, completing the payment due to him for his coffee. This way, the men's debt to jTatic Xel and the cooperative is "restructured" as a manageable loan that leaves them in good standing.

[142] A form of fictive kinship between a child's parents and godparents (cf Gudeman 1976).
[143] This fact is surely related to the new incentive that arose after he had made a commitment: the 22% "tax" has been removed (see below). Most likely, he would have otherwise hedged his bets by selling some coffee to the cooperative and some to a *coyote*, but now he sells it all (or at least a much greater proportion) to the cooperative.

They will be able to pay the debt in small instalments over four months, at a minimal interest rate. xMari patiently goes through the logic and the numbers with everyone involved. They all agree, and sign the appropriate paperwork.

After some pleasantries, the two men disappear back into the night. jTatic Xel, who helped found the village after gaining land rights in the 1990s, begins telling stories about hard work on his homestead and in his *cargo* as a *trensipal* of deacons (*jmuk'ubtesej o'tanil*, literally "encourager of hearts"). He, xMari and jAlfredo share impressions of the ritual fast in which they have recently participated along with the entire MB.

Finally, jAlfredo formally pays jTatic Xel for the coffee. He makes it a point to break a large bill in order to pay the precise amount, down to the last 33 pesos (US$2). jTatic Xel is pleased with this gesture of fairness, and contrasts the cooperative to the *coyotes*, who do not count the extra grams when a sack's weight is not a round number in kilograms. After receiving his coffee payment, jTatic Xel repays the 9,000 peso (US$530) Comon Sit C'ateltic loan he has used to invest in a horse.

Early the next morning, the horse helps carry the coffee back up through the hills to where the truck is parked. Before we take our leave, jTatic Xel asks if one of his sons could be jAlfredo's apprentice, to learn the coffee trade with him. A few weeks later, this son indeed begins his internship.

In this episode, the activity centres on gradually improving income and building wealth through collective effort, in ways that are embedded in (and reproduce) multiple forms of recognition. Community-based trust and solidarity simultaneously enable market exchange and make its structures flexible enough to fit people's needs. xMari is an empowered woman with a high-status job. Both she and jAlfredo help others learn the skills involved in their work. Commodities do not compete with food sovereignty or

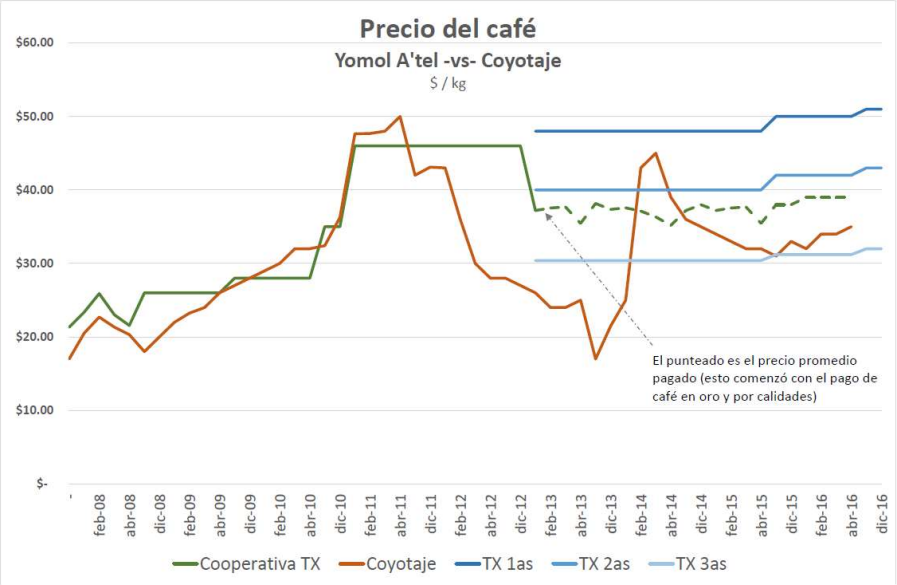
biodiversity. Tseltal self-determination is enacted through all of these dimensions. Still, vulnerability is also at the heart of the story: a health problem is enough to destabilize the economy of more than one family. At the same time that YA's model is clearly a sophisticated attempt to address multidimensional poverty, the empirical reality raises the question of the model's actual impact.

Does it work?

Some key indicators suggest that YA's innovative and ambitious model is economically viable. YA' has experienced 79% average annual growth since 2007 (Irezabal Vilaclara 2016). In 2015, it reported revenues of US$1,843,699 and profits of US$209,695, in the coffee sector alone (Ibid.). It is expanding with new coffee shops and new markets for its roasted coffee. New capital investments in production and processing include a large plant for honey and honey-based cosmetics that is currently under construction. New products, such as chocolate-covered coffee beans and various forms of insurance, are in the design stage.

In terms of social upgrading, there are also signs that the model is having a positive impact. Producers earn a stable price based on quality, which on average is 30% higher than the average market price, for their coffee (Irezabal Vilaclara 2016). Figure 2 shows this in more detail.

Figure 2: Price of coffee: Yomol A'tel vs conventional traders ("coyotaje").



Source: Yomol A'tel (in Agostini et al, unpublished manuscript).
Prices are in Mexican pesos.

The brown line is the price paid by local conventional traders; it is determined by the international commodities market. The solid green line represents Ts'umbal Xitalha's price, which became relatively high and stable once the Capeltic coffee shops began to function in 2010. The dotted green line is Ts'umbal Xitalha's average price actually paid, starting in 2013 when the cooperative began to incentivize quality with three price tiers (blue lines). In my April 2018 visit, I was told by the secretary of the cooperative that the trend has continued. In the 2017-2018 harvest which had just ended, Ts'umbal Xitalha' had paid producers an average of 43 Mexican pesos per kilogram, with a top price of 50 pesos for first-quality coffee.[144] Meanwhile, the local traders had started the season paying 32 pesos, and eventually lowered it to 28 pesos by the end of the season

[144] As a pilot project, YA' had also just produced its first "microlots" of a new product innovation, "honey coffee," (a generic name in the market which refers to a distinct flavour from the way the coffee is processed, not to actual honey); participating producers made 60 pesos per kg. YA' is planning to expand production for next year.

(jDomingo pers. comm.). As Ts'umbal Xitalha' has become increasingly attractive, it has grown: the number of producers has increased from 22 in 2000 to 350 in 2015 (the most recent year for which I have membership data).

Comon Sit C'ateltic lent a total of US$18,900 to its 280 members in 2016.[145] New skilled jobs have been created; the number of employees has increased from 2 to 67 in the same period. Two departments, Capeltic and Canan Taqu'in, are headed by women; there are two women on the Mesa Directiva; and other women work in high-value, non-traditional positions.

These promising signs certainly make YA's model worthy of attention, but they need to be qualified. Several research projects, notably through the Yomol Nohptesel research network (cf chapter 2), are underway to adequately measure the model's economic, social, and ecological results. For example, Stephen Pitts has applied 700 household surveys, half to Ts'umbal Xitalha' cooperative members (ie, a complete census of that statistical universe) and half to non-members, in order to determine the actual effect of cooperative membership on livelihoods; he is currently processing that data (pers. comm.). His and other forthcoming contributions will be important for properly evaluating YA's impact.

In any case, while a more detailed snapshot of the current reality would certainly be useful, the model itself is still in the process of being implemented, making even the most tangible results hard to interpret at this point. This is exacerbated by the distortion caused by the coffee rust epidemic; it will take time before the full significance of data from the affected seasons (2012-2017) can be understood. Furthermore, since the innovative model aims to have holistic impact through the relationship between several

[145] The average loan is for US$150 over 6 months (Alex pers. comm.).

dimensions, and across different sectors, even available tools for evaluation are not necessarily entirely adequate.[146]

My pretension here has been to give an account of the model itself, rather than to measure its results (cf chapter 2). This, however, does not mean that we can be satisfied with a naïve rendition of the vision and its potential; it is also incumbent on us to consider the model's challenges. Challenges are distinct from and prior to the question of success or failure; what I analyse in the following section are the tensions and difficulties that YA's leaders must creatively engage in their effort to implement the model and realize its potential.

Challenges

There is no shortage of challenges. A first set arise from limitations in YA's actual capabilities compared to its ambitious vision for economic upgrading with social and ecological transformation; these are compounded by shocks that make things even more difficult. Because of its straightforward limitations and the cost of its value-based decisions, YA's model cannot be implemented quickly; from within the duration that spans its inauguration and its full realization, another, more complex set of challenges emerge. Even to the degree that the model is successfully implemented, it carries a built-in tension that generates a permanent set of challenges. In what follows, I will describe the major challenges as well as YA's strategies for facing them.

[146] To be sure, there are many notable contemporary efforts to develop tools and parameters (cf eg Barrientos et al 2011, Owen et al 2017, Nicholls 2018, Jennings et al 2018) – as well as conceptual frameworks (eg Bolwig et al 2010) and methodologies (eg García-Cardona 2016) – for measuring various economic, social, and ecological impacts in ways that would be relevant to YA'. Precisely this plethora of contemporary efforts to define what is worth measuring, and how, indicates that these questions are still open. The fact that all of the above proposals would be relevant to a proper understanding of the impact of YA's *sui generis* model, but are as yet unrelated to each other, only demonstrates my claim.

"The audacity of doing the impossible"

Limited possibilities vs infinite ambition and radical values

The first set of challenges is a straightforward result of YA's attempt at carrying out such an ambitious project, despite its limitations and other difficulties. The YA' team is relatively young (eg the average age of Capeltic managers is twenty-five), and nobody on the team has ever done what they are trying to do. Thus, business decisions are subject to a learning curve. For example, in one meeting, the YA' leadership admitted that they did not yet know what number of coffee shops would lead to an economy of scale. In a separate conversation, the manager of Comon Sit C'ateltic was still trying to determine how much it could safely loan.

Besides gaps in knowledge, there are logistical obstacles. For example, whereas one *coyote* or another is always stopping through the communities, selling to the cooperative requires arranging a fixed time. In some cases, it also implies up to a two-hour journey by horseback to reach the collection point. A sudden rain, though, might make it impossible for the cooperative agent to reach that collection point, and since many communities have no cell phone service, it is impossible to let them know that the rendezvous is cancelled. Even when the collection goes well, payment is partially delayed: a base price is paid immediately, and the "remnant" is calculated later based on the coffee's quality.[147] The *coyote*, on the other hand, pays a fixed price on the spot; this is attractive, even when it is somewhat lower than the cooperative's final price.

A different sort of challenge arises from YA's alternative values in the context of a competitive GVC that, for the time being, is governed by a capitalist logic. For example,

[147] At the time of my fieldwork, YA' was still trying to install the capacity to evaluate quality at the collection points. In fairness, a trader with Sustainable Harvest in Seattle, who buys coffee throughout Mexico and Colombia, told me that very few cooperatives have achieved the speed of payment that YA' has.

when YA' makes management decisions that prioritize the well-being of the person over that of the company, as described above, there are of course consequences for the company. For example, the practice of asking misbehaving employees to "rest," rather than firing and replacing them, slows everything down – but clients still expect their shipment on time. Market efficiency is equally in tension with YA's alternative vision of rural development, which led it to build the roasting plant in Chilón, rather than a larger town with better infrastructure. When a gas leak occurred in the roasting machinery, it took the technician five hours to arrive from Ocosingo, and a day's work was lost. Even when things are running smoothly, asking cooperative members to spend more time participating in the growing business is always in tension with their dedication to the very things that the business is meant to support: making *milpa,* carrying out *cargo* duties, and celebrating *fiestas*. As a result, YA' routinely concedes to requests for time off related to these activities.

Finally, there are continual shocks that make things even more difficult. The aforementioned coffee rust crisis was a major shock. Climate change is also making rain and other important factors less and less predictable. A different type of shock came in April 2017, when Oscar was asked by his Jesuit superior to take on a new position as the rector of an indigenous university in the state of Oaxaca, and as the coordinator of the Comparte network (cf chapter 5). Having made a vow of obedience, Jesuits are available to be sent anywhere at any time; nevertheless, the request had tremendous repercussions for YA', given that YA's progress so far has hinged to such a large degree on Oscar's protagonism.[148] Other key people have also moved on for various reasons.

[148] This is immediately obvious to anyone familiar with YA', but it is also documented as an issue of concern – including by Oscar himself – in Messina and Pieck 2010. The superior agreed that Oscar could stay formally engaged as president of YA', but after a brief transition period, he was entirely gone from its day-to-day functioning.

A resourceful way of proceeding

Even when solutions to problems are not obvious or easy, YA' has a way of proceeding, a style, that allows it to build "resourcefulness" (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Whereas "resilience" describes the ability to withstand external shocks, resourcefulness implies the ability to thrive by creatively engaging the sources of those shocks. YA's way of proceeding is marked by confidence, capability-building, and alliance-building, as well as other elements that I describe further below.

YA' is driven by what Jesuits describe as "the audacity of [doing] the impossible."[149] Because he believes that YA' is doing God's will, Oscar trusts that any problem – no matter how daunting – will necessarily have a solution; he constantly repeats that "there is no such thing as a closed situation for the Kingdom [of God]."[150] Team members likewise express confidence that even if "everything seems to be hanging by a thread" (in Alberto's words, pers. comm.), they must not only carry on but even take further risks; things will providentially work out, as they have so far. If YA' has dared to "tame" a GVC governed by powerful Goliaths – and to do it in a place and in ways that are even more improbable, in order to "domesticate" it, too – it is because of this fundamental attitude.

When applied to the intractable tensions of making its model viable in practice, audacious confidence translates into a firm refusal to compromise on core values. In one high-level meeting, for example, what could have been a relatively straightforward business decision was purposely complicated by the idea, repeated throughout the

[149] This phrase emerged as characterizing the Jesuit mission in the context of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, held in 2016.

[150] The Kingdom of God is a theological category from the Bible. In Latin American liberation theology (which informs the MB as a whole), it is understood as the gradual historical realization – through divinely inspired human agency – of God's will for people to live in justice and fraternal love (Gutiérrez 1971). This framing gives transcendent meaning, and a boost of eschatological confidence, to YA's work and vision.

meeting by several people, that "the social dimension cannot be a second step, as an add-on after the business side is solved; we need to build our social values into the DNA of the business model." How exactly to do that was not obvious, so the meeting dragged into the night until they found a creative solution.

Trust is accompanied by a second fundamental attitude, expressed in another of Oscar's refrains: "our problems are our greatest teachers." Framing challenges (and mistakes) as opportunities for learning fosters new capabilities. For example, when jPaco and Omar from Ts'umbajeletic reported that harvest levels had drastically fallen, Oscar held a meeting with them. He asked them to analyse the change in light of longer trends, comparing data for each specific region, and then to ask themselves, "What does this tell us? Is it because of rain? Coffee rust? *Coyotes*? Discouragement?" He asked them to visit the communities that had contributed the most and the least amounts of coffee first, to see if they could come up with a well-founded interpretation of what exactly the challenge entailed, and what potential solutions would be. Another time, a machine broke down in one of the wet processing plants. José gathered women from the community and taught them how to fix it. Then, he organized visits by these women to other regions (each with their respective wet processing plants), so they could train their peers in machinery maintenance.

This approach is closely tied to another, which YA' calls "methodological ignorance." Whenever there is a challenge that requires information or capabilities beyond the organization's expertise, YA' sees an opportunity to seek out experts who would be able to help. Universities have made particularly good allies, as have networks of initiatives working towards similar goals (cf chapter 5). The continual process of learning and making new friends diminishes the impact of staff turnover, since lower-

level staff are trained in higher-level thinking and skills, and there is a constant stream of visitors with needed expertise who may stay on if a vacancy arises.

Challenges of the in-between

Before the model can pull, it needs a push

YA's mission is to give economic viability to the MB's project of Tseltal sovereignty. Most crucially, YA' is aimed at improving the livelihoods of people with *cargos*, in order to make it viable for them to stay in their communities and continue offering their unpaid community service work through the *cargo* system. In this way, YA' is designed to generate value in the market, and transfer it to the sphere of the community and its base.

YA's vision is to be straightforwardly "persuasive": it will transform the regional economy by showing that its model has obvious economic, social, and ecological advantages compared to the currently dominant model. Since the model has to do with people's main source of income in a context of poverty, it is crucial that the model be clearly attractive in terms of the rational economic interests of producers. But achieving precisely this key "pull" factor depends on the full implementation of the whole ambitious model, and especially of its breakthroughs in functional upgrading which allow for higher and more stable prices for parchment coffee.

