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The International Market, Globalization and NAFTA: If Food Is Life, Why Have We Allowed It to Become So Dirty?

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First Thoughts, Decision Making and Methodology

I began my ISP planning to focus on urban agriculture as an extension of food sovereignty in the city of Oaxaca in order to better understand it as a movement in terms of its influences and future goals as well as its current applications in the city. Urban agriculture is an alternative way of living and viewing modern urban life where, today, over half of the world's population lives. Though agriculture is often associated with the countryside, urban agriculture is a feasible and increasingly necessary alternative that can create for us a new image as to where food is grown and shared. It is a part of the overall response to modern methods of food production, consumption and distribution, which are today influenced by top-down pressures of the international market that have rendered us passive consumers, unaware of the origins or contents of our food. With this background knowledge, I had hoped to learn more about the application of urban agriculture specifically in Oaxaca, Mexico as integral to *la lucha para autosuficiencia*.

However, after a frustrating first week of investigation, limited findings and a persuasive meeting with my advisors, I realized that though urban agriculture does exist as a growing force in Oaxaca City, it remains but a young initiative that would not provide me with sufficient information to address overall issues of food sovereignty. I recognized that the underlying mission of urban agriculture as an alternative to food dependency on governmental and transnational powers is shared by numerous organizations and individuals throughout Oaxaca and beyond. Thus, I have devoted my 2008 spring semester ISP investigation to learning about the alternative routes pursued by a variety of initiatives whose members have dedicated their time and energies to creating and promoting sustainable alternatives to the current dominant, international system of

agriculture that is destroying local culture, techniques and human health. Together, they have proven a widely-shared determination to create a healthier, more sustainable and self-reliant Oaxaca in the name of that which unifies them all: the overall search food sovereignty.

As we have learned during this semester as part of SIT's Oaxaca, Mexico: Grassroots Development and Social Change program, people and groups throughout Oaxaca are working to change unjust political, social, economic and environmental realities in which they find themselves, often due to outside forces. My strong interest in agriculture stems from the reality that all people must eat food for survival, yet many activist groups forget to include the fight for food sovereignty as integral to breaking our dependence on international powers. Today's 21st century food system, driven by the whim of a small elite in control of the transnational seed and soil business, does not acknowledge locally appropriate and historically accurate and important methods and types of food production in its highly detrimental, neoliberal agenda. Indeed,

the failure to address the sustainability of food systems...reflects the way in which agriculture has been viewed in Latin America, and the dominant role of the industrial and urban sectors within the policy debates that have taken place during the last 30 years¹

I took this ISP time to discover through interviews, observation and participation why the importance of sustainable local food systems has been largely ignored and what alternative actions are being taken to address this dire problem in the Oaxaca City.

My study of this topic has depended on the willingness of directors of organizations, teachers, and individuals to share with me their time, knowledge and unhindered passion about creating sustainable communities and growing organic agriculture throughout Oaxaca. Talking to self-starters of individual agricultural

initiatives as well as working directly with organic food production and its preparation and sale at an organic market was integral in furnishing me with a well-rounded view of organic agriculture from the perspective of both consumer and producer. I also found it easy and logical to expand my topic of local food sovereignty and place it in an international context after learning from nearly every participant that their efforts to create local alternatives were in direct response to the oppressive global food system. Secondary sources helped to enhance my discussion of international realities and statistics and conversations with my advisor helped to ground me to better understand my role in my ISP and in the food justice movement as a whole.

Overall, I found this project to be an incredibly enjoyable and challenging experience. While I am accustomed to spending hours in the library reading about people and experiences, the nature of the ISP forced me to get out onto the streets and into the dirt (often literally), speaking directly with individuals rather than learning about them. I would have liked to have had more time to devote to volunteering with Val and Adriana on their land, learning about production processes and speaking with their workers about their personal experiences with and beliefs toward agriculture in Oaxaca and globally. Additional time too would have allowed me to visit and perhaps volunteer with organizations like ITT, INSO, or even CICEANA in Mexico City, an urban agriculture initiative. Also, if I were to add something else to my experience, I would have liked to have worked with a peer interested in the same topic. Perhaps together we could have shared ideas and observational opinions that may have broadened my own perspective.

To be sure, the nature of this topic and my growing interest in it requires years of investigation; this ISP has helped me to take the first steps in research and discovery that I hope will lead to future projects and experiences in the field of alternative agriculture as we all fight for food sovereignty.

The International Market, Globalization and NAFTA: If Food is Life, Why Have we allowed it to Become So Dirty?

The word *globalization* is thrown around constantly today and often without consistent or correct usage. But what does globalization mean and what are its dually positive and negative connotations? I believe that the processes and realities we see today are not so much powered by globalization - a process I would assert to have been in effect for many hundreds of years as indicated by the international movement of people and commerce - but by *global capitalism*, or the interconnectedness of nations over the world based on a multi-faceted reliance on transnational organizations for information, technology and basic food stuffs.

My interest in this current global reality as specifically applied to food is rooted in the fact that every human being, regardless of cultural, historical, or spiritual background or beliefs, requires food to survive as a basic human need and thus should have a right to it. What has rapidly occurred over the past several decades is the commoditization of this daily requirement, leading to an unprecedented degree of processing and the immense hunger and forced migration of human beings, many of whom “simply have to move into cities. It is not that they want to; it is that the world market makes it that they

(particularly farmers) – their spouses, their children, their grandchildren – cannot compete with world food prices and so they have move to the city to survive.”ⁱⁱ When small- and medium-sized farms cannot compete with the internationally set price for essential grains, such as corn, rice, wheat, and soy, they are impelled to give up their ancient methods of self-sustenance and diverse crop production and are forced to rely on the corrupt “global supermarket.”ⁱⁱⁱ Resultant is an

Overdependence on market forces (that) has adverse long-range implications for the environment, the survival of indigenous peoples, nutrition, quality of life, and the political and economic stability of the nation. Questions about feeding Mexico go to the heart of such broader development issues as the relations among markets, the state, and communities.^{iv}

As Tom Barry has put so succinctly in his book *Zapata`s Revenge : Free Trade and the Farm Crisis in Mexico*, the specialized and large-scale methods of global food production do not take into account the cultural and environmental varieties and needs of individuals and communities all over the world. The idiosyncrasies of livelihoods and centuries-old lifestyles for many are lost in the name of increased profits for an elite few in our modern, global society.

Concurrently, what was once an often spiritual relationship with our food and our bodies has become a mechanical process from which has evolved an increasingly dangerous distance between the essential life processes of the production and consumption of our daily bread.^v The nature of our modern economy, ruled by a handful of transnational businesses concerned primarily with personal financial accumulation, demands a large scale, high-yielding method of food production. This has destroyed small- and medium-sized farming operations and has led to an ever-increasing distance between the methods of production, distribution and finally consumption in a global food

system so unsustainable and 'non-functional' that social and environmental destruction are inevitable.^{vi} Not only is this a cultural and environmental injustice, but that the decisions of those in power have taken from communities throughout the world the ability to determine what is best for them and their families in the name of self-sustenance and food consumption is too a violation of basic human rights.

Due to the topic of my investigation and my location in Oaxaca, Mexico, an essential example of the impact of "a dominant minority"^{vii} imposing world economic influence on countries rich in human and natural resources such as Mexico is that of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Signed on the 17th of December, 1992 by its three Parties, Canada, the United States of America and Mexico, before entering into the international economy as a force on the first of January, 1994, NAFTA is one of the most important trade agreements in the Americas due to the far-reaching, unequal impact of its neoliberal aims by all Parties involved.^{viii} Its overarching objective is to eliminate barriers to trade to facilitate easier cross-border movement of goods and services. In terms of basic grains, this elimination of tariffs and quotas has generated absurd financial success for a few transnational seed and agrochemical companies while it has concomitantly destroyed domestic food economies. Before NAFTA, Mexico's basic grains sector in terms of corn "held strategic importance" on the international market and was always a form of social stability and food security as it provided an estimated 70% of caloric intake for rural families. Beyond its inseparable cultural importance to Mexico, corn production was also an essential source of employment and accounted for 65% of agricultural production.^{ix}

Yet, with the onslaught of NAFTA and the continuation of high-yielding industrialized and government subsidized corn production from the US, Mexico's unprotected, traditionally produced maize could not compete. Corn imports to Mexico from the US increased by over 20 percent and "American maize was dumped abroad at prices ranging from 13 to 33% below the cost of production" due to US government subsidies and price supports, a luxury most Mexican farmers do not have.^x As tortilla prices continue to soar,^{xi} maize is losing its once essential role in daily Mexican life as the mechanization of production and the liberalization of markets has forced the desertion of milpa fields and has fueled the rampant loss of jobs and a traditionally agricultural way of life in Mexico. NAFTA has enabled the US to dump into Mexico its excess, far less nutritious, genetically modified grains and food products, creating a socially, environmentally and culturally unhealthy economic interdependence between these two border nations. Neoliberal policies such as NAFTA has transformed food into a business heavily weighted with political and economic pressures, a fact that often leads one to forget that food is essential to life. Healthy food, full of balanced nutrients, free of pesticides and, ideally, locally grown, carries a stark difference than that which is consumed daily by many (if not most) of our global citizens today in mostly urban but also rural settings. Large agribusiness that relies on monocrop cultivation and the heavy use of pesticides and chemicals at every stage of production and distribution have taken over world markets, making it impossible for traditional, small farmers to continue their practices and forcing consumers to ingest food dangerous to both human and environmental health. Due to a Mexican government that rarely enforces pesticide use or abuse regulations and has "largely ignored the health consequences of the uncontrolled

application of agrochemicals, ... A 1993 report by the National Human Rights Commission concluded that Mexicans have one of the world's highest amounts of toxic substances in their bloodstreams.^{xii} This same report conducted a study and results from blood tests from Sonora, México found that traces of fourteen agrochemicals appeared in mothers' breast milk while infants' blood showed traces of ten pesticides.