The challenge for the first fifteen years or so has been how to achieve economic upgrading before the "pull" factor is firmly in place. This was not an easy task. Upgrading implied investments that had to be repaid; quality improvements required changing habits and working more; staffers needed their wages; novices took time to train. Again, these practical considerations intersect with YA's value-based commitment to a bottom-up

effort, so as to empower the cooperative and break with the model of dependency that it associates with the government and NGOs. Grants are seen as a necessary evil during the process of implementation: YA' is gradually phasing them out (to only 14% of the total budget in 2017, Alberto pers. comm.) and they are treated as if they were loans, to be repaid into Comon Sit C'ateltic's capital fund (Fuentes González 2016).

Getting any disruptive start-up to the point where its results – and not only its rhetoric – are self-evidently persuasive from the point of view of rational self-interest requires some people to take a leap of faith, often spanning years of sacrifice. In this case, the stakes of the leap were extremely high. Ts'umbal Xitalha' producers live in conditions of multidimensional poverty, and coffee is their principal source of income, but getting YA's economic upgrading strategy in place required them to make important economic and personal sacrifices. Even once the cooperative became able to provide a higher price than the market's, until recently, 22% of this income was discounted: 17% to cover operational costs, and 5% in obligatory savings, as a way to kick-start Comon Sit C'ateltic. For many producers (depending on the quality grade of their coffee), this worked out to the same or even slightly less income than what they would have made by selling their coffee to a *coyote*. And since *coyotes* do not care about quality, the extra work required to meet Ts'umbal Xitalha' standards – not to mention the many days invested in assembly meetings – represented yet another sacrifice.

These sacrifices would be irrational from the point of view of a disjoint identity's short-term self-interest. And since coffee has always been seen as a commodity (and its trade as exploitation), this is the identity through which producers were used to dealing with it (Oscar pers. comm.). The only way it would make sense to stay in Ts'umbal Xitalha' during the initial 15 years or so would be from the point of view of a long-term investment in the common good, but that would require dealing in the coffee trade

through a conjoint identity. Indeed, this identity would have to be especially invested in the good of the community, because whoever made the mid-term sacrifice would have to overlook the free-rider problem: once the model became profitable, many people would be attracted to it, and membership would be open to all; that was the whole point. Where to find, then, people with such a strong conjoint identity, that could *itself* be mobilized from the community into the market sphere?

Reverse cascading

YA' found them precisely in the *cargos*, a conjoint identity with a public dimension, which could be mobilized for public ends. Deacons and others with a high-ranking *cargo*, especially, are committed to serving the long-term common good above their own short-term self-interest. They are a select group that has demonstrated enough willingness and worthiness to take on this responsibility throughout their entire adult life. The fact that *cargos* are public roles in close-knit communities also means that they are held accountable – and rewarded in the form of status recognition – for their behaviour. Further, anybody who was already a deacon, for example, by the time YA' was founded had likely played a leadership role in struggles for land and indigenous rights over the previous two or three decades; more than one had spent time in prison. These were ideologically "woke" veterans with community organizing skills, who had dedicated their lives to taking risks for the sake of a dream. The MB's *cargo* system consolidates this identity, institutionalizes it, and endows it with sacred religious meaning.[151]

Thanks to the MB's separate-but-articulated spheres, it was possible to mobilize producers *against* their short-term rational economic interest, by appealing to their

[151] Moreover, at the centre of this meaning is the idea of following Jesus, as someone who freely gave his life so that others might have life in abundance. The *cargos* had spent years reflecting and preaching on what this implied for their own reality. For an explicit statement of the implications of the diaconate in this regard, cf Diócesis de San Cristóbal de las Casas 1999.

identity as *cargos*. This explains why YA' has recruited nearly all Ts'umbal Xitalha' members from within the *cargo* system, from the beginning.[152] It is of course designed to help them, but for roughly fifteen years, even if participation in Ts'umbal Xitalha' represented a wager for a better future, it also represented at least as many troubles as benefits in the present.[153] YA's practices that reinforce these identities and the religious meaning attached to them, as described above, can also be seen as strategies to keep its market-engaging activity within the frame of the community and its conjoint identities.

I call the mobilization of the logic of the community sphere into the sphere that is normally governed by market-logic "reverse cascading." By this inversion of Gudeman's concept, I mean a dynamic that is analogous to what he calls "cascading," but in the opposite direction. Whereas cascading normally occurs, for Gudeman, through the expanding practice of trade, reverse cascading is also possible through the expanding practice of solidarity.[154] However, if "cascading" represents the danger of collapsing the tension between economic spheres by subsuming both into a single logic (that of the market), "reverse cascading" in the case of YA' is meant to bring the market under control in order to restore a healthy tension.

In other words, "reverse cascading" is the "push" strategy that allowed YA' to implement its economic upgrading programme in the absence of the "pull" factor that successful upgrading would thereafter generate. The intuition that "taming" the market

[152] This point also helps to explain why YA' recruits only Tseltal Catholics for now. It is not about identity politics: the ultimate goal is to transform the entire regional economy and improve conditions for everybody. But the strategy is to accomplish that by establishing the viability of a social and solidarity economy through the MB's *cargo* system, which provides a protected niche for this alternative economic experiment in the midst of an adverse system (cf chapter 5).

[153] Even as the coffee sector has overcome this stage, the Chabtic cooperative is still undergoing the process with honey. In April 2018, I was told by a member of Ts'umbajeletic that, given its current sales and costs, Chabtic was not able to pay producers the same price as conventional traders did; its price was roughly 25% less. Still, more than 30 producers were opting to sell their honey to Chabtic, because they believe in its vision.

[154] Gudeman suggests something along these lines at the end of his most recent book (2016: 190): "Can we build sharing into the economy in the way that self-interest is nurtured through markets?"

required the mobilization of conjoint identities is corroborated by one of the cooperative's founders, who had participated in several failed cooperatives before Ts'umbal Xitalha'. I asked him in an interview why Ts'umbal Xitalha' had survived, while the others had failed. He responded: "Well, first of all, jTatic, I will show you the logo of Ts'umbal Xitalha'. The logo shows a tree, and under the tree, that's where people pray. The cooperative began like that." I then asked why people had stuck with it through the difficult times, to which he replied: "Well, it's partly because of what they are, all of them are *cargos*, so I think they more or less understand."

Figure 3. Logo of the Ts'umbal Xitalha' cooperative.

The limits of reverse cascading

My claim that YA' has been able, to a degree, to mobilize the conjoint identities of certain Tseltal actors this way should not be mistaken for a romanticized notion about indigenous "communality" in opposition to Western selfishness,[155] or about the Church-

[155] Such a dichotomy, which echoes substantivist positions in the economic anthropology debate of a previous generation (cf Carrier 2009), is used to argue that indigenous peoples are natural allies of social and solidarity economy models that have emerged in contexts of resistance to capitalism (cf eg Esteva n.d.), despite at least one Mexican anthropologist's decades-old effort to disabuse development actors of this illusion (De la Fuente 1944).While I am arguing that YA's model of SSE is enabled by strategic mobilizations of certain aspects of Tseltal culture, it would be a mistake to see Tseltal culture as automatically "translatable" into a cooperative model, or to see individual self-interested behaviour by rationally-choosing Tseltal persons as less "authentically" indigenous.

based *cargos* as a group of saints.[156] Following Gudeman, I assume that all people have both conjoint and disjoint identities; the question is how these two interact, with what boundaries and mechanisms of articulation, and under what conditions. If the market has been "tamed" and "domesticated" in YA's model, this should not be taken for granted.

Indeed, there are limits to reverse cascading. The same people who mix each other's tortillas into shared piles as a sign of communion when they are at the *fiesta* (Ali Modad Aguilar 1999) also refuse to mix their coffee in the drying machines when they are at the wet processing plant. Since YA' pays producers individually at a price that is determined by the quality of their coffee, no producer wants to risk mixing his coffee with another that might be of lower quality.[157] Despite Oscar's entreaties, and the fact that the machines would drastically reduce the work and time involved in drying their coffee, the producers all prefer to transport their sacks of coffee back home after using the de-pulping machines, to dry them in the sun (which takes several days and is subject to loss of quality due to weather conditions and ambient odours), and then transport the dry coffee back again for collection. The same Ts'umbal Xitalha' producers whose conjoint identities as *cargos* allowed them to create this cooperative still act out of their disjoint identity when it comes to actually selling their coffee. After all, it is their principal source of household income, and each household is economically autonomous.[158]

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[156] Indeed, two deacons have been caught stealing money from the cooperative. In Oscar's view, the strategy of working with *cargos* creates relatively favourable conditions, but it is not fool-proof (pers. comm.).

[157] While the de-pulping machines can be worked with any quantity of coffee, drying machines are too expensive to run unless they are full, and too big for any one producer to fill alone. Realizing this problem, YA' has progressively installed smaller and smaller drying machines in each region, but during my fieldwork, the drastically reduced production due to the coffee rust epidemic meant that no producer had enough coffee to fill even a small a dryer on his own. This interpretation of producers' refusal to use the dryers, which I observed directly (if implicitly), was shared with me by several informants.

[158] Another example is the producer who asked for the loan to buy the two cows, mentioned above. Besides his *cargo* in the MB, he is also a high-ranking judge in the Zapatista's parallel *cargo* system. When he asked for the loan, YA' first asked him why he had not asked the Zapatistas for the money instead. He admitted that he had, but that they had insisted that the cows would be owned communally, and he was not willing to be part of a collective debt. The story also illustrates the "political ecology" of the region, where different actors coexist in symbiotic relationships, and the corresponding "multi-cropping" strategies of Tseltal peasants (cf chapter 3).

The disjoint identity of producers also finds expression in their relationship with the rest of YA'. The producers point out that they are the only ones who do not earn a fixed salary, and they continually demand higher prices for their coffee and honey. This often came up regarding the 22% "tax" (perceived as such even though 5% went to personal savings), which was deducted at the time of quality bonus payments. As the years of sacrifice dragged on, some producers began to wonder out loud if they would die before seeing the benefits of economic upgrading. This became a sensitive issue. Oscar complained to me that although he tries to get them to understand the logic of the long-term vision, the producers respond with "price, price, price." One Ts'umbal Xitalha' leader expressed to me that pressuring for higher prices is an organized strategy. Besides frontal negotiation, producers' "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985) include selling coffee to *coyotes* rather than the cooperative; using Ts'umbajeletic staff as a channel for anonymous complaints from "the producers" to reach the ears of leadership; and possibly underreporting the amount of land used to grow coffee, as a way of evading pressure to sell it all to the cooperative.[159]

As for Tseltal youth working in the coffee and honey processing plants, they have also resisted the appeals by YA' leadership to act out of a conjoint identity. Some of them are interns, commissioned by their communities; YA' covers their costs but does not pay them a salary. In YA' leaders' minds, these youth are contributing to a collective project from which their families benefit, and they are learning skills that they can use to build up their home region's economy. It sees them as the future leaders who will replicate processing plants in the ten rural areas where the cooperative acts. However, many of the youth aspire to a full-time urban job, and they and their families complain, sometimes publicly (in Ts'umbal Xitalha' assemblies), when internships do not meet that

[159] The latter suspicion was shared with me by a member of Ts'umbajeletic staff.

expectation. Those who are paid employees have also resisted the invitation to turn Bats'il Maya into a fully-fledged cooperative, which would give them real ownership but would require greater investment and risk on their part. The fact that these young people were recruited independently of the *cargo* system, and that they perform wage work in an industrial, office, or retail setting far away from their home community, might be factors that make it harder to appeal to their conjoint identity (compared to producers, who are *cargos* and make their income from homestead-based work embedded in community).[160] In any case, as the cooperative expands (from six communities in one region in 2001 to sixty-six communities spread over ten regions in 2016), even the producer's ties to each other are increasingly weak, making the density of their conjoint identity harder to mobilize in that context.

Complementary strategies

YA' confronts the challenges of the "in-between" stage with two complementary approaches. First, it invests a great deal of energy in the conditions for the possibility of "reverse cascading." Nourishing the sources of conjoint identities is also of course the whole point of the "domesticated" business model, because it consists in reinforcing the community and its base. YA' participates as much as possible in the activities of the wider MB, and also incorporates some of those activities, such as prayers, fasts, and *fiestas,* into its own rhythm. Meeting agendas routinely set aside a few minutes for reflecting on the values of cooperation and solidarity.

YA's other approach is more complex, involving several interrelated strategies that aim to bring about the arrival of the desired end. These include knowing when to shift gears from "push" to "pull;" turning such shifts into opportunities for "reverse shock

[160] I am indebted to Garima Jaju (pers. comm.) for this insight.

doctrine" implementation of the model; and ensuring that these advances – which inevitably require a new "push" – are translated into tangible signs – a "pull," however incomplete – to buttress motivation and credibility for the longer-term vision. Like a sailor tacking back and forth to move against the wind, YA' deftly articulates these strategies with the big picture in mind.

The organization's practical wisdom (phronesis) is illustrated by a strategic decision made during a meeting in which I was present. The coffee rust epidemic, compounded by a drought that affected the maize harvest, was a major crisis whose effects were being felt throughout my fieldwork. To a degree, the drastic drop in coffee production was balanced out by a simultaneous crisis: there was a dramatic drop in demand when Bats'il Maya's largest client, a corporation with whom they had yearly contracts, sold off its chain of restaurants. However, not only was there still a supply deficit, but also a drop in incomes and a rise in food insecurity throughout the region.

YA' recognized an opportunity to take a next step in the implementation of its model. YA' leaders and the Mesa Directiva of Ts'umbal Xitalha' agreed to drop the 17% tax on producers; they dropped the 5% savings requirement for those with more than two years in the cooperative; and they decided to make YA's profits available to producers for investments in new sectors, as described above.

This set of policies had the immediate effect of shifting the "pull" factor – the model's attractiveness based on economic self-interest – into gear, thereby relaxing the pressure on the "push" factor of "reverse cascading," which was wearing thin under the circumstances. Without the tax, Ts'umbal Xitalha's price for coffee is much higher than the *coyotes*', making participation a no-brainer (as long as the producer is willing to put in the work to keep it organic and achieve a degree of quality). Simultaneously, the set of policies advanced other goals. It diversified production (through the investments), as a

boost to food sovereignty and inter-sectoral upgrading, all while conserving the capital and strengthening Comon Sit C'ateltic. It also served as an important exercise in shared governance and solidarity across the group of businesses, with a popular measure that reduced tensions. By this point, Bats'il Maya and Capeltic had sufficient funds to subsidize the operating costs of Ts'umbajeletic, normally covered by the Ts'umbal Xitalha' tax.

At the same time, the concessions to Ts'umbal Xitalha' came with a strategic caveat: Ts'umbal Xitalha' would have to contribute by adding new value. Since the drop in production forced Bats'il Maya to buy coffee from outside Ts'umbal Xitalha' to meet demand, the Mesa Directiva would be expected to help Bats'il Maya with this process. They would buy twenty-five tons of coffee at a time from other organic cooperatives, and then resell it at a higher price to Bats'il Maya.[161] Doing this required negotiating capabilities well beyond their experience, but José would train them.

Thus, the subsidy as such would only be temporary and conditional, and the end result would be a more capable and confident Ts'umbal Xitalha' (holding their own in the cutthroat coffee trade); new relationships (with the other cooperatives); and expanded business opportunities (processing and selling the latter's coffee) for YA' as a whole. It also put YA' in a position of regional influence, since they could now potentially bring prices up in the way that Brother Quintero had, much more locally, for many years.[162] In short, YA' turned a major problem into an opportunity to flex the muscles it had developed so far, using the exercise to show its strength (in order to persuade) and become

[161] The higher price would be justified by the work involved in negotiating the transaction and seeing it to completion. Originally, the plan also involved Ts'umbal Xitlha' doing the processing from parchment to green coffee, but in the end this was not feasible because it took too much time away from making *milpa*, which all accept as taking priority.

[162] See above in the section on the pre-history of YA'. The idea of recovering this strategy – which again escapes the teleology of full vertical integration – is coming as a request from several communities (Oscar pers. comm.).

even stronger in the process. Just as the MB has enacted "house therapy" in its overall economy, its business branch applies "reverse shock therapy" within the market, to achieve the implementation of its model with respect to that realm.

Meanwhile, the government and multinational corporations are also engaged in their own version of "disaster capitalism" (Klein 2008; cf chapter 5). Victory for the MB is far from assured. In this context, YA' focuses on "key battles in the middle of a long-term war" (Alberto pers. comm.).

At the moment, there are three such "battles" whereby YA' aims to gain strategic ground, tangible successes that can serve to boost credibility and motivation in the midst of the struggle, and that might just turn the tide in YA's favor. The three initiatives are spread out in different regions where Ts'umbal Xitalha' has members. YA' provides them with technical support and moral encouragement, as well as credit insofar as repayment is judged to be economically feasible (ie, there is no subsidy that might create an artificial sense of success, or dependency).

One is a large, long-term loan to the aforementioned producer who is diversifying his homestead by agroecologically integrating two cows to it. It is the pilot project for how profits will be invested. The second is a collectively managed nursery for coffee seedlings (in demand after the coffee rust epidemic). The nursery involves the entire community where jGerardo, a young man who works in Bats'il Maya's administration, is from; he is applying the skills he has learned at Bats'il Maya to help turn the nursery into a viable cooperative business. The third is the personal choice made by the coordinator of Ts'umbajeletic, jXel Japón, to leave his office job, go back to his land, and provide for his family as a producer.

This latter case is especially significant for YA'. After years of trying to convince the youth who work with him in Ts'umbajeletic that their future is in their rural home regions,

jXel Japón decided that it would be best to lead by example. He left behind a good job with a salary which had allowed him to buy a used car, as well as urban life and the opportunities that come with being a rising star in YA' (such as traveling to Japan, which is how he got his nickname). Economically, it is a risk (he has just planted new coffee trees, which will take two to three years to start producing). There was no pressure for him to leave his job (Alberto, pers. comm.). Yet, he wants to live the dream that YA' proposes to all the members of Ts'umbal Xitalha': a good middle peasant livelihood, close to his family and his community, growing *milpa* and coffee, as well as a few head of cattle and some perennial fruit trees, all agroecologically.

Alberto, the executive director, explains that jXel Japón's example, if successful, will have much more weight than even Oscar's word. "It is no longer said by us, but rather by the people who are making the journey." Alberto's interpretation is rooted in another refrain from the YA' lexicon, which is derived from a popular Mexican expression: "If I say the donkey is brown, it's because I have the donkey's hairs in my hand." It means that first-hand experience gives certainty. Hence the related popular expression, "One must have the donkey's hairs in hand," meaning that one's positions should be backed up by demonstrable evidence. In YA's jargon, the "methodology of the donkey's hairs" refers to the conviction that its model will only be persuasive when it shows concrete results that people experience or at least see as attainable because their peers experience it.

As I have shown, YA' is at an in-between stage where it has not yet been able to prove to all that its vision is truly better than what the dominant paradigm offers. In the meantime, remembering the "donkey's hairs" gives both a sense of motivational urgency and an intuition that the promise must be mediated by at least partial realizations throughout the process. This strategy gives traction to the larger, high-risk strategic

decisions – "shifting gears" and "reverse shock doctrine" – by keeping them grounded in the producers' lived experience.

Other challenges of the in-between stage

YA's model has grown enough that it is relatively independent and viable, but it has not yet reached maturity. As with any adolescence, this in-between stage is fraught with awkward ambiguities. They reflect not only the lag in economic persuasiveness, the implications of which I have discussed above, but also the social transitions involved in the model's implementation. These social transitions, which constitute a distinct set of challenges, occur along the axes of the intersecting forms of alterity and asymmetry that already structure the internal politics of YA', such as status, age, gender, and cultural differences (cf chapter 3).

For example, since YA' aims to be a cooperative of cooperatives, the Mesa Directiva of Ts'umbal Xitalha' are involved in decision-making not only as regards coffee, honey, and soap producers, whom they represent, but also regarding the social businesses which are still in transition to the cooperative model. This mode of governance is meant to open the way to a future in which cooperative members of all the branches of YA' will govern together. But in the meantime, there are none who can directly represent the membership of the roasting plant and coffee shops. On the one hand, the members of the Mesa Directiva are largely Tseltal elders with important *cargos*, who are well respected. Thus, the model buttresses Tseltal sovereignty by giving weight to a culturally appropriate system of authority. On the other hand, the elders do not necessarily have a good grasp on the intricacies of managing the social businesses. When they influence a decision that affects Bats'il Maya, their position is not always fully informed, nor are they the ones who will bear the direct consequences of the decision. This sometimes

results in tension, which can be exacerbated by other factors, such as the intercultural nature of YA'.

Given the Tseltal model of authority, which is both meritocratic and gerontocratic (since *cargos* are arranged in a hierarchy of gradually increasing responsibility), the introduction of new technologies, which are mastered by the younger generation working in Ts'umbajeletic and Bats'il Maya, adds to the tension.[163] By virtue of their age, the younger members do not have important *cargos*. Nor are they organized as a cooperative yet, meaning that they are not fully integrated to the governance structure that YA' is trying to build. And yet, the producers, who are most often their elders, depend on them for information, technical support, and the overall viability of the economic upgrading strategy. The awkwardness of this arrangement is reflected in the process by which the name Ts'umbajeletic was chosen to refer to the relatively young support staff of Ts'umbal Xitalha'. At first, there was no official name for them, and the producers began calling them "*jolal*" (head), a nickname that recognized their importance but also expressed a certain irony about who was the real authority in the cooperative. This created some anxiety in the team, who responded by beginning to refer to themselves as "*itzinaletic*" (literally "younger siblings," also meaning "apprentices"), a rhetorical reaffirmation of their humility and subservience. After a while, the Spanish phrase "*equipo técnico*"

[163] These younger members, whose ages range from about 18 to about 30, are uniformly referred to as "children of producers," reflecting the original idea of working through family units to overcome alienation by adding value to their product. However, the category is not so clearly defined; many of these "children of producers" are themselves producers with children (and refer to themselves as such in private conversation, even if they adopt the official term in public). In Tseltal culture, people are considered adults once they are married, which usually occurs relatively early, but at the same time, family units are multigenerational (and patrilocal), and there is no set rule for when land inheritance is distributed. Thus, many of the relatively young staff of Ts'umbajeletic and Bats'il Maya live in their father's homestead, but are also married, with their own children, and either growing coffee on their father's land or on a piece of that land that has already been allocated to them. Others are unmarried, and tend to help with their father's production. At the same time, the modern category of "youth" has recently made inroads in Tseltal culture (Zepeda 2016), further adding to the ambiguity. There is also a gendered aspect to this whole dynamic. I noticed that for several young men, earning an income at Bats'il Maya was seen as an accelerator of marriage, while for some young women, it allowed them to delay marriage and even consider other options.

(technical team) began to take root as a neutral alternative, but by then it was clear that the team needed a proper name. At a subsequent team meeting, there was a democratic process in which anybody could suggest a name, and the proposal with the most votes (*Ts'umbajeletic*, meaning "planters of seeds") won.

Another group whose identity is in flux are the young *kaxlán* professionals who have come to Chilón from other parts of Mexico to be part of the project. Many of them first came during or just after university studies to complete an internship or social service requirement, but by now have been involved in YA' for a number of years, with increasing responsibility and also a growing sense of their own adulthood as invested, personally and professionally, in YA's vision. This group plays a crucial role in the in-between stage of YA's development, whereby Tseltal people from producer families are still acquiring all of the needed capabilities to run everything on their own. However, because of the centrality of that ultimate goal in the vision and discourse of YA', there is literally no institutional language for referring to the group that largely runs things in the meantime. People often joke about not knowing what to call them; one nickname, "*los yomoles*" (a play on Yomol A'tel), nevertheless reveals how their own sense of local community is embedded in and inseparable from YA' itself. Indeed, many of them live together in a rented house close to the processing plant, where they share space with short-term YA' volunteers.

For this group, the awkwardness consists not only in their relative marginality in YA's imaginary despite their *de facto* importance, but also in that primary relationships and work relationships are easily conflated. When a housemate and friend is also one's boss (or one's direct report), the distinction between spheres is ambiguous, making it hard to balance conjoint and disjoint attitudes. This is aggravated by the fact that YA' is still maturing in terms of its governance model; job descriptions and decision-making chains

are relatively fluid. As they settle in for at least the foreseeable future, the *yomoles* have begun to demand greater recognition and formality. This has found some echo in YA's new strategic plan, the first institutional document which makes them clearly visible.

With regard to these challenges, tensions are aired so they can be dealt with. I often witnessed public complaints made in regular meetings and assemblies. A more thorough way of working through the root issues underlying conflicts is that YA' has twice carried out a participatory systematization of its collective experience (Enrique Pieck interview; cf Messina and Pieck 2010; Pieck and Vicente Díaz forthcoming). The process takes years to complete, and is aided by experts in the methodology from the Ibero university in Mexico City. While some issues have no obvious solution, there is generally good will on all sides, and speaking openly about conflicting perspectives and feelings helps the group mature together.

Threats of violence

Conflict with external groups is more dangerous, especially during the in-between time in which YA' is successful enough to become visible, but not yet successful enough to replace the dominant system with its own model. I discuss this phenomenon, and YA's strategies with regard to it, in chapter 5. For now, suffice it to say that it ultimately comes down to a personal choice. A basic normative principle in the theology espoused by the MB is that a sacrifice is only life-giving if it is freely made. In this sense, as with reverse cascading, a strong base is key, especially insofar as its constituent values are internalized by individual members of the community. The Tseltal expression for this is for something to "enter one's heart."

Permanent tension

Even in the best case scenario, where YA' is successful in transforming the coffee value chain and other market-related aspects, there is an inescapable tension that is built in to the MB's overall economic model. This constitutes a distinct set of challenges, which are easy to understand with reference to Gudeman's framework. The realm of mutuality and the realm of the market are inseparable but contrary to each other, and the market tends to cascade into the community and its base.

Likewise, the intercultural nature of YA' represents an analogous tension. The challenges this entails, and YA's strategies in facing them, are similar to those for Gudeman's tension.

Risk of normal cascading

Besides the limits of what I have called "reverse cascading," another challenge is that attempting it requires bringing the community and its base into close proximity with the market, thereby exposing the former to the risk of regular cascading, as defined by Gudeman (cf chapter 1) and initially discussed regarding the MB in chapter 3. The colonizing tendency of the market is present in three main dimensions: rational cost/benefit logic; "capitalist time"; and the commoditization of the base.

Gudeman (2008) argues that the rational cost/benefit logic of the market seeps into the realm of mutuality by the repeated exercise of trade. In the case of YA', the effort to expand its market share creates new pressure to learn and adopt this way of thinking.[164] For instance, an intern from a European business school spent some months in Chabtic,

[164] Gerber (2014: 736-738) argues that credit also introduces this way of thinking in rural areas, with negative effects of the base of social relations and ecology. In the case of Chiapas, informal lenders had already introduced the pressures of market efficiency long before Comon Sit C'ateltic was founded; if anything, the latter is an attempt to soften and re-embed the cold rationality of finance, as shown in the anecdote in the above section on recognition.

YA's honey business, to help the team build capabilities for efficiency upgrading. In several meetings, he tried to convey an analytical approach that met with a puzzled reaction from team members, partly because his arguments involved some unfamiliar mathematical skills, but also because his very way of thinking was foreign to them. In one meeting about the carpentry workshop, the intern asked how long it takes to make one beehive box, and then led an exercise to estimate, based on that datum, how many boxes could be made in a year. The team members made it clear that they thought this exercise was useless: the workshop is meant to generate capabilities (and income) for cooperative members from the rural communities. But sometimes it rains and roads from those communities become impassable, meaning the workshop remains closed. Since it is impossible to know how often this will happen, and hiring workers based in Chilón would defeat the purpose, there is no point trying to extrapolate from normal conditions. Nevertheless, YA' leadership insisted that the team needed to learn the mentality and skills involved in this way of planning, if the business were to ever be viable; indeed, this is why they had brought the intern to teach them.[165]

The example above points to the dimension of time as a plane that intersects with imaginaries about production. By virtue of its participation in a GVC, YA' unavoidably introduces "capitalist time" (Bear 2017) into the MB's "timescape." Through the rationalities involved in trade, the market imposes a flat, linear, and fast pace that is in tension with the textured rhythms related to the community's social reproduction. Since the latter calendars are intimately tied to food production, they tend to be circular and resist acceleration. The clash is obvious whenever members of the Bats'il Maya team

[165] Similarly, the steadily growing demand for coffee has led YA' to experiment with software that would rationalize its supply side.

skip out early from MB events, much to the annoyance of everyone else, because they have to meet a deadline for a shipment of coffee.

A third risk of cascading is that elements of the base might be commodified, and thus brought directly under the calculative and temporal regimes of the market. Whereas the latter's influence via functional and process upgrading in the coffee and honey value chains do create an indirect risk of contagion, YA's strategies related to intersectoral economic upgrading include the *milpa* itself (through the new catering service), as well as nonmaterial dimensions that are also constitutive of the Tseltal base (ie, the designs in Luchiyej's embroidery).[166] This represents a much more immediate cascading of market culture into the sphere that the MB has otherwise taken pains to protect from the former's influence.

Given these risks, YA' makes efforts to resist regular cascading. The catering business does sell food, but only to save money and keep it circulating within the cooperative; likewise, investments in new productive initiatives related to food are aimed at the local market only, rather than an export-oriented approach. In this way, economic exchange related to the base is kept embedded in social relationships (and at the service of food sovereignty).[167] The young people who have come to Chilón to work in Ts'umbajeletic or Bats'il Maya are given Fridays off, as a way of encouraging them to spend long weekends in their home communities, tending to their *milpa* and remaining engaged in the social fabric, rather than becoming entirely urban and depending exclusively on their salary for a livelihood.[168]

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[166] In Tseltal culture, embroidery is traditionally part of the reproductive economy; women embroider their own clothes with designs that convey Mayan cosmology (Martínez Loera 2011). The implications of any market pressure to change the aesthetic would be much more severe than when this occurred in the case of coffee. Thanks to Laura Rival for this insight, in relation to her observation that Huaorani women resent being asked by clients to change their traditional weaving patterns (pers. comm.).

[167] This would be different in terms of selling Luchiyej's embroidery to outside markets; it remains to be seen how that will play out.

[168] Towards the end of my fieldwork, discussions were underway to adapt this experiment to a system in which two teams would alternate in Chilón every two weeks, in order to give people much more time at

As for the tendency of "capitalist time" to invade the base, YA' resists temporal cascading by adopting the Tseltal concept, *'kun 'kun* ("slowly, slowly"), as a mantra. Whenever the business rhythm and the community rhythm are in tension, *'kun 'kun* is a reminder to err on the side of protecting the weaker pole, in order to keep the tension from collapsing. For example, Oscar and I were once participating in a week-long *fiesta* in the town of Sitalá, when the interim executive director, Che, needed to meet with him urgently for a business matter. Rather than Oscar leave the *fiesta*, Che drove out to Sitalá to meet with Oscar in the middle of the *fiesta*, talking over their business matter in between the moments of ritual dancing and eating. This was possible precisely because of the *fiesta*'s slow pace, even if it meant that Che had to dance for a bit, greet all those present, and share in the meal before driving back to the office. In the end, this solution added value, because it connected Che more deeply to the people he was working for, and showed respect for them. Oscar frequently applies the principle of *'kun 'kun* to YA's overarching strategy of starting small and growing slowly: it is true that the vision is to transform the region's entire economy, but imprudently rushing things will not make that happen any sooner.

Intercultural asymmetry

In integrating the value chain across its rural and urban components, YA' has created an intercultural organization. Whereas the *kaxlanes* who work with YA' in Chilón are expected to gradually make way for their increasingly capable Tseltal counterparts, YA' has set roots in various cities, without the expectation that Tseltal peasants will migrate there to run the business. Instead, the Capeltic coffee shops are run by people

home. This would also double the amount of people being trained, limit the tendency to place their hopes in a full-time job in Chilón, and encourage them instead to think about how what they learn in Chilón could be replicated in their respective home regions.

from the urban contexts in which they are located, and they are in the process of becoming members of the cooperative group.

This makes interculturality a permanent feature of YA', with an attendant permanent tension. To be clear, the tension is not necessarily framed in terms of a communal rural indigenous culture and an individualist urban *kaxlán* one. Rather, YA' sees both conjoint and disjoint identities in both cultures; it is investing in the conjoint base of the "urban subject," for example, through a new partnership with Centro Meneses, which will foster the recruitment of Capeltic employees in Santa Fe from within an allied social organization.

That said, the respective shapes of the mutuality-market dialectic in the two cultures are indeed distinct, and there is indeed an asymmetry of power between them in the Mexican context, where the urban *kaxlán* culture is dominant. In this regard, the MB approaches the tension analogously to how it deals with the clash of rhythms. It inverts the asymmetry by giving preference to Tseltal ways and by emphasizing the role of rural producers as the foundation of the entire project.[169]

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have presented YA's innovative model for "taming" and "domesticating" the coffee GVC, in order to make the MB's project of Tseltal sovereignty economically viable. Adequately accounting for the model has required us to develop some concepts, such as "reverse cascading," which constitute this chapter's theoretical contribution to the economic anthropology literature. The case study itself also brings new possibilities (and recovers forgotten ones, such as those related to intersectoral upgrading) to the field of development strategies that engage with GVCs, as I have argued

[169] This approach fits well with Mella's (2015) criteria for ethical intercultural dialogue.

throughout the chapter. More than any quantitative measure of success, for now the most relevant aspect of YA's model is certainly its transformative potential, insofar as it shows what a life-giving engagement with the market can look like.