Not only is agribusiness today literally killing Mexican consumers, farmworkers and their families, but the overall mechanized and neoliberal approach to production for profit has robbed Mexico of its agricultural-based food culture and security over the past several centuries. The decisions and trade agreements of elite international powers have caused a massive desertion of the countryside, rural agricultural practices and traditional methods of living. As previously mentioned, the change in the relationship to maize is hugely profound in Mexico, but maize is not the only crop native to Mexico that has been affected by this change in international economic agricultural relations; amaranth and its cultural and health implications were also plucked from this nation by outside forces in a similarly thoughtless manner. Amaranth, or *Amaranto*, is a grain indigenous to Mexico and Mesoamerica. Because it needs very little water, requires days of strong sun and has the ability to withstand drought, it grows incredibly well in this region. It is also fortified with high levels of calcium, iron, folic acid and zinc and, when combined with other grains such as rice, oats, or wheat, it forms a powerful and perfect protein. Amaranth, considered "The best food of vegetable origin for human consumption,"^{xiii} provides seeds, leaves and stem that can (and should) be eaten in a variety of ways and added to dishes already consumed on a regular basis. Indeed, it is a supplement that will lead to

far healthier individuals and communities as long as its abilities, potential uses and means of production are distributed as essential knowledge to the greater public.^{xiv}

This understanding and the necessary research and activism to endorse this information is the job of Puente a la Salud Comunitaria, an A.C. (*asociación civil*, or civil society/association) with headquarters in Oaxaca City whose mission it is to collaborate with families, producers and health workers to promote the cultivation and consumption of amaranth in order to foster healthier rural communities, families and individuals.

Their results have been astounding. On the day of a workshop that I attended at Puente's main office, a Oaxacan amaranth activist in her thirties, cradling a healthy son whom we were all shocked to learn was only three-month old son, explained: "Clearly, I had a very *very* large child. At birth, he weighed twice that which a baby is expected to weigh... I ate amaranth every day of my pregnancy."^{xv} Puente's research and promotion in rural Oaxacan communities supports her claim. In a country where malnutrition is a dangerously common reality and Oaxaca has one of the highest percentages of those suffering – 8.8% of the population has severe malnutrition, 30.47% suffers from high levels and 17.7% from moderate malnutrition – Puente found that after a year of amaranth consumption in rural communities as compared to a placebo variable held constant (without amaranth), there was a 61% recuperation rate from malnutrition among participants.^{xvi} Puente also asserts that amaranth helps with anemia due to its high levels of iron, prevents type II diabetes because of low fat levels and high nutritional value and that if eaten daily during a woman's life, it will greatly improve her health, her menstrual cycle and the future health of her children and family.^{xvii}

Co-Founder Catherine Lorenz and fellow staff members at the organization held this, their first of hopefully many future workshops, one stormy Friday afternoon during the end of April. There, they showed a PowerPoint to a group of attentive learners and offered an interactive cooking and history lesson, the last of which depicted through drawings on 14 20" x 20" laminated squares the obliteration of the amaranth plant by the Spanish in the sixteenth century and, thus, the destruction of local cultural, religious and health practices tied intricately to the grain in ancient Mesoamerican society. The last of the history squares showed the disturbing modern results of this destruction with a representative image of a Mexican family consuming Coca-Cola and Cornflake products. This suggested that in today's modern family, much of what is consumed contains corn-syrup or substances of corn origin, most often grown from transgenic, US grown crops at unnaturally and unjustly low production costs. Brief and to-the-point, the history lesson was a reminder for me and other participants that, especially in Mexico, food has immense cultural value that can and should be revived.

Thus, according to Puente's mission and work, supporting amaranth growth locally and naturally is an essential step forward in the reclamation of local traditions. They not only work with outside learners looking to improve their consumption patterns and better understand Mexican culture in a historic and modern context, but also and most importantly with indigenous communities in Oaxaca to reinforce the health benefits and cultural importance of amaranth growth and consumption. As these communities are relying more on their ancient methods of food production, they depend less on the international food markets that are so often the root causes of local health, environmental and cultural strife.

Puente is one of the many organizations with which I met that are working to create grassroots alternatives to the dominant global food system that prevails today. They challenge the assumption that one must assimilate to or remain part of the Western, neoliberal way of life where profit accumulation – without considering human rights and cultural dignity – remains the primary goal. Even with its small organizational structure, Puente enforces their belief that these changes can be made and that we can work apart from the international market and begin to rely on our own needs and those of the local environment and community. They prove that a degree of reclaimed food sovereignty is possible. Yet, in our modern world filled with social, political, economic and environmental inequality, can we truly remedy our dependency on international, elite powers by depending on each other? The actions and mentalities shared by the other people and organizations with whom I met would suggest that it is indeed possible.

Self-Sufficiency: A Radical Movement or a Feasible Option?