I have discussed some of the key challenges facing YA'. Some are due to straightforward limitations, while others arise from within the model itself. Despite the many challenges, the cooperative has steadily grown, and even people with legitimate complaints seem to find reason enough to stay. Partly, this may be due to the lack of other attractive options;[170] partly, it is a testament to the credibility of its leaders.[171] Ultimately, though, Tseltal informants generally insisted that the model's persuasiveness is a matter of whether or not it "enters the heart," that is, whether a person comes to fully understand and adopt the vision at a deeply subjective level, and not only as a matter of rational advantage.[172]

At the very least, it can be said that YA' is attempting to "organize hope" by prefiguring an alternative possibility (Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012). But admitting this forces us to investigate that hope further. In the following chapter, I turn directly to the question of YA's potential for effecting wider systemic transformation.

[170] While my research did not involve any rigorous comparative evaluation of the various options available to Tseltal peasants, there are signs that other alternatives are less than persuasive. Oscar recounts that many people who join Ts'umbal Xitalha' end up leaving after two years (when the initial enthusiasm gives way to the challenges), but then slowly come back later on (after seeing that the challenges elsewhere are even greater, or less hopeful). In any case, it is clear that jobs are scarce, and many other cooperatives have either failed or are propped up artificially by subsidies, making them stagnant. This is not only the view from within YA', but corroborated by secondary literature (eg Sánchez Juárez 2015) as well as independent informants, such as a trader I met from the Seattle-based Sustainable Harvest. Cf also my discussion of the "political ecology" (in the metaphorical sense) of the region in chapter 3.

[171] Many informants interpret the fidelity of members despite difficulties in terms of trusting Oscar and the MB. For an analogous case, cf Burnyeat (2018) on the bond between the peace community of San José de Apartadó and the Jesuit, Javier Giraldo.

[172] Analogously, *kaxlán* informants of the "*yomoles*" group, most of whom are professionals trained in elite universities, insisted that they could make more money and have better career prospects elsewhere, but they found YA's vision compelling and meaningful, despite its imperfections.

jPedro Guzmán, a Tseltal deacon from the Misión de Bachajón and then-president of the Ts'umbal Xitalha' cooperative, speaks in front of a Mayan altar. The candles have all been lit but are not yet melted: a prayer has just ended. The occasion is the inauguration of a Capeltic coffee shop at the Ibero university in Mexico City, in March 2010. Among the allies who are present is the then-rector of the university, José Morales Orozco. José is a Jesuit priest, and like jPedro, he wears a Tseltal stole. The stoles are a visible sign of their shared mission and connected identities, which go beyond – but are mediated through – a commercial relationship. The mission, identities and relationship are personal but also institutional; they continue to this day, with different people in charge.

Photo credit: Yomol A'tel

Chapter 5
Activating the Pluriverse

INTRODUCTION

I have shown that the Misón de Bachajón (MB) is implementing an ambitious middle peasant model, which to be viable requires a "rebooting" of ecological, economic, and social factors. In chapter 3, I showed how the MB uses agroecology to improve its soil and enhance biodiversity. In chapter 4, I focused on its economic upgrading strategies. Throughout, I have shown how the MB's vision also involves a strengthened community, and I have drawn connections between all three factors, arguing that the MB's model generates virtuous circles between them.

In this chapter, I will extend the discussion about the social factors that are necessary to make the MB's model viable. Because the MB's business strategy is embedded in a GVC, and not an autarkic market, its business is exposed to global competition. Thus, understanding the way it is internally organized, as we have done so far, is necessary but not sufficient. To fully account for the MB's survival thus far, and the challenges it faces towards the future, we must also consider how it has managed to implement an innovative model with transformative potential in the midst of a wider system that is generally unhelpful, and often adverse. I will focus mainly (but not exclusively) on the business branch of the MB, Yomol A'tel (YA'), since it is where the external context is most threatening to the viability of its middle peasant model for Tseltal autonomy.

An adverse context

Any nascent industry is relatively inefficient compared to more established ones. This is especially true in the case of YA's initiatives, because the organization has opted to work far away from the industrial clusters where enabling infrastructure and services are readily available. To survive, new industries need protection from more efficient competition; historically, this has typically been provided through state interventions, such as tariffs on imported goods (Chang 2002; Reinert 2007).

However, the days when the Mexican state actively fostered national industries like those of YA' are long gone. In the coffee sector today, the type of industry enabled by the Mexican state is that of foreign direct investment by multinational corporations (MNCs). Specifically, the government has been promoting the manufacture of instant coffee, in coordination with Nestlé (Alberto pers. comm.).[173] The instant coffee industry requires capital on a scale that is only available to MNCs or governments, and provides very few technical spillovers (Talbot 2002). Further, its raw material is coffee of mediocre quality that is grown without shade (and with heavy dependence on artificial inputs). Its low value means that it is only feasible at high volume; economies of scale are achieved through monoculture, land grabs, and cheap, low-skilled labour.[174]

Although this rent-seeking model provides little benefit to the population of Chiapas and is sure to lead to debasement, the state is actively serving the interests of coffee-sector MNCs. In a perfect illustration of Naomi Klein's (2008) concept of "disaster capitalism," the Mexican state has responded to the recent coffee rust crisis (cf

[173] Nestlé operates an instant coffee processing plant in Toluca, near Mexico City. It imports most of its coffee from Vietnam, but wants to save money on transport costs by producing it within Mexico. This is a good illustration of globalized capitalism's disregard for territories, which it views in commensurate terms of profitability.

[174] In other words, this model (coffee monoculture and large gaps in productivity between hi-tech engineers and low-wage plantation workers) contributes to a specialized and heterogeneous economy, thereby stimying the linkages and synergies that could dynamize the wider economy. Contrast this with the YA' model, which contributes – albeit humbly, for now – to a diverse and homogenous economy.

chapter 4) by giving away millions of seedlings of *robusta* (low-quality, shadeless) coffee throughout northern Chiapas.[175] In so doing, it is setting the stage for a shift towards instant coffee production, and away from the agroecological, smallholding, high-value model espoused by the MB (Oscar pers. comm.).

The asymmetrical competition facing YA' is not limited to the availability of funds or the economic development policies of the government. Even the basic juridical framework is designed with capitalist models in mind. Mexican law does not recognize the possibility of a business model like the MB's Mondragon-inspired cooperative of cooperatives, in which money can be transferred between its constituent businesses (Alberto pers. comm.). In fact, some laws are actually designed to impede such a model, probably as a measure against money laundering (Oscar pers. comm.). As YA' becomes large enough that it is increasingly on the state's "radar" for tax purposes, its functioning is hampered by the way the system is designed.

The MB cannot afford to stay small and isolated to avoid these problems. As we have seen, the viability of its middle peasant model, at the root of its project for Tseltal sovereignty, hinges on its success in the market. Furthermore, the MB's pretension is not only to survive in an adverse system, but to contribute to the common good by transforming that system, in Mexico and beyond. How, then, can this be achieved in the midst of competition from MNCs combined with the state's unhelpful policies and legal frameworks?

[175] This model already dominates the southern Soconusco region's coffee plantations. The state is enabling its cascading into the north, where smallholding shade-grown coffee has predominated.

PART I: COLLABORATIVE VISION

The simple answer to our question is that the MB does not try to go it alone. Just as other organizations and movements seeking systemic transformation are doing elsewhere (Haxeltine et al 2017; Escobar 2008, 2018), the MB joins its forces with networks of like-minded actors at multiple scales, from the local to the transnational. Still, understanding the potential and challenges of the MB and its allies in their struggle to have a say in the wider political conversation about how we will shape our economy requires a more nuanced answer.

The MB collaborates with literally hundreds of other organized actors. In many cases, the partnership is relatively straightforward, such as when a foundation gives the MB a grant to carry out some project. Here, I will focus on the more sustained, multidimensional alliances where YA' has incorporated something from the experience of working together with others into its evolving strategy and vision. The main examples are its collaborations with universities, with a group of Japanese organizations, and with the Comparte network. Precisely because these experiences are at the core of YA's story, I have already touched on them throughout this thesis; now I will analyze them more systematically.

"To add and not subtract"

From the beginning, the coffee cooperative has participated in networks with its many regional peers, most of whom deal in parchment coffee. As it embarked on its ambitious economic upgrading strategy, though, YA' began to find itself in uncharted territory. As early as 2002, it realized that it needed help from outside experts.

Collaboration with universities

At first, it found this new type of ally in several public Mexican universities (Rodríguez Rivera forthcoming). I have mentioned, for example, the consultors from the National Polytechnic Institute who advised YA' that quality upgrading could make its coffee competitive (cf chapter 4). Other early allies included the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), the Instituto de Ecología, and El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR). Most of these relationships proved to be relatively one-directional (assistance from the university to YA'), one-dimensional (one type of assistance, usually a consultancy), and finite (not lasting beyond the extent of a specific consultancy or project).[176]

Meanwhile, there are also six Jesuit universities in Mexico, and close to 200 Jesuit institutes of higher learning around the world, thirty-one of them in Latin America. As works with a shared mission and identity – that is, as part of the Jesuit "base" – this network represented an obvious opportunity, not only for accessing expertise but also for other forms of long-term collaboration. Nevertheless, it took YA' several years to take this step. The delay was largely due to an ideological divide that had existed for decades among Mexican Jesuits. As in many other parts of the world, those who worked with rural indigenous communities often accused those who worked with the wealthy in universities of having neglected to make the "preferential option for the poor" after the Second Vatican Council (cf chapter 3).

Eventually, Oscar and some of his university-based Jesuit counterparts were able to overcome this old mistrust (Arturo pers. comm.). They recognized that by working together, the MB and Jesuit universities would be bridging diverse socioeconomic,

[176] The exception is ECOSUR, which is based in Chiapas, and has a long-standing, rich and multi-layered relationship with the MB.

cultural, and geographic worlds, each with their respective "bases," which overlap only through their shared Jesuit connection. This prospect resonated with a shift in the way we Jesuits have come to understand our mission. Whereas the 1970s and 1980s were marked by the prefix "*in*" (as in "insertion" communities that lived among the poorest of the poor, and "inculturation" of the Gospel in non-Western cultures), recent decades have seen the emergence of the prefix "*inter,*" especially in terms of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue; the work of promoting social justice is now commonly framed as reconciling the divisions between social groups (González Buelta 2014). In that light, Oscar began to use the slogan, "to add and not subtract" (*sumar y no restar*), in reference to the potential of Mexican Jesuits working together despite their differences.

By 2007, inter-sectoral collaboration with Jesuit universities had become a cornerstone of YA's strategy and a key to its success.[177] In chapter 4, I have discussed the multidimensional role of three Mexican Jesuit universities with respect to the Capeltic coffee shops. Another Jesuit university, the Instituto Superior Intercultural Ayuuk (where Oscar is now the rector), has also provided some of the university courses that are essential to YA's capability-building process. The business schools mentioned as allies in the section on efficiency upgrading include two Jesuit universities in Spain, ESADE (Barcelona) and Deusto (Bilbao). Another two – Comillas (Madrid) and INEA (Valladolid) – sell Capeltic coffee. Even the process of "reverse cascading," also described in chapter 4, was aided by a sociologist at ITESO (the Jesuit university in Guadalajara) who helped YA' leaders interpret the behaviour of Ts'umbal Xitalha' producers according to Bourdieu's theory of social fields.

[177] The same is true for the wider MB (cf eg chapter 3 on the theological training of deacons); I am focusing here on YA' for the reasons explained above. To be sure, YA' continues to collaborate with several non-Jesuit universities as well.

In a PowerPoint presentation from 2015,[178] Alberto argues that this multifaceted link with universities helped to "professionalize the organized grassroots response" of YA' to the challenges of building an economic alternative for the territory. Moreover, he identifies the strategy of systematically working with universities – starting in 2007 – as a crucial factor that allowed YA' to increase its budget 37-fold and simultaneously reduce its dependence on subsidies from 70% to 14%, while generating profits that could be reinvested, all in only seven years. To be sure, this period of remarkable growth is primarily a story about functional and product upgrading, as we have seen in chapter 4, but Alberto's point is that the two stories are inseparable.

Modelling collaboration

Throughout this process, YA' developed certain insights about the types of collaboration that would yield the best results. One of these has to do with combining the trust of primary relationships with the stability of institutions. During fieldwork, I observed several times how YA' leaders would go about establishing new alliances. Once they have identified a potential ally, they begin to mobilize their networks to see if they can find a mutual friend, or a friend-of-a-friend, who can provide a personal introduction. "Cold calling" is avoided as much as possible. In one case, I witnessed a wait of almost three years until a personal connection could be found, even though the "target" contact was himself a Jesuit who could be expected, in principle, to welcome an inquiry from YA'. When I asked about this, Oscar explained that in his experience, the personal touch makes a major difference in gaining access, trust, and goodwill.

[178] "Construyendo alternativas al desarrollo en la Selva Norte de Chiapas" (PowerPoint, Alberto Irezabal, May 2015).

At the same time, once a personal contact has established the connection between YA' and a university, the next step is to institutionalize the relationship. For example, if a student approaches YA' to propose an internship or a thesis, then YA' leaders will find out who the student's supervising professor is, and then they will try to establish a deeper relationship with that professor's academic department. The initial relationship with the student provides the opportunity, and its translation into an institutional relationship opens the possibility of a collaboration that will outlast the individual student's period of study, and that might include wider strategic possibilities. At the very least, a direct connection with the professor can result in a steady stream of future student interns.

A second key insight, related to the first, is the distinction between operational and strategic collaboration, described in an article that has been the source of reflection for YA' and the wider Comparte network (Alvarez 2012: 18). In Gudeman's terms, operational collaboration is about two distinct communities reciprocally solving problems for each other. Strategic collaboration involves the joining of two organizations into a single community, insofar as they embark together on a shared mission. In the latter case, the respective "bases" are available for mutual sharing, and the open-ended alliance is longer-lived.

This distinction is one reason why collaborating with Jesuit universities in particular is so full of potential. As part of the wider Jesuit "base," there is a pre-existing overlap between the MB and these universities. Something analogous can be said about Mexican universities, as opposed to foreign ones: there is, if not a strong sense of national solidarity, at least some shared horizon of intelligibility, besides other advantages of proximity. In these cases, and especially the case of Mexican Jesuit universities, there is an obvious latent commons that can be activated for strategic alliances.

Unlocking the potential of inter-sectoral collaboration

All of the above factors came together in one long-lasting relationship, when a Jesuit with a clear "option for the poor" crossed over to the university sector. David Fernández Dávalos had founded and directed a centre to accompany children who live on the street, and later directed a high-profile human rights organization.[179] His work was recognized by Human Rights Watch in 1996. Then, in 1998, he was missioned by his Jesuit superiors to become rector of ITESO, the university in Guadalajara. He brought with him an explicit vision, which he maintains to this day: the fundamental purpose of a Jesuit university is the liberation of the poor and the excluded, and to speak of "reconciliation" (as in the language of the "*inter*-," discussed above) is only meaningful when it involves a real commitment to justice (Rendón 2018).

In 2008, Fernández Dávalos became rector of the Ibero in Puebla. His presence there at that time encouraged YA' to consolidate its strategy of collaborating with Jesuit universities (Oscar pers. comm.). Concomitantly, it ensured that the collaboration would be mutual and multi-layered, with a vision well beyond the opening of a coffee shop on campus.

Fernández Dávalos was instrumental in setting up a master's degree in the administration of social enterprises at the Ibero Puebla, offered in collaboration with Mondragon University (Rodríguez Rivera forthcoming). The first of its kind in Mexico, this program quickly became a hub where members of cooperatives and social businesses from around the country meet each other. Several members of YA' have completed the master's, and others are currently enrolled. The rector further committed the institution to SSE by creating a "laboratory" – part think tank, part incubator – for social enterprise.

[179] He was director of the Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juarez (Centro Pro), in Mexico City, from 1994 to 1998. This is the same centre that is now supporting the MB in its legal struggle for state recognition of the indigenous right to community self-government (as described below).

One social business embedded in this laboratory has been instrumental in YA's product innovation and quality upgrading processes.

Because Fernández Dávalos' measures in this direction were institutional, they have outlasted his own presence there, and new initiatives have emerged from the dynamics he set in motion. For example, the master's program has been complemented by a more accessible program in collaboration with Mondragon's continuing education branch, Lanki. Not only have many members of YA' participated in this program, others have helped to design its curriculum. Further, in 2015 the Ibero Puebla hosted an International Colloquium on Social and Solidarity Economy, in which various members of YA' participated.[180]

In 2014, Fernández Dávalos became rector of the Ibero universities in Santa Fe (Mexico City) and Tijuana. YA' is closely linked to the Mexico City campus, where Fernández Dávalos has once again amplified the institution's strategic alliance with YA'. He established an international research centre on SSE, and made Alberto one of its fellows. The rector's backing made it possible for Alberto to ensure that, at a high-profile economics conference at the Ibero Santa Fe in April 2018, the opening keynote and a series of panels were dedicated to SSE, agroecology and food sovereignty.[181] Fernández Dávalos also personally encouraged the linkage between YA' and the Centro Meneses, the Ibero's NGO, to train baristas from a marginalized community with a strong conjoint identity (cf chapter 4; González 2018).