Inherent in our modern capitalist world, where “100 people have more material wealth than the rest of human kind,”^{xviii} there is an injustice rooted in the systemic means of production that supports profit rather than social needs. This, along with expanding geo-political relations that forcibly connect societies through global economic market dependence, has destroyed our commons and has bred an alienation between individuals and workers and consumers and producers that has led to a loss in the meaning of production.

Gustavo Esteva, founder of la Universidad de la Tierra and promoter of finding alternatives to education and harmful modern ways of living, helped to explain these realities and their modern-day implications during a group meeting in March. At his self-designed home adorned with fruit trees, vegetable gardens, sustainable building and cleaning materials and *baños secos*^{xix}, he advocated his firm belief in the need for each member of our increasingly global society to “reclaim the meaning of work” and to begin to “invest in and produce for social needs...everywhere and not just for profit.”^{xx} Using as an ideal example of self-reliant, food sovereign communities Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares,^{xxi} Gustavo explained how we must restructure our current consumer-producer relationships and, instead of relying on foreign markets, we must work for the good of our communities. He referenced his self-defined *Localization*, “against localism and globalism, an ‘inplaceness’ and open arms to many different people”^{xxii} and emphasized our need to create a *commons* and, thus, move beyond individual self-interest and begin to rely on the work, dedication and thoughtfulness of peers to put forward their best and most sincere effort in the name of creating a healthier and more beautiful commons for the sake of their community as a whole.

While this may appear to be an impossibly utopian society painted by Gustavo Esteva, the actions and ensuing results of several organizations and individuals suggest otherwise. CideCI, also known as Unitierra Chiapas, has been a center for learning and an innovator of alternatives since its founding in August of 1989. Similar to the *caracoles*^{xxiii} of the Zapatista movement, CideCI is fighting for autonomous rights of indigenous communities in a creative and organized way. When we arrived as a group of students to meet with Maestro Rafael, our guide for the day and an integral member of

the organization for the past 19 years, we were invited to sit around an over-sized, golden-hued wooden table in regal chairs of the same material, both of which we were soon to learn had been hand-made from local materials by community and student workers at CideCI. The design and idiosyncrasies of the meeting room, including but not limited to warm brown bricks, red tapestries, high ceilings, wooden beams, followed the same method of construction from reused and natural materials by local community members.

After an informative introductory explanation, Maestro Rafael took us on a tour, which truly enforced the organized and self-sustaining nature of their operation that they use as their “fight against the government and capitalism.”^{xxiv} Each of their many *talleres*, or workshops, which ranged from indigenous textile production to shoe making to bread making to a medical facility and learning center to pottery making in a tree house and everything in between, proved indeed that their means of fighting against government dependency was through the development of highly sophisticated means of sustaining themselves and their community with the natural resources and the physical and mental tools locally available.

When talking about *autosuficiencia*, or self-sufficiency, one of the first systems that must be addressed is that of food production and the idea of food sovereignty,

the RIGHT of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies.^{xxv}

Between outdoor garden plots, terraced rows of vegetables and plants, and several greenhouses, CideCI grows a significant percentage of its own food on its grounds and also teaches local and international workers *how* to achieve this degree of food sovereignty through an increased understanding of local weather and soil conditions and various methods of seed use and crop cultivation. In demonstrating that this self-initiated and maintained production works well and is achievable for everyone, CideCI enforces their belief that we truly can and must begin to rely on ourselves more than the government for our basic human needs if we ever wish to free ourselves from the oppressive capitalistic system, which is neither sustaining nor lucrative, in which we presently find ourselves.

The structure and success of CideCI's rabbit initiative proves the feasibility of food sovereignty and the creativity of the organization. After a ten minute hike uphill, our group came upon several small vegetable gardens in front of a medium-sized wooden house, with which we soon discovered to be filled with hundreds of rabbits of various colors and sizes. While my inner vegetarian cringed momentarily, such nausea subsided immediately once the keeper of the rabbits and overseer of the initiative explained their function not only as a source of protein, but also as a the key ingredient in a workshop that taught learners how to keep their own rabbits and create a business through the breeding and distribution of this important nutritive source. Thus, these rabbits provided a financially, nutritionally and locally sustainable option whereby the individual rabbit-vendor relies on community members as consumers and the community relies on the individual to provide the meat. Through this taller, among many others, CideCI proves that through hard work, creative initiatives and trust, we can help to sustain each other.