Indeed, these institutional collaborations are strategic, as opposed to merely operational. YA' is a household name at the Jesuit universities in Mexico, not only because of its visibility through the Capeltic coffee shops, but also because of the many

[180] I was a panelist at this Colloquium (cf Coloquio Internacional Economía Social y Solidaria 2016).
[181] The conference, *Sobre México: 5º Congreso anual de Economía y de Políticas Públicas*, featured talks by the economic advisors of all the major presidential candidates, as well as scholars from around the world. I was asked to give the opening keynote, based on this thesis.

projects on which YA' has worked together with various departments and centres affiliated to the universities. On more than one occasion I have walked through the campus of the Ibero Santa Fe with Alberto, and of the Ibero Puebla with Oscar; each time, we had to stop every few meters for them to greet various professors, department heads, researchers, students, and other collaborators. Even when I walked the campuses without them, I met people who spoke about YA' with great familiarity.

Reflecting on the many relationships he has built at the Ibero, Alberto comments: "We are not in the business of selling coffee; we are in the business of bringing people together around a good cup of coffee, and we have learned to do this well at universities" (pers. comm.). To be sure, this is partly an insight about marketing in a niche market, and one might suspect a hint of mystification in Gudeman's sense (cf chapter 1). However, Gudeman himself also describes a case where market exchange is a pretext for building relationships of mutuality (Gudeman 2008: 101), and Alberto's comment might also be taken as a genuine mission statement in light of YA's SSE values. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that many people have come together around YA's proposals to the Ibero community, and not just as consumers in its Capeltic coffee shop.

The "Junichi model"

I have shown above how Mexican Jesuit universities in particular can lend themselves to strong, open-ended, and multilayered alliances with YA'. This is not to suggest that other universities are not important allies. Indeed, one extremely crucial strategic collaboration emerged for YA' through an academic from a private university in Japan.[182]

[182] I have reconstructed the following narrative from several overlapping sources, especially a José Aquino's oral history which I recorded and transcribed as part of a collaborative project (Yomol A'tel forthcoming), and personal communications with Oscar Rodríguez and Alberto Irezabal. Other sources

Dr. Junichi Yamamoto, a professor from Keio University in Tokyo, came to Chiapas in the early 2000s to learn about the Zapatistas. His choice of research topic was motivated by both his professional specialization and his political commitments.[183] Thus, besides producing several academic publications, he also wanted to engage in practical solidarity with the people from whom he was learning.

While in Chiapas, Junichi[184] got to know Maya Vinic, a coffee cooperative run by the Abejas. The Abejas are an organization of Tsotsil Catholic activists in the tradition of liberation theology in the diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, as described in chapter 3. They had allied themselves with the Zapatistas during the 1994 uprising. In 1997, paramilitaries massacred dozens of people in their community of Acteal. The survivors founded the Maya Vinic cooperative in 1999. When they met Junichi in 2003, they asked him about exporting their coffee to Japan.

Upon returning to Japan, Junichi told his university students about Maya Vinic's request. They helped him to establish a fair trade scheme for buying the coffee from Chiapas. He began to mobilize other contacts, and in 2006, JICA (the Japanese development agency) approved a multi-year partnership project designed to build the capabilities of Chiapas coffee cooperatives so that they could sell their product to the demanding Japanese market, and to gradually improve their terms of trade through economic upgrading. The project brought together Keio University, the Japanese Embassy in Mexico, and the aforementioned food corporation. A Japanese business consultant based in Guadalajara also played an important role; he specializes in

include various conversations during fieldwork, and the version published by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013).

[183] On his Keio University website, he says that his research on the Zapatistas "…began with my interests as a Mexicanologist and a grass roots democrat…."

[184] I refer to Dr. Yamamoto by his first name, as he is universally known by friends and allies in Chiapas, to avoid confusion at my mention of the "Junichi model" below, and for the sake of consistency. I had the pleasure of meeting him during my fieldwork; he was on a friendly visit, and came to bring Oscar a copy of the book where he has a chapter on Bats'il Maya (Yamamoto 2013). He is now an emeritus professor.

facilitating bureaucratic procedures and communication for Japanese interests doing business in Mexico. Through this project, Maya Vinic began exporting green coffee to the corporation, and eventually was able to open its own coffee shop in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Meanwhile, due to their overlapping political, religious, ethnic and economic affinities, the key advisor of Maya Vinic, Luis Alvarez, had by then established a good relationship with Oscar from the MB. Through Luis, Junichi came to Chilón to visit the MB's cooperative, and he became enamoured with Oscar's holistic vision. Thus, when he arranged for Maya Vinic to visit Japan to learn about their client's quality standards and meet directly with consumers, they invited the MB's roaster, José, along as well.

The initial contact with the corporation went very well, enough to generate interest in a new trade partnership. The Japanese government was willing to continue sponsoring the travel costs for mutual visits between the two organizations, to help their relationship flourish. The food corporation's executives came twice to Chilón.

They expressed interest in Bats'il Maya's desire to export roasted, rather than green, coffee, and they recognized Bats'il Maya's potential. However, commerce requires commensuration. Before signing a contract, the Japanese corporation needed to guarantee that Bats'il Maya could consistently deliver a standardized product in terms of established consumer taste preferences.

The second visit, as remembered by Alberto, was crucial. An important delegation came from the corporation. Among others, it included the president's son, who was vice president for international relations; the vice president for procurement in the corporation's U.S. businesses; and an elder board member, who was an old friend of the president's and part of the "original culture" of the business, before it had become a large corporation. They spent an entire week doing taste tests in José's laboratory at the

roasting plant, all day, every day. Their reticent poker faces made their Mexican hosts anxious.

On the second to last day, the guests were taken to visit an inter-zonal course for MB *cargos*, being held in one of the rural communities. As is customary, they were asked to introduce themselves in front of the assembly of a few hundred people (cf chapter 2). When it was the elder board member's turn, he said: "We have not come to buy your coffee; we have come to see your faces." And he began to cry. Alberto remembers it as a beautiful moment in which he told himself "something magical is happening here." Later, the board member explained that he had been moved upon seeing barefoot children in the village, which reminded him of when he himself was a barefoot child in Japan after the atomic bomb.

By the end of the visit, José had finally come up with the right blend for U.S. consumer tastes, and the Japanese food corporation agreed to a contract. However, when the contract arrived, it was full of conditions and clauses; the Mexicans were a bit taken aback. Remembering the emotional connection from the visit, somebody commented of the board member: "his tears dried up." Mutuality had enabled trade, but trade was still trade; economy is indeed a dialectic between the two realms.

Because they had truly reached a strong level of trust, though, the corporation eventually agreed to give Bats'il Maya the time and support it needed to build up to the standards and volume that it required. The corporation became a major client, buying coffee for a restaurant chain it owned in California. Due to the strong relationship, contracts were signed yearly, rather than on an order-by-order basis, which was very helpful to Bats'il Maya in terms of stability and predictability. This trading relationship lasted several years, until the corporation sold the restaurant chain. It gave the Ts'umbal

Xitalha' cooperative and Bats'il Maya the "traction" they needed to grow into what is now YA'.

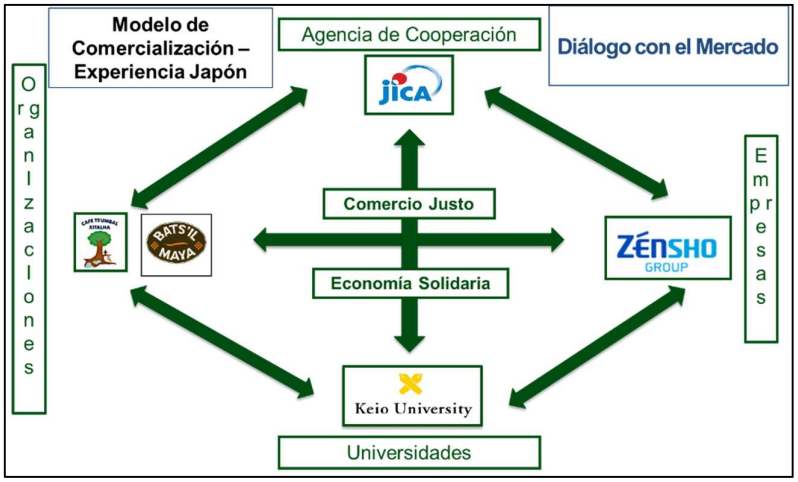
As the relationship developed between the two organizations and the other parties from Junichi's team, it bore much fruit in other ways as well. The Japanese embassy and JICA gave YA' several grants to invest in new machinery to increase its capabilities – such as the high-tech coffee grain selector from Costa Rica that detects colour (cf chapter 3), which allows for specialty blends – and the rural wet processing plants that allow for greater decentralization. A translator who worked with the consultant in Guadalajara, and accompanied the visits to Chilón, eventually became personally involved with YA' as an angel investor. During my fieldwork, this person was thinking of becoming a barista (independently of any connection with YA'), and came with another friend and angel investor to spend a few days in Chilón, practicing in the Capeltic at the roasting plant until they had perfected the art of the latte. Besides gaining a skill, it was also a way for them to grow in friendship with the YA' team, learn about Tseltal culture by participating in village *fiestas*, and share meals and conversation with the Jesuit community.

Besides these direct practical and personal benefits, the relationship with the Japanese allies brought a strategic innovation to Chiapas. Junichi's way of bringing together actors from across university, government, business, and civil society sectors to collaborate on a common project was a revelation for YA'.[185] The key insight is that collaboration can go beyond the inter-sectoral dimension (as between YA' and a university); its full strategic potential is realized when collaboration is multi-sectoral. Its novelty for YA' is underlined by the fact that Oscar at first called this the "Junichi model," a term that is still used interchangeably with "multi-actor model" in YA's

[185] Multi-sectoral collaboration, with the state as a major actor, is a characteristic feature of Japanese capitalism (Johnson 2001). Another typical feature that YA' has come to know and appreciate, as described here, is that Japanese firms tend to invest early on in promising long-term commercial relationships, as in the *keiretsu*.

internal lexicon. He made a diagram showing the inter-sectoral collaborations among Japanese actors that made their trade partnership with the corporation possible, and by 2014 this diagram began to feature regularly in Oscar's presentations about YA's strategy. Notably, the diagram describing YA's "Japan experience" already includes a level of abstraction, in the generic labels next to the specific actors.

Figure 4. The "Junichi model," showing Yomol A'tel's "Japan experience" [186]



Source: Oscar Rodriguez, "Alternativas al Desarrollo, Poder Social y Economía Solidaria: El camino de la escalabilidad." [Alternatives to Development, Social Power and Solidarity Economy: The path to scalability.] PowerPoint Presentation, September 2014.

In the same 2014 presentation from which the above diagram is taken, Oscar also included a slide acknowledging the many allies that had been working with YA'. Notably, the allies are not presented according to any particular logic. Other than the title, "Accompanying organizations," it is simply a collection of logos.

[186] The diagram describes how governmental development agencies, private corporations, and universities can collaborate with grassroots organizations for fair trade and solidarity economy. Later versions of this slide tend to be labelled as either "Multiple actor model" or "Junichi model." Notably, the diagram already includes a level of abstraction, in the generic (and plural) labels next to the specific actors from a concrete experience.

Figure 5. “Accompanying organizations.”

Source: Oscar Rodriguez, “Alternativas al Desarrollo, Poder Social y Economía Solidaria: El camino de la escalabilidad.” [Alternatives to Development, Social Power and Solidarity Economy: The path to scalability.] PowerPoint Presentation, September 2014.

Also in the same 2014 presentation, there is a slide explaining the agroecological method of production used by Ts’umbal Xitalha’. This slide appears in a different, earlier section of the presentation, with no connection whatsoever to the issue of collaboration. It includes the following image of a coffee shade forest.

Figure 6. Detail from a slide, showing the image of a coffee shade forest.

Source: Oscar Rodriguez, “Alternativas al Desarrollo, Poder Social y Economía Solidaria: El camino de la escalabilidad.” [Alternatives to Development, Social Power and Solidarity Economy: The path to scalability.] PowerPoint Presentation, September 2014.

Then, in a stroke of figurative reasoning a few months later, Oscar "tropicalized" the Japanese innovation, putting it in terms that were proper to his own base.[187] In a new PowerPoint presentation, he began to represent YA's alliances in a way that emphasizes the Japanese logic of multi-sector collaboration. Moreover, the coffee shade forest that had previously featured in his presentations for a different purpose became a metaphor that both captured the Japanese logic and opened it to greater nuance. Just as a coffee ecosystem involves a complex and diverse set of interactions between different types of actors, so, too, does YA's multi-actor model of collaboration.

Figure 7: Detail from slide. Some of Yomol A'tel's inter-sectoral alliances, grouped by sector and represented as a coffee shade forest.

Source: Oscar Rodríguez, untitled PowerPoint presentation for Comparte seminar, February 2015.

Representing its multiple alliances through this metaphor allowed YA' to imagine new possibilities, whereby relationships could be articulated in complex ways. To help facilitate sustained multi-sectoral collaboration, YA' has formed a board of advisors with

[187] Members of the MB, and many people in Mexico, frequently use the term "to tropicalize" in this sense. This particular event is a perfect example of how Gudeman (1992, 2008) describes innovation at the base, both in terms of the heterogeneous references at hand there, and in terms of the type of rationality at play.

allies from academia, private enterprise, and social movements. Oscar attributes the failure of many other cooperatives in the region to their lack of relationships that cover this range of expertise (Rodríguez Rivera forthcoming).

As YA's approach has proven to be valuable, it has spilled over to the other area (along with the coffee GVC) in which the MB faces an especially challenging external context: its struggle for state recognition of the indigenous right to self-governance. Since this involves the expulsion of political parties and the disenfranchisement of other corrupt but powerful actors, the MB needs a strong and diverse set of allies to make it happen. Thus, the MB is collaborating closely on this project with at least three other major actors. The Centro Pro is a Jesuit human rights NGO in Mexico City; it provides legal advice and helps with political strategy. The Centro Pro also helped connect the MB with the self-governing indigenous community of Cherán, Michoacán, upon which the MB's model is based. The Centro Pro had worked with the Cherán community, and it facilitated a series of exchange visits between the two indigenous organizations. Since then, the Cherán community government has not only been an inspiration for the MB, but also a wise advisor with a wealth of practical experience. Finally, ECOSUR, the university based in San Cristóbal de las Casas, has helped the MB's elected officials design formal "municipal development plans" for Chilón and Sitalá (see below), which not only will guide their practice but also help them establish credibility.

The Comparte network

Meanwhile, a further insight had begun to evolve in parallel to this process, and has matured together with it. Multi-sectoral collaboration offers many advantages in itself, but its potential is even greater when there is collaboration between two or more

groups that are each multi-sectoral in their own right. YA' has helped to systematically apply this insight through its leadership in the Comparte network, founded in 2010.[188]

Comparte

The Comparte network (whose name is derived from the verb, "to share," in Spanish) defines itself as a "learning community," made up of fifteen economically productive initiatives from ten countries in Latin America and one NGO in Spain, who are all interested in "alternative development." The community is continually activated and renewed by frequent assemblies, exchange visits, and a permanent flow of communications, as well as a series of collaborative projects. Programmatically, network members collaborate strategically by helping each other apply "the Comparte method," which includes a strategic reading of the territory, capability-building, value chain upgrading with reinvestment of profits, and SSE business models.

They also provide mutual operational support to each other. For example, Suyusama in Colombia has expertise in agroecology and specialty coffee; its director has been a key advisor in YA's struggle against the coffee rust epidemic and in its efforts for quality upgrading. Meanwhile, YA' has helped the Instituto Mayor Campesino (IMCA), also in Colombia, to set up its first coffee shop on a Jesuit university campus in Cali. Further, Nitlapan, an established microfinance institution from Nicaragua, assisted YA' in setting up its own, Comon Sit Ca'teltic (cf chapter 4). These forms of support are understood in terms of what Gudeman would call "sharing" – there are no consulting fees involved, nor is there an expectation of proportionate reciprocity. It is a community, and all of its members have a legitimate claim to its base of collective expertise, a base which

[188] This section is based on my active participation in the Comparte network since 2012, on the organization's grey literature, and on sustained personal and collective communications with its members. Further insights and documentation on YA's participation in the Comparte network can be found in Romero Huesca (2016).

they are trying to grow together (cf Gudeman 2001: 117). Indeed, collaboration of this sort has been shown to stimulate the innovative capacity of members (Goes and Park 1997).

The group is also a space for nourishing the shared vision that motivates and guides the initiatives. As a baseline, it has defined a common discourse about its vision for alternative development, spelled out in an official publication (Comunidad Comparte 2011). Human dignity is at the centre. Initiatives should be built collectively and from the grassroots level, and they should generate capabilities for participation and decision-making. Diversity is valued. Harmony with the environment and gender equity are to be sought. *Buen vivir*, and not the accumulation of capital, is the horizon.

Beyond this charter document, the network's assemblies always include a space to discuss empirical or theoretical analysis, and just as importantly, each day begins and ends with a bit of *mística*. The latter "mystical" component entails engagement on a deeper register of meaning, through spiritual reflection, meditation, and artistic or other dynamic methods.

New symbols occasionally emerge from these assemblies, and become part of the community's shared "base." For example, early on in one assembly, somebody shared the idea that we should be like the giraffe: its long neck allows it to see far and wide, but this feature also has two other implications. In order not to lose its balance, its feet must be firmly planted on the ground. And to pump blood all the way up to its brain, the animal needs a huge heart.[189] The simile resonated throughout the rest of the meeting, and by the

[189] The metaphor is from a bishop in Cambodia who chose the giraffe as his diocesan symbol; it came to us through a Latin American Jesuit who had heard it from the worldwide superior of the Jesuits at the time. Notably, the original version seems to have referred only to the neck and the heart (cf Mukasa 2015; Gustafson 2015); the detail about the feet firmly on the ground seems to be yet another peculiarly Latin American riff on the theme, simultaneous with the embrace of another community's innovation. In any case, it illustrates how an element from one community's base can be transferred to another, through overlapping identities.

end of it, "the giraffe" had become a shorthand reference to this combination of values – vision, rootedness, and love – among Comparte members.

More tangibly, Comparte has a remarkable degree of institutionality for such a network (cf Haxeltine et al 2017). Two full-time secretaries (one in Colombia, one in the Basque country of Spain) design projects, raise funds, coordinate events, follow up on commitments, and keep the communication flowing. Each member organization is financially independent of the network,[190] but the transnational networking activities of Comparte as such – assemblies, exchange visits, publications, courses, etc. – are funded largely through grants. Many of these are obtained by a Jesuit NGO in Bilbao, Alboan, which applies for funding from the Basque government among other sources. All but one of the member institutions are Jesuit-affiliated; the lone exception has a long-standing relationship with a Jesuit NGO. The network is officially coordinated under the aegis of the Conference of Latin American Jesuit Provincials, which is the regional Jesuit governing body.

The tangible and intangible elements of the Comparte community's base come together in its most recent project. The network is taking measures to create its own credence-based differential seal, representing a "system of guarantees" for commercial purposes. It would be analogous to the World Fair Trade Organization model, whereby peers confirm that each other's businesses are organized according to a certain set of principles, as opposed to other fair trade schemes which entail expensive certification of specific products by a third party. The added value of a Comparte seal is that it would leverage the credibility of the Jesuit "brand" to distinguish itself from other seals.[191] A

[190] In this sense, Comparte is analogous to the Guatemalan *cofradías* described by Gudeman and Rivera (2002): it is a community whose base is mostly immaterial.
[191] Given the proliferation of competing seals related to fair trade and environmental sustainability, consumers often find it hard to distinguish between "authentic" ones and those that have been tarnished by the dynamics of mystified rent-seeking and other forms of cascading.

unique Comparte seal would also reflect the especially holistic vision of the group and become a tangible element of its common base, adding further synergistic value to it.

Transnational "coffee shade forests" and beyond

YA' is a founding member of Comparte and has always served on its steering committee. Alex (of YA's community bank, Comon Sit C'ateltic) coordinates the sub-group of micro-finance initiatives in the network. Oscar has recently become the network's general coordinator, and he has long been one of its principal visionaries.

Thus, it is no surprise that the multi-actor logic of the coffee shade forest found its way to Comparte's way of proceeding. However, this step does add another dimension to the innovation. As the whole network and each of its members begin to apply the multi-actor model, its potential is supercharged when the interaction is between complex units that each constitute a set of multi-sectoral alliances.

This is reflected, for example, in a decision made in 2017 regarding inter-sectoral collaboration between Comparte members and universities. Transnational collaboration is encouraged and indeed takes place, but the priority from now on will be for each member organization to build up relationships with universities in its own country (Amaia pers. comm.). As with the discussion of YA' and Mexican universities above, this makes sense for several reasons from the perspective of the member organizations. The linguistic, geographic and technological proximity afforded by a shared national context has been shown to contribute to the successful diffusion of useful knowledge (MacGarvie 2005). Just as importantly, this proximity also makes it easier to develop multi-faceted strategic collaborations involving overlapping multi-sectoral networks, as opposed to one-way, one-off, one-dimensional operational assistance.

Less obviously, decentralizing collaboration this way is equally advantageous from the point of view of the Comparte network as such. For small and medium firms in developing countries, both domestic universities and foreign universities from countries with a similar development profile are effective channels for the creation and diffusion of relevant innovations (Fu and Li 2016). The dual orientation of Comparte members – a national focus for extra-network partnerships on the one hand, and transnational, mainly South-South collaboration within the network on the other – gives them access to both types of sources. Again, this effect is multiplied through the complexity of the "coffee shade forest" model, which now connects a plurality of multi-sectoral "ecosystems."

Relevant South-North collaboration is not excluded, either, thanks to Alboan's membership in the Comparte network. I have mentioned that the Jesuit NGO in Bilbao is an important fundraiser for Comparte, but its participation goes well beyond this role. Alboan shares the same complex approach and dual orientation as the other members; its alternative development initiatives are oriented both to international cooperation (including but not limited to Comparte) and local cooperation in the Basque country and Navarre.

Unlocking the potential of transnational, multi-sectoral collaboration

A unique set of conditions has enabled the phenomenon I have been describing – the transnational interaction between complex collaborative communities – to flourish between Alboan's Basque community and the respective communities of other Comparte members. Since Alboan obtains funding for Comparte from the Basque government, and ultimately from Basque taxpayers, one of the requirements attached to the grants is that it must be used in a way that helps develop the Basque country. For example, funded

activities are expected to help generate reciprocal relationships between Basque organizations and outside ones.

Comparte members have welcomed the requirement as an opportunity, especially considering the effervescence of alternative development initiatives in the Basque country. It does not hurt, either, that among the Basque country's famous sons are St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order; Pedro Arrupe, who renewed it after the Second Vatican Council (cf chapter 3); and Ignacio Ellacuría, the emblematic Jesuit liberation theologian who was assassinated by the Salvadoran army in 1989. For Jesuits, these figures of the Basque base[192] are part of our "sacra;" another important element of our overlapping bases is Deusto University, with campuses in Bilbao and San Sebastián.

Thus, Comparte assemblies are often held in the Basque country. Visits and meetings with Basque organizations, cooperatives, and academics are routinely built into them. For example, the 2017 assembly included a visit to a potato cooperative, a cooperative bank, and an agroecological farm, none of which are affiliated with the Comparte network. We also visited the offices of Euskolábel, the Basque government's seal for credence-based differentiation of products made in the Basque country, to learn from their experience in light of the Comparte network's similar project.

In reciprocity, Alboan arranged for many of us who went for the Comparte assembly to give presentations at non-Comparte Basque institutions. For example, I was invited to speak at the University of Mondragon and at Egibide, a technical institute in Vitoria. Some of us also gave interviews to the local media.

Comparte members also engage fruitfully with Alboan's partners from other world regions. For example, during one assembly, the network's Paraguayan representative

[192] St. Ignatius' family home in Loyola is an important pilgrimage site. Arrupe's family home is commemorated with a plaque in downtown Bilbao.

took advantage of a break to meet separately with an Alboan contact who was visiting from DR Congo. Both of them accompany producers of sesame-based multicropping systems, and they were keen to compare notes about appropriate technologies. In another instance, when a network of African Jesuit social centres was designing new ways to collaborate around economically productive initiatives, Alboan arranged for delegates from that network to participate in a Comparte assembly.

Perhaps the greatest example of Comparte-Basque collaboration so far, though, has happened largely thanks to YA's long-standing relationship with the University of Mondragon, rooted in the master's degree programme at the Ibero Puebla (described above). This programme includes a period of time where students visit the industrial cooperatives in Mondragon (the university is itself a cooperative and part of the Mondragon group). Thanks to that, Oscar, Arturo, Alberto, jXel Japón, and other members of YA' have spent time in Mondragon over the years, and they have developed rapport with the people there in the process. Indeed, the Tseltal project of indigenous "sovereignty without adjectives" resonates strongly with the Basque struggle, and this is reflected in YA's relationships with Mondragon and other Basque actors.[193] When Alboan began mobilizing its Basque networks to interact with Comparte members, YA' was able to support the effort by tapping this previously existing connection.

One major result of this amplified relationship is that in late 2017 and early 2018, Comparte and Alboan coordinated a six-month certificate course on social and solidarity economy together with Lanki, the extension branch of the University of Mondragon. Two people each from eight member organizations of Comparte participated in the course. It

[193] At the March 2018 seminar in Bilbao, I heard several members of Basque organizations point out their affinity with the Chiapas group as an oppressed indigenous people with a distinctive language, and I was told that the Chiapas participants had been extremely well received by their Mondragon hosts, partly because of where they were from. Another connection that is sometimes mentioned is that the Mondragon cooperative was originally founded by a priest.

combined three months of online learning with three months of intensive learning in the Basque country. In this latter stage, each pair met regularly with very experienced members of the Mondragon corporation, some of whom were among the founders in 1956. The Mondragon veterans – stewards of the famous cooperative's identity, with a lifetime's worth of practical wisdom – helped the Comparte teams to develop detailed business plans, adapting cooperative principles to a particular project in each Comparte organization. Meanwhile, spending three months in the same dorm was an opportunity for the Comparte members from different Latin American countries to get to know each other better. Further, as part of the course, the sponsoring organizations (Alboan, Comparte, University of Mondragon and Lanki) organized a weeklong seminar in March 2018 which brought together the Comparte participants with members of various Basque social movements and academics from Deusto to discuss food sovereignty, SSE and feminist economics.[194] As usual, a number of side-events were planned to coincide with the seminar, in order to make the most of the presence of so many old and new allies.

Modelling the Comparte network

As the breadth and depth of YA's alliances has evolved through the Comparte network, and as Oscar has taken on its coordination, his theoretical model is also beginning to expand beyond the "coffee shade forest." At the March 2018 seminar in Bilbao, Oscar gave his first presentation to the wider network as its coordinator. The words and images he used are indicative of an ongoing thought process.

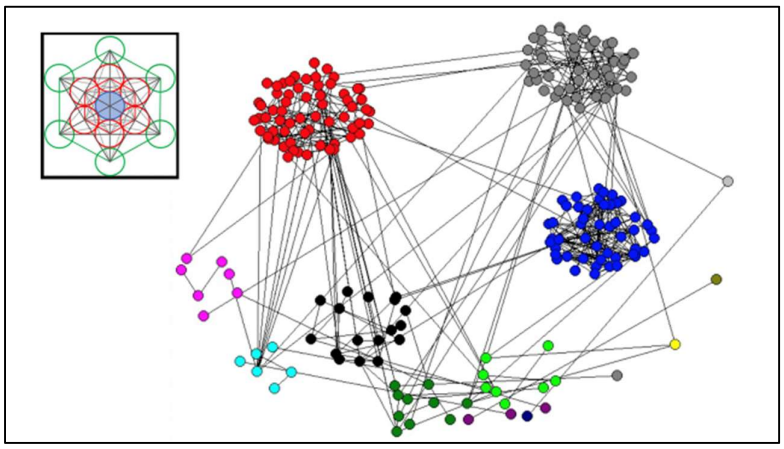
Some ideas have migrated smoothly to the new scale. For example, Oscar's earlier presentations about YA' routinely included a slide showing two interlocking spirals – one emanating from the inside of the Tseltal homestead, and the other arriving at it from

[194] I was also among the presenters at the seminar.

the outside – to show the dialectic between community and market, and between indigenous agency and solidarity from allies. The new presentation shows the same two spirals, only this time they are transposed on a map of Latin America showing all of the Comparte members.

However, the "coffee shade forest" metaphor is now absent. Instead, Oscar has begun to represent the network with geometric shapes which emphasize the multiplicity and complexity of different types of connections. Figure 8, from his March 2018 presentation, is one illustration he used, among other similar ones.

Figure 8. A slide from Oscar's presentation, representing the Comparte network in the form of abstract diagrams.



Source: Oscar Rodríguez, "Retos y oportunidades del trabajo en red para la construcción de alternativas" [Challenges and opportunities of networking for the construction of alternatives.] Powerpoint used at Alboan-Comparte-U. Mondragon-Lanki Seminar. March 2018.

Notably, the two figures are completely abstract, bereft of Oscar's signature "tropicalized" metaphors. They are also both generic figures. While, in his explanation, the concentric shapes in the smaller one refer to types of actors and the coloured dots in the larger one refer to interconnected clusters, these specific parts do not necessarily correspond exactly to a detailed "map" of the Comparte network; they simply illustrate the types of relationship found in Comparte. In my view, this slide indicates a step in the

evolution of Oscar's thinking, whereby he is beginning to describe something new, but has not yet found a creative, inculturated way to communicate it, as he tends to do with his mature models.

At the same time, in other slides with more text, Oscar – an avid reader, with whom I have had many conversations about a wide range of authors – makes several allusions to relevant theoretical literature. In one, he explains the concept of entropy, whereby a system needs to open itself to new energy in order to stay resilient; it is a reference to panarchy theory, regarding the adaptive capabilities of interacting economic, ecological and social systems (Gunderson and Holling 2002). In another, Oscar mentions the theory of complexity (he is a fan of Edgar Morin), and the way in which distinct actors can help to reproduce each other through *autopoiesis* (a concept developed in Arturo Escobar's work, with which Oscar is also familiar). While he brings all of these to bear on his proposal for a renewed engagement with the network, the combination of concepts has not necessarily cohered into a clear narrative yet; at least, this was the impression shared with me by several Comparte members after the presentation.

However, what is clear is that Oscar is in the process of cooking up a new model, which promises to be no less sophisticated than his previous ones. And in the meantime, he and the rest of the Comparte network are busily enacting the commons of a transnational range of actors that are trying to make the world more hospitable to economic alternatives that enact Comparte's values. The network's theory will surely continue to develop through this praxis.

PART II: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES OF THE VISION

In the first part of this chapter, I have described several types of relationships which are important to the MB, and to YA' in particular. Gudeman's conceptual framework is useful for analyzing these relationships. For instance, we have seen how reciprocity between two communities (one based in Japan, the other in Chiapas) enabled market trade. A key moment was when the elder board member of the Japanese corporation was able to empathize with his Tseltal hosts, seeing himself as a post-war child – that is, as a subject immersed in and dependent on community, during a time when survival depended on solidarity, and before he had developed his disjoint identity as a corporate executive – in them. In other words, the extension of the Tseltal base (by welcoming the executives into a community event) was successful in establishing a connection of the two bases and their respective conjoint identities. The connection was strong enough that it allowed them to overcome challenges that could have otherwise impeded their commercial relationship.[195]

I have used Gudeman's theory to point out other dynamics along the way as well. In some parts of the story, though, the interactions between and within overlapping communities of varying intensities (cf Gudeman 2001: 25-51) seem to blur his lines, for example, between sharing and reciprocity. However, the point here is not to arrive at a definitive interpretation in terms of a single frame of reference. Indeed, even Gudeman

[195] We might even push our Gudemanian interpretation of this event a bit further, in order to understand the significant role of the communities' aging members, in both the Japanese and Basque cases (where the Mondragon veterans accompanied Comparte members for three months). As people age and might become relatively less "efficient" in the ever-changing market, their accumulated experience nevertheless gives them greater value in the incommensurate realm of the base. As stewards of a group's memory and style, elders embody the group's identity, and this makes them excellent ambassadors, able to share tokens of the base with other communities through their personal interactions. This is crucial for the community's relationships to the outside, partly – but not only – to enable market trade and acquire innovations that will stimulate growth.

allows for ambiguity and "fuzziness" in the empirical application of his model (Gudeman 2001: 23, note 9; Gudeman 2010: 4).

Instead, what drives us here echoes Gudeman's larger concern with provoking a political conversation about the way we structure our economic lives (cf chapter 1). What we need to understand are the implications of YA's relational strategies not only for its survival, but also for its ability to creatively transform the adverse context in which it is trying to build a viable middle peasant economy. Thus, we turn now to consider the potential and challenges of YA's vision. Given the more diffuse and open-ended nature of the vision discussed in this chapter compared to the previous ones, the relevant challenges are not so much specific obstacles that prevent implementation of a particular project, but rather contingencies that shape how its implementation might take place. Thus, in this case it makes sense to discuss the potential and the challenges in that combined sense.