Sharing a similarly passionate and steadfast view that the fight for healthier, food sovereign and self-sustaining communities can be won is shared by an organization whose structure and mission closely resembled that of CideCI. Located in Ejutla, Oaxaca, El Instituto Tonantzin Tlalli (ITT) is a learning center and a space for the exchange of knowledge and traditional “know-how” under the umbrella organization, GRUPEDSAC, or, in English, the Group for the Promotion of Education and Sustainable Development.^{xxvi} On an incredibly hot Oaxacan mid-afternoon, I met director Javier Zaragoza for an interview to learn more about his organization and his views on alternative and sustainable initiatives in Oaxaca. Mr. Zaragoza immediately emphasized that the overarching mission of ITT is to teach that self-sustainability is indeed “an economically and environmentally viable option for families in various rural and urban communities throughout Oaxaca.” According to him and ITT, “self-sustainability” means constant access to food, clean air, clean and available water, and housing in order to make viable healthier environments and bodies. The daily work of the center is the promotion of this belief through a variety of academic and physical workshops both on and off ITT grounds.^{xxvii}

To achieve this mission and maintain their space as a tool for teaching and knowledge sharing, ITT has focused on three areas: permaculture, eco-technologies and volunteering. Why focus on these three? “We are trying to promote knowledge about land, resources and human and community relationships with them based on the environmental, economic and social conditions of Oaxaca,”^{xxviii} such as poverty or the poor climate and dry soil conditions faced by many, especially Oaxaca’s indigenous community. Javier continued, “We want to resolve the needs of the people through

healthier actions toward the land,^{xxxix} a task that is realized in a variety of ways on their ten acres, of which five are currently in use. These three initiatives, according to the Javier, represent broadly those elements that must be developed to achieve a sustainable alternative to daily life. ITT's devotion to permaculture, a system of living that respects and works to preserve local culture and agriculture through sustainable techniques and relationships to the land,^{xxx} is realized through their commitment to plant diversification rather than specialization and to the natural regeneration of crops native to the area in order to promote food sovereignty. With their *huertos orgánicos*,^{xxxi} they promote food production on their grounds as a teaching tool primarily for members of local indigenous communities, but also for national and international learners with a variety of backgrounds. They are currently working with *bolitas mágicas*^{xxxii} that are prepared as balls of soil, seed and fertilizer and then planted whole during the rainy season to best utilize limited water resources.

Water quality and quantity is integral to agricultural success; that it is increasingly limited and contaminated presents for those involved in agriculture an often life-threatening problem. ITT is looking for ways to remedy these *agua* challenges. The center is now working on projects to purify and make potable the water on their grounds, which they have accomplished through intense study of the water cycle and its dually human and ecological relationship. These eco-technologies, named as such because the well being of the environment and the use and reuse of natural materials are essential to their construction, have been created and improved upon by ITT and shared with other organizations and locals in also looking to improve methods of water purification and collection.

In addition, thanks to the savvy of scientists, technicians and locals and their knowledge about earth processes, currently underway are reforestation and soil conservation projects, including an initiative to construct cisterns from *ferrocemento* (a natural material made from metal and cement). For the sustenance of both water and soil, a commonly used and advocated method is *terracing*, whereby step-like notches are human-made on the sides of hills and mountains to prevent soil erosion and water runoff. This can also be achieved with walls built from alternative materials that are strategically constructed on areas of land where runoff is common. Such materials include *soale*, originally from Africa, *ferrocemento*, and *pajarcilla*, a mixture of wheat with other grains and adobe, elements of which are all found locally and often reused in their original form in a manner that is culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable.

Javier emphasized that, though their efforts are generally for and on behalf of indigenous communities, the actions and direct involvement of international volunteers are important components to the operation. The volunteers at ITT, after an excruciatingly competitive selection process as is enforced by Javier, enter as a pre-requisite with a strong belief in the importance of self-sufficiency and give an incredible amount of their time and energy to the organization, leaving the results of their devotion and taking with them the knowledge and pride from these results and the determination to spread awareness internationally. Indeed, 70% of the volunteers are foreigners, mostly from the United States, England and Germany, who Javier believes to add an important element of diversity and outside knowledge and experience to the operation.^{xxxiii}

He hopes to expand his outreach for volunteers and increase his standards as part of his and ITT's mission for their future. They plan to become an international center of

permaculture, environmental education, eco-technologies and research in order to “rescue the knowledge in the area pertaining to the land, nature, and the people.”^{xxxiv} Javier emphasized the need for food sovereignty within the concept of self-sustenance as necessary now more than ever due to the ever-increasing destruction caused by the international food market. Javier explained:

There are a few major differences between the international market and the idea of self-sufficiency. The market looks for consumers and needs liquid assets in order to sell other things. It is not concerned with what is natural or organic. It uses one crop and fabricates everything. It isolates. Self-sufficiency looks only for that – sufficiency of the self. It relies on diversification (of crops) and the work of the individual or family or community.^{xxxv}

Isolation does not exist in a self-sustaining lifestyle because one must rely on local family and community members to be fed and sheltered and protected. In terms of food sovereignty, this fosters a direct and often honest connection between producer and consumer. The international market as is structured today has broken down this common space of work and trust and has forced an individualism that often excludes caring for others. It has limited the ability of these individuals to know how their consumer decisions are affecting the environment and fellow human beings, leading to what Gustavo Esteva asserted to be an isolative cycle of meaningless work and consumption in today’s globalized world.