YA' is trying to effect systemic change, and evaluating its potential to that end requires concepts that go beyond the mainstream business metric of "scale" (cf Thorpe 2014: 5). However, the language of "scale" can be rhetorically useful – as long as it is strategically and responsibly deployed – precisely because it has acquired such currency in common parlance. Hence, I will adopt Riddell and Moore's (2005) elegant framework for describing the systemic impact of social innovations in terms of three distinct types of "scale."

"Scaling out" refers to an expansion, in the ordinary sense of scale. "Scaling up" refers to effecting necessary changes at the level of laws, policies, and institutions, to enable rather than impede the innovation's progress. Finally, "scaling deep" means that the new ways of relating, thinking, and doing become part of the culture, ingrained in people's *habitus* and eventually expressed in the institutions they (re)create. All of these

together constitute systemic transformation (Ibid.). Riddell and Moore's concepts serve well to illuminate YA's prospects for achieving impact on an adverse system, but the three concepts also take on a particular shape due to the uniqueness of YA's model, and to the contingencies of its context.

Scaling out

In the mainstream capitalist imaginary, "scaling out" entails growth in terms of volume, with returns to a single centre of accumulation. With globalization, capitalism uses the language of "scale" to flatten the planet into a single commensurate space (Tsing 2012). YA' and its allies are also interested in the whole planet, but they think of their reach in quite different terms.

Plurality for a shared world

Two fundamental differences between YA' and a capitalist business are its SSE vision and its rootedness in a particular vision of Tseltal territory. As I have argued in chapter 4, the YA' business model combines both aspects, not just the strictly economic one. In other words, its political geography is not limited to those aspects of the MB economy that are withdrawn from the market (such as land, food, and natural resources), but also reflected in its upgrading strategies, which are designed to redraw the map of global value chain governance from below. Not only MODEVITE (cf chapter 3), but also Capeltic, both use the language of "defending the territory."

This double rupture with the capitalist imaginary enables YA' to see itself as a transnational actor, but without any pretense to global domination. Because the point of SSE is not so much to accumulate capital as it is to change the way the economy functions, in order to effect a decentralization of both agency and wealth, YA' does not

see the other businesses in the Comparte network as competitors. If it did, it would certainly not have shared its expertise and other resources with IMCA – free of charge, no less – when the latter was setting up a coffee shop on a university campus. Rather, it recognized Cali as part of IMCA's own territory, and it collaborated generously with IMCA because both organizations share a trans-territorial project.

The objective of their collaboration is to expand Comparte's base, which is entirely distinct from accumulating capital (Gudeman 2008: 86-93). Indeed, Comparte defines itself as a community, not a competitive marketplace or an integrated supply chain. The Comparte base's wealth is measured not in economic returns on investment, but rather in terms of the heterogeneous values espoused by Comparte – values that include rendering YA's SSE business model persuasive, partly through demonstrating its viability and replicability. In this way, YA's strategy for "scaling out" through multiplicity (ie, decentralized, autonomous replication) rather than volume (ie, expansion with respect to a single point of agency and accumulation) is intimately tied to its strategies for "scaling up" and "scaling deep," as I discuss below.

Territorial networks for a hopeful "pluriverse"

What makes a net strong is not the size of its knots, but rather the connections between them.[196] Thus, a network of interconnected territories, and their corresponding territorial imaginaries (Hiernaux 1999; Hiernaux and Lindón 2012), are a way of strengthening resistance to capitalist globalization, by puncturing its sheet of for-profit commensuration with "spaces of hope" (Harvey 2000), which together constitute an alternative "pluriverse" – a world in which many worlds fit (Escobar 2018). This –

[196] I owe this insight to Jorge Cela, who used it in developing the international Fe y Alegría network. Cf Escobar 2008: 25-26 regarding how Latin American networks (*redes*, also meaning nets) are modeled as fishing nets.

combined with an ecologically rooted model of the transformative process (Gunderson and Holling 2002) – is the argument of two researchers at ECOSUR (Arreola Muñoz and Saldívar Moreno 2017), whose article Oscar cites (in pers. comm.) as a major source of inspiration for YA'.

This political geography interpretation of YA's way of "scaling out" certainly sheds light on the meaning of YA's involvement in Comparte and other networks. It also suggests a deeper, albeit hypothetical reading of the enthusiastic support YA' and Comparte – and indeed many other initiatives around the world – have received from their Japanese and Basque allies. The strongly nationalist development trajectories of these allies may have something to do with their willingness to invest in relationship-building with "ethnodevelopment" projects (Stavenhagen 1986) such as the MB in Latin America and beyond. By fostering alternative territorial networks, they are also strengthening their own position with regard to their "politics of place" and identity vis-à-vis the global capitalist economy (Escobar 2018: 67, 164). In this reading, the affinity I have described above between the Tseltal and the Basque, for example, would have an important strategic significance.[197]

In any case, it is certainly noteworthy that both the Japanese and the Basque governments have engaged in a form of international cooperation that emphasizes reciprocal relationships, as opposed to a more typical model of "aid" that often masks rent-seeking. Reciprocity builds up the type of sovereignty that is ultimately beneficial to the common good, thereby reinforcing its transformative effect. This is also why YA' and Comparte have been keen to continue working with their Japanese and Basque partners.

[197] I am indebted to Laura Rival for this insight.

Scaling up

"Scaling up" is about effecting policy change. This is certainly relevant to YA'. However, straightforward campaigning is unfeasible within its horizon of possibility. Thus, YA' finds more creative ways to engage the policy environment.

Deep-rooted hesitance to engage the state

On my first day of fieldwork, the executive secretary of Comparte was in Chilón to help YA' conduct its "strategic reading of the territory." He started off with an exercise developed by IMCA and Suyusama in Colombia. In the IMCA-Suyusama method (Aguilar Posada and Idárraga Quintero 2017),[198] one key step involves analyzing the other actors' visions for the territory, and identifying intersections with one's own vision, as potential areas of collaboration. The list of actors includes the government, with the idea that any overlap between the government's stated policy agenda and the civil society organization's interests might be strategic pressure points for lobbying and accountability.

However, the YA' participants in the workshop refused to complete this part of the exercise. They explained that it was futile to expect anything positive to come from engaging the government. More likely than not, any such contact would only make YA' worse off.

This attitude of avoidance is not unique to YA'. On the contrary, it is representative of a long Mexican tradition of grassroots democracy-building by a civil society that prefers to ignore the state (Forment 2003). The Chiapas context, where the

[198] The overall method, developed in Colombia by IMCA in the Cauca Valley and Suyusama in Nariño, closely resembles Escobar's (2018) proposal regarding designs for the pluriverse, including very long-term "life plans" of culturally diverse rural communities, who envision their *buen vivir* in terms of a "Beautiful Region" or territory.

state has failed to establish hegemony even as it has used violence against the population, only makes the idea of approaching it much less appealing (cf chapter 3).

Indeed, YA' sees the state as subservient to the interests of the MB's powerful opponents, the multinational corporations that control the policy agenda (Rodríguez Rivera forthcoming). This is why, for example, Mexican legislation has been consistently unhelpful for the social economy initiatives that would be in the interest of the common good (cf Ocejo Moreno 2013; Rojas Herrera 2013). In short, YA' sees the contemporary state as an agent of a competing claim on the same territory, one which is incompatible with the MB's vision for that territory. In this view, this reality will only change at the municipal level once the MB's project of indigenous self-government is successful in replacing the current political actors and their organizational structure altogether.[199]

For now, then, YA' must gradually shift its balance between two complementary strategies, which we might call – drawing figuratively on terms that have emerged in Latin America's history of struggle against oppression – a "maroon" strategy (ie, resisting by enacting an alternative system in a protected niche) and a "guerrilla" strategy (ie, targeted attacks on the centre, where asymmetry disallows frontal war). These strategies are spelled out (though not with the same terminology) by none other than David Fernández Dávalos, whose long alliance with YA' I have described above. During my fieldwork, Oscar frequently cited an article by Fernández Dávalos (2013) as a good description of YA's political vision regarding systemic transformation; he was so inspired by it that he acquired several copies and circulated them among YA' leaders.

[199] The municipalities of Chilón and Sitalá coincide with most of the MB's territory (cf Introduction).

Indirect politics

According to Fernández Dávalos, social and solidarity economy initiatives can strategically influence both policy and culture by being simultaneously radical and prudent. One way to do this, which he derives from Alain Badiou's philosophy, is by enacting "minimal differences." In the case of a business like YA', this entails functioning in a superficially very similar way to a normal capitalist enterprise. The small differences between the two models are then what highlight the fact that a "normal" business is not meant to promote social and solidarity values, and that the system (laws, subsidies, etc.) is nevertheless designed to favour it to the detriment of a model that is. By rendering the arbitrariness of this "background" visible, it shows that the "normal" model did not fall from the sky; it has been configured according to powerful interests. In other words, minimal differences are an indirect way of problematizing business models as political facts.

Insofar as minimal differences are recognized, a crack is opened in the system, because people realize that things do not have to be the way they are. The alternative initiatives are witnesses to the fact that things could be otherwise. They offer something better – especially for those who are impoverished and excluded by the dominant system – but in order to become the new normal, they would need a different "background," implying changes in the system. This process of making visible and problematizing the "rules of the game" serves to provoke new proposals and struggles for wider change. It is in this way that social and solidarity economy enterprises can be "political organizations that are economic in nature" (*organizaciones políticas de base económica*).

This has been the main strategy used by YA' as far as policy is concerned. It is playing a long game, in which the current goal is to demonstrate that an alternative can in fact exist, and be advantageous. Achieving a viable model has taken the greater part of

their energy since 2001, and gradually they are entering the complementary process of making that model more visible. Media interviews and academic interventions (such as those described above) are a way of prodding wider society to recognize that things could be different if more businesses were more like YA'.

Infinite demands

As for relating to the state itself, Fernández Dávalos again draws on Badiou to propose the taking of "a certain distance." The state provides the basic conditions that allow a social movement to exist at all; for this reason, it is not convenient for the movement to turn its back on the state entirely (as in isolated "Autonomous Zones"[200]), nor to adopt a purely destructive (or "terrorist") stance. Rather, Fernández Dávalos (inspired by Simon Critchley) counsels a strategy of undermining the state's hegemony through precise demands that the state cannot deny without contradicting itself. In this way, each concrete demand results either in a win (for example, of a policy reform), or at least in exposing the incoherence – and therefore, also the hidden interests – in the current system's configuration. This form of active resistance gradually opens a new space in which social and solidarity initiatives can manoeuvre and mature; as they get stronger, they can increase their pressure. Once the dominant structure is sufficiently exposed and weakened, the social movement will finally be in a position to appropriate the state's institutions and transform them more radically.

Despite Oscar's enthusiastic assent to the entirety of Fernández Dávalos' proposal, YA' has been far from assertive in this particular respect. The only exception, to my knowledge, is that whenever YA' members present at academic events, they make it a point to appeal for better SSE legislation. To be sure, this part of the theory is espoused

[200] By using this term, Fernández Dávalos makes an oblique – and critical – reference to the Zapatistas.

implicitly insofar as YA' does not take a more aggressive or radical position that would prevent it from benefitting from the state's basic services.

Meanwhile, YA's position must be seen in its relationship to the wider MB's much more assertive campaign for indigenous self-government, which corresponds exactly to what Fernández Dávalos is describing here. By early 2018, the MB had successfully submitted all the required legal paperwork for the transfer of government to an indigenous common law system in the municipalities of Chilón and Sitalá (Arturo pers. comm.). The paperwork included a petition signed by many thousands of residents in those municipalities.

However, the governmental authority that oversees indigenous issues, which must approve the claim, is stalling the process. The MB notes that 2018 is an election year for the mainstream government, and many interests are at play. But just as the "pre-deacons" went about their work while waiting for a pope who would ordain them (cf chapter 3), the MB decided to go ahead and elect governments according to indigenous common law for the two municipalities. It made it a point to ensure complete gender equity on the governing committees, and to bolster their credibility with the help of ECOSUR and the Centro Pro, as described above. The governments recognized by the MB are beginning to implement their municipal plans, in parallel to whatever the official politicians will do. This juxtaposition raises the question of which of the governments is more legitimate (ie, it exposes the state's incoherence), and simultaneously puts the MB-sponsored governments in a position of strength from which they can continue to exert pressure between now and the next electoral cycle.

Staying ahead of the game

In an April 2018 conversation, Alberto shared how YA' is beginning to envision a third complementary strategy for dealing with the state, beyond the two proposed by Fernández Dávalos. YA's microfinance entity, Comon Sit C'ateltic, has been growing, and would be ready to transition to a more formal structure. However, YA' is aware that the Mexican government has been systematically constraining financial cooperatives with regulations that would tend to eliminate them altogether (cf Oulhaj 2016). Furthermore, political violence in Chilón has increased (precisely due to the official electoral cycle described in the previous section), and as a result, the only formal bank in town decided to leave, making basic financial logistics even more difficult for YA'.

Faced with these circumstances, Alberto and Alex have decided that the time is ripe for Comon Sit C'ateltic to make a giant leap and join the emerging "fintech" sector. That is, it would develop financial technology for mobile phones and other IT platforms, adapted to YA's cooperative business model. This would allow Capeltic to offer consumers not only hot beverages, but also savings accounts in a cutting-edge cooperative bank, making them financial partners of the producers and workers to whom they are connected through the coffee they consume, and through their participation in the social economy. It would "bring people together," and it would also increase the available funds for Comon Sit C'ateltic's investments in new productive initiatives (cf chapter 4). Further, cashless banking would allow staff to travel throughout the increasingly insecure region more safely.

The genius of this idea is not just in the way it advances the YA' vision on multiple levels. It is also that fintechs are so new, the Mexican government has not yet come up with any legislation to control them. Thus, by using the "squeeze" of an adverse policy environment to propel its innovative process forward, YA' has figured out a way

to stay a step ahead of the government. Insofar as it is able do this, YA' not only creates a space of freedom – an wide-open field, not just a protected niche – where it can advance its SSE agenda through concrete experiments, but also positions itself as a reference point on the frontier of debates about the future of the economy.

Scaling deep

"Scaling deep" is the most novel of Riddell and Moore's terms. I propose that in the case of YA', we can understand its potential in three main ways. YA's particular challenges also bring out other profound implications to the notion "scaling deep."

Three meanings of "scaling deep"

"Scaling deep" is sometimes described by transformative social innovation theorists in terms of generating "hype" (cf Haxeltine et al 2017). In other words, coming up with a strong narrative and achieving high visibility for it is a way to influence wider imaginaries (Haxeltine et al 2013). YA' does invest in this type of strategy. Its media interviews, presentations, and publications, including those made in collaboration with Yomol Nohptesel (cf chapter 2) and Comparte, are all ways in which YA' builds and communicates a message. Notably, YA' leaders have used these means to explicitly underline the relevance of their vision for high-profile conversations in Latin America, such as debates about *buen vivir* and "epistemologies of the South" (cf eg Fuentes González 2016). The YA' story has also featured in a documentary film (Ibañez Díaz Infante 2017).

Surely, "scaling deep" is also about Tocquevillian culture-making, that is, influencing the *habitus* of one's society (cf Crouch 2008). YA' attempts to do this by sharing its SSE-rooted managerial insights and know-how (cf chapter 4) with other

actors. The Bilbao seminar with Comparte and Mondragon, and the Puebla master's degree program with Mexican cooperatives, have been venues for that. YA' is also working with ESADE to write a case study based on its social business practices, to be used for training business school students in Barcelona.

The deepest meaning of "scaling deep" for YA', though, is the Tseltal concept of "entering the heart" (cf chapter 4). When YA's vision is fully embraced at a personal level, it is assimilated into that subject's conjoint identity. From then on, the individual has a deeply personal stake in the vision, and various forms of collaboration will flow naturally from there. I have mentioned, for example, the Japanese translator for YA's corporate clients; as her personal enthusiasm grew for the project, she became financially invested in it, and even spent time participating in Tseltal *fiestas* in order to deepen her bond with the community. Because YA' conjugates the personal and the institutional in its networking strategy (as described above), it has developed many analogous relationships with individual people who have become informal ambassadors for YA', and can be counted on as true friends, willing to invest a part of themselves in a vision that they embrace as their own.

Implications of scaling deep

Even as it made new friends in this process, YA' has also made some potential enemies. I have described above how the Mexican state and multinational corporations engage in system-building of a type that undermines the MB's vision. More focused threats directed at the MB have also emerged as a result of its efforts to replace traditional political parties with an indigenous self-government, and its efforts to restructure the regional coffee economy. To the degree that the MB is successful while still marginal to

the wider system, it occupies a vulnerable position of increased visibility without a corresponding increase in power.