Distribution: The Link between Producer and Consumer

A necessary step in adding meaning to our methods of production is making a visual and physical connection between producers and consumers, something that is especially challenging in an urban setting. In studying the food market, I thought it was important to speak with vendors at a market in Oaxaca City that I frequented throughout my stay. I spoke with a total of three vendors, two women and a man, and asked them to describe their typical work day and general views regarding their work and produce. All participants, who daily sell fruit and vegetables at this market, have asked to remain anonymous.

Interestingly, each vendor proudly emphasized that their produce came from Mexico, though not a single participant could tell me from where specifically (city, state) or the methods of production (outdoor hectares, greenhouses, size of farms, methods of plague and bug protection, chemical use, etc.). The physical and mental distance between vendor and the means of production became more clear as each participant readily admitted that they felt no specific relationship to the produce, other than that they were selling it as means of monetary income for themselves and family.^{xxxvi} This confession is representative of the commoditization of food and the deterioration of a close relationship between producer and vendor, which could ideally be one in the same or, at the very least, directly connected. For these three vendors, likely due to necessity rather than choice^{xxxvii}, produce is a commodity rather than an extension of their labor. With this relationship on a global scale, lost is a level of appreciation for the nutritive and cultural value of the crop, correspondingly seen only as a product to be sold rather than

an essential entity with which to nourish the body and enhance a relationship with and respect for the land.

Though this commercialized view of and relationship to vegetables and fruit is omnipresent in our modern global supermarket,^{xxxviii} by no means is it the only available option. Only two blocks north of this first market, down a cobble stone road through an arc overpass of stone, every Friday and Saturday morning El Pochote Organic Market comes to life. If you arrive early, the morning sun remains cool and the walk through the market is especially enjoyable with the bustle of people setting up their stalls and hungry on-lookers waiting for free samples, massive tortas, breakfast pizzas, muffins and coffee. Stationed throughout the small courtyard are about fifteen vendors representing organic farms and natural food stores throughout Oaxaca. Beyond fruits and vegetables, there are breads, cheeses, coffee, specialty meats and numerous other goods offered by families and individuals who are devoted to producing and selling organic and natural food for themselves and the greater community for a healthier Oaxaca.

At the urging of my advisors, I interviewed a female tomato vendor who, like the three produce vendors from the previous market, requested to remain nameless. She explained how she and her husband produce organic tomatoes in large quantities and emphasized the exceptionally difficult nature of this task due to the strong Oaxaqueño sun and high temperatures, lack of water and dry soil and the reality that tomatoes are particularly susceptible to various plagues and bacteria.^{xxxix} On their land, approximately 2,000 square meters, they use greenhouses so as to ensure production all year-round. They also refuse to use anything other than organic compost and fertilizers and, though plagues are rampant, she claims they have never used any kind of pesticide or chemical in

their production. She lifted a tomato from her display and drew my attention to the top of the tomato where it was plucked from its stem, pointing to the slight yellow discoloration. “This plague is called *aranja roja* and it is very, very common. It eats the plant – first the leaf and then the tomato – and makes it yellow. It can ruin a whole crop if we don’t remove the tomatoes from the vines first” she explained.^{x1} In her two years immersed in this agricultural endeavor with her spouse, by far their largest struggle has been the presence of plagues and the threat of a lost harvest. However, for her, it is worth the risk as she is producing what she believes to be food that is truly healthy for the environment and for herself. My conversation with her taught me that an enormous degree of devotion and conviction is required when growing organic food due the high risks associated with its production; yet, the reward of being able to sell that which your labor produced clearly outweighs the costs.

This steadfast commitment to organic food is championed by El Pochote market, where the consumption and production of organic food is promoted to no end. As a general background definition,

organic food production has certain characteristics including (that) the product was grown or raised by a producer who uses practices in balance with nature, using methods and materials that do not harm or destroy the environment. The farmer is committed to maintaining harmony with the environment, building biodiversity, and fostering healthy soil and growing conditions.^{xli}

This mentality and commitment to leading a more rounded, sustainable lifestyle – similar and often integral to that of permaculture – is how Val, another El Pochote vendor, has chosen to live her life and structure her profession. During this ISP period, she invited me to help harvest and sell her vegetables, which was a great experience. To prepare for a long morning at the market, we began Thursday afternoon into evening cutting those

greens and herbs that could be soaked in water overnight without going limp. We arranged pre-orders of greens, herbs and other vegetables, cutting, rinsing and tying them together with moss-green string. At five o'clock Friday morning, Val and I awoke and returned to her farm to finish cutting, cleaning and packing vegetables. Then, literally loading me and multiple crates of vegetables into her small car, Val drove us to Pochote where we set up a table, spread out our produce and began interacting with customers and selling our food.

I undeniably felt a special pride in offering to the public the food that I had picked, cleaned, arranged and knew was organically produced; I can only imagine how these proud sentiments are amplified for Val and the other vendors at Pochote who plant and care for their produce from its origins and then hand it directly to their fellow Oaxacan consumers. This exchange from producer to consumer, rare in today's industrialized world, is an important goal for which we must work as we search for alternatives to food production, distribution and consumption. El Pochote and those who support it through their hard work, sales and purchases is an essential alternative formed from the grassroots that proves communities can achieve a degree of food sovereignty and build a stronger consumer-producer relationship.

Individual Alternatives for Self-Sufficient Living

El Pochote, as well as other organic markets in Oaxaca such as La Merced and Red Mexicana, could not function without the work of farmers who grow and tend to their land to make available such an abundance of organic produce. This requires not only a knowledge of the seasons, daily climate, plant needs, and soil and water problems, but a drive to create an alternative to the dominant system of agricultural economics and a willingness to push through difficult local and international challenges. It is with this determination that Val began her own farm in Oaxaca 18 years ago.

I first met Val at six o'clock in the morning near Tule, where she picked me up in her dusty, purple VW beetle. Void of back seats, the car took me on a shaky 20 minute ride away from Tule toward the countryside, each minute further away from the noise and commotion of the city center. Upon arrival at her farm, Arbol de la Vida, located across from a colorful kindergarten, her two dogs greeted us with bounds of energy and led us toward her land currently under cultivation. Surrounded entirely by large mountains, her two acre garden is nestled in the valley of Oaxaca. Closest to the entrance were five orange trees heavy with the green-hued fruit as well as six more carrying lemons, tangerines and kumquats. Offered as an apologetic explanation for the brown-colored leaves of her citrus trees, Val stressed that she “simply could not use the little water (she) had just for the trees; (she) needed it for the products that would sell in the market.”^{xliii} A water shortage for Val threatens both her crops and her market sales, on which she relies in part for a living salary. Indeed, the whims of nature have an immense impact on those devoted to a life of agriculture.

Generally, as long as climate is favorable, Val grows and sells greens such as lettuce, arugula, kale, New Zealand spinach, red chard, dinosaur kale and a plethora of herbs, including but not limited to basil, dill, parsley and cilantro. She arrives early every Friday morning at El Pochote market and hopes to sell all of her weekly produce. “By no means is this a lucrative career. I have chosen it as a lifestyle because I believe that we should be eating organic food free of pesticides and chemicals and hundreds of food miles. If you want my full perspective, read Pollan’s *Omnivore’s Dilemma*,”^{xliii} she added with a grin as we walked up and down her rows of lettuce and kale, covered by black sheets in anticipation of the strong afternoon sun. Val recounted that it was only a few decades ago that one had to avoid all greens in Oaxaca because of the pesticides and chemicals used in large quantities by most farmers. In her opinion, pesticides have become “entirely all-too commonplace in modern agriculture.”^{xliv} Indeed, the large scale production that the international market demands today cannot be achieved without the use of agrochemicals – sold by the same transnational companies whose genetically modified seeds have a monopoly on the market – to kill bacteria and plagues. This is neither sustainable for our health nor for the environment. Luckily, there has been a slow but growing demand among consumers in many parts of the world for produce free of pesticides, something that can be best achieved through diverse, organic growth on small plots of land. Val related this trend to her experience as a producer and vendor in local Oaxacan markets. Due to what she believes to be a boom in the tourist industry, she hypothesized that demand for her organic greens has grown a bit, though it still only provides her with a small salary. She hopes a continually growing awareness about the importance of organics will soon bring her more consumers.^{xlv}

In discussing organic demand and market supply, we soon found our conversation veering away from the local El Pochote and heading fast for big business and the international food market according to Val, frustrated with unfair competition from pre-packaged lettuce companies. “*Lechuga Viva* knew that people had begun hearing the word ‘organic’ and they jumped on it,”^{xlvi} Val fumed, continuing to say that this relatively new brand of lettuce wore the word *organic* boldly and, in her opinion, fallaciously on its package of pre-washed lettuce. When I told her that I had eaten salads several times in restaurants here that claimed to be organic she scoffed, emphasizing that false marketing is rampant and is taking away consumer agency in making decisions about their food. “If the standards get bastardized so much, people are not going to know what they are buying. Here, in this common situation (the example of false-advertizing by *Lechuga Viva* brand) organic isn’t organic... This whole food thing is going to be a huge crisis.”^{xlvii}

To Val, “This whole food thing” represents the vast discrepancy between consumer and producer. In addition to the physical distance between food production and the dinner plate, what is so often lacking is consumer understanding of the meaning and value of organic and sustainable produce versus the true costs of modern industrial production. Indeed,

These hidden costs include environmental degradation, use of fossil fuels, damage to human health, and the destruction of rural communities. These costs are not paid for by the owners of factory farms; they are paid for by residents of the communities in which these operations are located, by taxpayers and by consumers.^{xlviii}

If consumers were fully aware of the far-reaching impact of their choices, it is hopeful that they would feel far more impelled to purchase Val's New Zealand spinach over *Lechuga Viva* brand.