As long as YA' was small and worked with its own producers, it stayed off the radar of mainstream traders, who deal in much larger volumes. But by the time of my fieldwork, the coffee rust had made coffee scarce, and YA' was buying relatively large quantities (eg 25 tons at a time) from all over the region, since it could draw producers with its higher price. As a result, traders started to take notice, and some have begun to show up outside the Bats'il Maya plant in Chilón. They do not engage, but only look at the facility from just outside; this is interpreted by YA' as both appraisal and intimidation. In an informal conversation, José shared that he is concerned about arson, and eventually – as they make more of a dent in the mainstream system – with more personal violence. Others on the team shared similar worries about the dangers they face as a direct result of their transformative social innovation.

In response to these risks, the MB is taking several precautionary measures. The roasting plant has been equipped with CCTV. New protocols are being designed and implemented to stay in communication while traveling on rural roads. Sadly, some of YA's social movement allies in Mexico have already had experiences of violent repression; on the other hand, this has endowed them with a form of expertise, and during my April 2018 visit, an allied cooperative from Tabasco offered to share their more robust security protocols with the MB.

They are all fully aware, though, that there is no guarantee for their security. Adversity at the macro level is sharpened in the local "political ecology," populated as it is by several violent groups who kill with impunity (cf chapter 3). Nevertheless, José explicitly states that he is willing to risk his life for this project, because it gives hope that things can be otherwise (pers. comm.). Many others throughout the MB say as much,

implicitly, by continuing to mobilize and build this alternative for the common good, in spite of the threats. This readiness to freely give their lives so that others might have life is perhaps the greatest sign of all that the model has "scaled deep." Once it has "entered the heart," its value is incommensurate with any cost.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, we have seen how the MB's ambitious middle peasant model requires not only ecological and economic, but also social "rebooting" to be viable. In this chapter, the wider dimensions of the latter task – and some of the deeper ones – have become clearer. The MB's project for Tseltal sovereignty impels it to engage with a wide range of other communities. The transformative potential of the project is nearly matched by the enormity of challenges, which the MB must creatively overcome with a combination of radical and prudent strategies.

At a theoretical level, I have demonstrated that Gudeman's lens can add useful nuance to our understanding of networks. This, combined with the way YA's potential and challenges shape the three dimensions of scale, can contribute to burgeoning conversations about transformative social innovation theory (cf Haxeltine et al 2017). As YA' leaders themselves have emphasized, their story is also relevant to other debates rooted in social movements and the struggle for indigenous autonomy.

At the same time, seeing YA' from these angles has helped us to politicize Gudeman's framework in a new way. Gudeman emphasizes that economy's tension is a dialectical process with ever-changing conjunctions (Gudeman 2008: 14). However, his normative recommendations tend to target centralized policy shifts which, as we have seen, are not

forthcoming in the case at hand. YA's story paints a complementary picture about how systemic change can come from the margins.

Indeed, many elements of this chapter reinforce my earlier claims about peripheries as places of clarity, creativity, freedom. Junichi, for example, came to Chiapas because of the Zapatistas. The Zapatista movement itself is very much a response from the periphery to the hegemonic centre; as an organization it is also part of the complex political ecology of rural northern Chiapas, as described in chapter 3. The conditions of this peripheral political ecology were conducive to the "cross-fertilization" that has proven so important for YA'.

In sum, YA's strategic relationship-building shows that "social institutions" are far from a static factor, as in Li's deterministic model. The struggle for a viable middle peasant model is still an uphill battle, but it is far from a question of fate. Even overarching contexts are contingent and subject to the influence of collective action. YA' has mobilized the latent commons it shares with anybody who is interested in the possibility of a shared world, as understood in terms of the Comparte network's principles for alternative(s to) development.

In the "liquid world" we are left with only one option: to learn to walk on water.

Benjamín González Buelta

Conclusion: Reason to Hope

I have portrayed the Misión de Bachajón's experience "warts and all," including both major challenges and "other challenges" that complicate the picture. I have done this not only for the sake of transparency, but also to encourage the hope of others who struggle in messy and difficult conditions. On the other hand, the messiness of the MB's story obliges us to clarify how exactly it gives reason to hope. The MB's model is highly unique, built in dialogue with a host of contingent factors and unrepeatable conjunctures. Replicating it as such would not be possible. What the MB offers is anything but a handbook of technocratic solutions for managing the great transition to equity and sustainability (cf Stirling 2015). What does it mean, then, when I claim, still, that this marginal initiative can help to "organize" our hope?

Organizing hope

In my hermeneutics of hope, I have been using the concept of "potential," which alludes to the gap between a provisional reality and the realization of something more, whose presence can be discerned within that reality. This presence is germinal; we can read it as a promise. Hope is the ability to recognize all of this and to believe that the gap can be reconciled, the promise fulfilled.[201] I have also spoken of "challenges," indicating both that the distance between the "already" and the "not yet" can be forded at least partly through human agency, and that this process is not easy.

Underlying this approach is the eschatological framework of Ignacio Ellacuría, the martyred liberation theologian whose ideas have been extremely influential, especially for Jesuits in Latin America. Ellacuría has taught us to look for transcendent

[201] For a survey of other ways of thinking about hope, cf Eagleton (2015).

plenitude *within* the vicissitudes of history (Ellacuría 1994a), and to find hope at the margins (Ellacuría 1989). His understanding of how hope works is best expressed in his posthumous article, "Utopía y profetismo" (Ellacuría 1994b).[202]

In this article, Ellacuría posits a mutually constitutive, dynamic relationship between utopia and prophecy. Utopia, for him, is a vision of what the full realization of the present reality's potential would look like. Prophecy is the work of pointing out the gap between present reality and its potential, and of shortening that distance. Utopia mobilizes prophecy, just as prophecy articulates utopia.

This implies a situated vision that is always provisional. The absolute good always lies just beyond any given utopia; it cannot be reduced to any construct, nor attained entirely by human effort.[203] In the meantime, utopia and prophecy are what make the ultimate promise intelligible and put us on the path towards it, which starts with recognizing that it is already among us.

The MB can be understood, and largely understands itself,[204] in this way. For our purposes, we might identify utopia with what I have described throughout this thesis as the MB's "vision" and its "potential," the gap between that promise and its present-day reality with the "challenges" it faces, and the work of prophecy with the "strategies" through which it confronts those challenges. Then, we might add flesh to our definition of hope with recourse to Ellacuría's (1994b: 412-415), whereby hope is the energy that moves us to keep struggling in spite of the obstacles, and gives meaning to that struggle.

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[202] His last article, it was written just months before his assassination in 1989. The 2000 edition of his writings by the UCA in San Salvador gives it a slightly longer title: "Utopía y profetismo desde América Latina. Un ensayo concreto de soteriología histórica." It has been translated to English as "Utopia and prophecy in Latin America."

[203] This "eschatological remainder" is a way of avoiding Pelagianism (considered a heresy), and of recognizing the absolute that is present in both the "already" and the "not yet" as a gift we receive (ie, grace).

[204] For example, when I recently asked Oscar what he had been reading lately, he gave me a list of books organized by category. The first category is "operative utopia" – a direct allusion to Ellacuría's article (1994b: 394, 395). This detail is only one illustration of a whole history and ethos that are palpable in every aspect of the MB.

We do not produce this energy ourselves, nor does it result from rational calculation or naïve idealism. Rather, it surges in us when we embrace the promise of liberation – ie, the promise that all shall have life in abundance – which is announced and made effective by "the poor with spirit." This promise that arises from the peripheries of history is strengthened when we nourish it through our own praxis along the way (Ibid.).

How, then, does the MB's own hopeful struggle resonate as a promise of life in abundance for the rest of us? And what would nourishing that promise entail?

The Misión de Bachajón's promise

Having let go of any temptation see the MB project as susceptible to "copy and paste" replication, we can perceive deeper ways in which its vision, potential, challenges and strategies shed light on the path to life-giving economies more generally. As in Gudeman's universal model, the MB has set up an economy with two distinct realms, one that protects the base and one that engages the market. As if guided by Gudeman's normative advice, priority is given to the base. But then where Gudeman turns despondent, and Li fatalist, the MB reveals a twofold promise.

Yes we can

The first promising dimension of the MB's experience is its suggestion that a middle peasant model that combines a thriving base with healthy market engagement is indeed viable, *even at the margins* where there is now poverty and exclusion. This is in itself good news for the millions of peasants around the world, and indigenous peoples especially, who currently endure the pressures of exploitation, land grabs, and climate change. And that makes it good news for all of us, since we depend on these smallholders for the present and future of our food, and for their care of our common home.

To be sure, Gudeman and Li point out important factors that condition our enthusiasm, but only insofar as those insights ground the promise announced by the MB in a realistic appraisal of the challenges involved. The MB's prophetic service has been to show that those obstacles are not greater than the potential of collective human agency. With tenacity and creativity, it is possible to rewire economic, social, and ecological factors into virtuous circles that generate life in abundance.

For the promise to be effective, it has to be concrete; concomitantly, it is situated and provisional. In the MB's context, making the middle peasant model feasible has entailed combining two very different approaches. On the one hand, to protect the base it applies a battery of radically alternative measures associated with "post-development," such as social property, voluntary service, and other forms of solidarity economy. On the other hand, the MB has ambitiously moved into industrialization, in ways that fit squarely in the repertoire of traditional[205] economic "development," albeit with a social economy twist.

Conjugating the "house" with the "factory" to regain autonomy vis-à-vis the "market" is not simple. The "factory" (ie, a productive strategy rooted in increasing returns activities) has its own "colonial" history, both in the literal and figurative sense. The history of colonialism is intimately tied to the history of industrialization by core countries (Reinert 2007), and also by the core regions within countries – as when cattle ranches invaded Tseltal territory during Mexico's state-led industrialization phase (cf chapter 3). As we have seen, industrialization also introduces ways of reasoning and other pressures that can lead to debasement, in Gudeman's sense of "colonization."

In my view, the "factory" – as in YA's economic upgrading strategies – is not an unqualified good in itself. As Gudeman insists, a healthy economy is one with a thriving

[205] The "heterodox" label notwithstanding, the "Other Canon" is much older Ricardo (Reinert 2007).

base, more than one that exhibits "growth." If the latter goal is only relative, though, it is necessary in the MB's context because the Tseltal engage in market trade with industrialized societies. Trading on asymmetrical terms leads to debasement, as Gudeman has also pointed out, and this is the reason that the MB's operative utopia must include an industrial strategy.

Of course, industrialization is not bad in itself, either, but it does create a tension with the other aspects of the MB middle peasant model. The articulation of solidarity economy in the base with social economy in the market, and with agroecology spanning both realms, helps make the tension creative, in a way that generates economic, social, and ecological virtuous circles. Indeed, this aspect of the MB's design is a perfect illustration of what Mella calls "creative action in the world of development." Through its both/and solution to the *buen vivir* debate (cf Introduction), the MB has effectively "tropicalized" *buen vivir* as "harmony" (*slamalil qu'inal*).[206] This innovation that springs from the Tseltal base might well serve as inspiration for others who are similarly situated.

Articulating this aspect of the MB's promise more clearly, and nourishing it, will require further attention to the "virtuous circles" model as it evolves. Crucially, this entails a rethinking of the food nexus insofar as it mediates the relationship between agricultural production and industry. Development economists have tended to imagine this relationship through a narrative in which the technological spillovers from industry to agriculture raise productivity, and the resulting "excess" rural labour moves into urban

[206] The Mesoamerican value of "harmony" should not be confused with neoclassical economists' use of the term to mean market equilibrium. In essence, harmony holds contrasting notes together, creating a beautiful sound that is greater than the sum of its parts. I am indebted to Virgilio Elizondo for this insight. Also, my claim here is rooted in a November 2017 conversation with Arturo (the MB's coordinator); he told me that the MB was reconsidering the discourse of *buen vivir* (*lekil kuxlejalil*), and paying more attention to the key Tseltal concept of "harmony."

industry (cf Reinert 2007; Gollin 2014).[207] As Gudeman (1998) has noted, this model implies cascading and results in debasement, making it unsustainable.

The way in which the MB has used agroecology to creatively invert the Green Revolution's approach to productivity and knowledge, and the way its industry is designed to stay decentralized and rural, suggests an alternative whose advantages we have seen throughout this thesis; it certainly gives reason to hope. However, the fact that its viability hinges – in the current context at least – on the global market's price premium for agroecologically-induced coffee (and honey) quality upgrades means that the model does not necessarily carry over into other products for which there may be no such incentives, or even perverse ones. That said, even difficult cases might be open to creative solutions, because market incentives are ultimately contingent on how we collectively decide to shape our economic lives. This challenge constitutes a pending agenda for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

The challenge is an urgent one, because the agro-industry machine continues to deforest and erode our common home in the meantime. What we can expect from this model is encapsulated by Bayer's innovation for waging chemical warfare on resilient voluntary plants that had become resistant to Monsanto's RoundUp: an even deadlier poison, cynically named "Liberty." The fact that people are starting to see through this mystification (cf Introduction) is also a sign that we are living in a time of great opportunity for prophetic experimentation that can make the promise announced by the Tseltal even more effective.

[207] Chang (2009) nuances this with a defence of smallholding, but his assumptions about Green Revolution technology ignore its elective affinity with economies of scale, making his position untenable.

Building the Pluriverse Together

The second dimension of the MB's promise has to do with the way in which it builds relationships with other communities (cf chapter 5). Rather than confronting neoliberal globalization on imposed terms, the MB reinvents the logic of scale (cf Escobar 2018: 164). Its planetary strategy is stitched together as a heterogeneous patchwork of overlaps and reciprocities that move in at least three dimensions at once.

This way of proceeding results in a network of unique territories, an "objective institution" (cf chapter 1) whose architecture frees us from the logic of centre and margins. In this pluriverse, there is room for corporate executives from Tokyo to engage peasants from rural Chiapas as equals, with genuine humility, at least for long enough to make a difference in the way they trade with each other. Global value chains are repurposed as channels for "bringing people together" across other distances as well.

This is surely the MB's greatest promise, in that it invites both middle peasants and all others to participate in "tirelessly reinitiating the possibility of a shared world" in which life – human and nonhuman – can flourish (Mella 2015: 102). At the same time, the asymmetries of the world as it is are still very real, and those who would embrace the MB's hope must also accept, in one way or another, the risks involved in bringing it to fruition. Likewise, taking this initiative from within the flow of our respective circumstances means that whoever wishes to join in the effort would do well to begin by taking stock of their own positionality, and seeking out collaborators who can bring clarity where there might be blind spots.

Mella's ethical framework for creative action unpacks what this approach might mean more concretely (Mella 2015: 94-127). Building bridges that lead to harmony entails a praxis of dialogue that attends to asymmetrical power dynamics, but is also

rooted in mutual care, open to forgiveness and invested in building trust. If this seems unrealistic, let us take heart in the Misión de Bachajón's "audacity of the impossible."

Then they said to each other,
"Were not our hearts burning within us […]?"

Luke 24, 32

List of Formal Interviews

1. José Avilés. Jesuit superior of the Misión de Bachajón during my fieldwork. He was directly involved in the agrarian reform of the 1990s, as director of the Centro de Derechos Indígenas, A.C. He is also the diocesan coordinator of the Catholic Peace and Justice commission. Interviewed in Bachajón on 8th November 2015.

2. Felipe Ali Modad Aguilar. During my fieldwork he was the Jesuit in charge of the Misión de Bachajón's pastoral ministry and projects related to linguistic sovereignty. Interviewed in Bachajón on 12th February 2016.

3. Carlos Camarena Labadie. A Jesuit who had been in the Misión de Bachajón since 1959; he passed away while I was on fieldwork. Interviewed in Chilón on 10th November 2015.

4. Esther Cuevas. A religious sister (Hermana del Divino Pastor) who has led the Misión de Bachajón's health program since the 1960s. Interviewed in Chilón on 8th February 2016.

5. José Aquino. Co-founder with Oscar Rodríguez of the Misión de Bachajón's business branch, Yomol A'tel, and chief cupper of its coffee roasting plant, Bats'il Maya. This interview is cited throughout the thesis as Yomol A'tel (forthcoming), since it is the basis for a publication based on José's oral history as transcribed by me. Interviewed in Chilón over the course of several days in March 2016.

6. A founding member of the Misión de Bachajón's coffee producer cooperative, Ts'umbal Xitalha', who asked to remain anonymous. Interviewed in Chilón on 15th March 2016.

7. Enrique Pieck. A researcher affiliated with the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, who has coordinated Yomol A'tel's two major participatory action research systematizations. Interviewed in Mexico City on 4th September 2015.

8. José Alejandro Aguilar. Jesuit ally and agroecological adviser of the Misión de Bachajón; he has played a leadership role in the Comparte network through the Colombian organization, Suyusama. Interviewed in Vitoria, Spain, on 18th May 2017.

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