The model and mission of Val's individual endeavor parallels that of Adriana Guzman and her husband, who moved to Oaxaca from Mexico City in search of a lifestyle that would promote such a healthy lifestyle for themselves and community. After working with indigenous communities in the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca to improve certain ecotourism projects, they began Tierra del Sol six years ago. Today, their four hectares (about ten acres) of land are dedicated to the cultivation, construction, use and dissemination of knowledge of organic agriculture and sustainable living.

On an exceptionally hot April morning, a twenty minute taxi ride left me a bit lost on the side of the highway, looking out onto a flat desert with scrub plants that stood between me and the mountains. Luckily, I had seen pictures of Tierra del Sol prior to my visit and immediately located my intended destination at the sight of a grand, silver *molino* (windmill) casting its shadow on a large triangular roof, which I would soon learn to be made of palm and local wood and adobe materials. Indeed, during our interview shaded by the morning sun by another palm-leaf roof, one of the first things that Adriana stressed was that each building – whether a baño seco, dormitory, or general meeting space – had been constructed with the use of local reused and natural materials.^{xlix} We continued our interview as Adriana took me on a tour of her land while discussing the structure of Tierra del Sol and her beliefs and devotion to a sustainable lifestyle.

On their two hectares currently in use, she and her husband are working to grow organic crops and plants and have constructed and continue to experiment with

alternative technologies. Adriana showed me their peanut-shell - based compost, a handmade, in-ground swimming pool that both functions as a rain catchment and a refuge from the afternoon heat, a water filtration system, baños secos (the only toilets they have) and a large *pozo de agua* (water well) that not only serves the water needs of Tierra del Sol but also those of thirty-eight local community members. We headed toward the garden, where Adriana taught me the systemic organization of her plants. On ten-by-one meter-long beds, of which there were about twenty, carrots, lettuce, beats, onions, kale, and calabaza grew in conjunction with a variety of flowers and herbs. She explained to me that she always plants the primary crop (vegetable) and the flowers one after the other, every two-by-one meter plot, and then later rotates the pattern so as to replenish soil nutrients through the exchange.¹

After years of research, experimentation, failure and the energy to repeatedly start again, these are the methods and systems that Adriana has discovered to work best with the soil, climate and resources of the region. The bounty and beauty of her crops and flowers are a brilliant physical manifestation of her knowledge and dedication to Tierra del Sol, as its grounds speak to her creativity and eye for beautiful design. We continued our tour through the garden along an adobe path, lined with dozens of sunflowers that mimicked human beings and seemed to stare at me in the eyes, until we approached an open building topped by a burnt-red tent, where vegetables are washed, rinsed, dried, organized, separated and wrapped as “boxed orders” and then sold on a regular basis to families, restaurants, La Merced organic market in Oaxaca and to a local Montessori school. Supporting Val’s earlier market speculation, Adriana emphasized that there is currently little demand for organic produce in Oaxaca and she feels her cleaning and

preparing her vegetables increases her sales. Overall, Adriana and her husband are confident, “and hopeful,” that the local market demand for organics will continue to increase for their own financial well being as well as the health of the greater Oaxacan community.^{li}

Most importantly for Adriana and her spouse is to create a wholly sustainable lifestyle, which they view as possible only once each aspect of living “gives back to another step in the process as well as to the people involved and the surrounding community.” For example, five months during the growing season Tierra del Sol invites students from local schools in the city of Oaxaca and in nearby Tlacachuaya to work on the land and learn about food production. To Adriana, this learning workshop for youth is crucial right now because “kids simply do not know that their food comes from the ground. It sounds crazy to you and me, but so many of us are out of touch with how our food is produced.” Presently working to better organize this school-to-farm outreach as well as enhance their volunteer program for both local and international participants, she emphasized that her efforts are powered by her belief that “this can be a reality for anyone. The earth needs a lot of attention and labor, but (Mexico’s) resources are economical and readily available here in Oaxaca, where climate is on our side to grow many plants nearly every month of the year.”^{lii}

Adriana believes sustainable living and self-sufficiency are feasible realities for which more individuals and communities must strive as it “is the healthy way. It would make everyone feel good and have a sense of pride in their work and place.”^{liii} To be sure, by the end of our interview and tour of Tierra del Sol, it was the first time I had ever been able to escape the midday sun sitting in an outdoor gazebo made entirely of reused

tires and earth, knowing that my pre-departure stop at one of Adriana's many dry toilets would add to the cycles of her farm rather than detract from her water well. I did "feel good," but on my walk through the quiet countryside back towards the highway and Oaxaca City, it became clear that much of the beauty and success of Tierra del Sol came from its more rural location. Can this lifestyle then, be achieved in the city? Urbanites face different challenges than rural dwellers, such as even more scarce and contaminated water, pollution, lack of space and, in a place where *Gamesa* and *Bimbo* brands grace the packages of most food products, an ever declining understanding and respect for the origins and consumption of natural and organic food. Busy lifestyles and hungry families often render the creation of homemade *mole* impossible and allow Burger King take-out to look for more appealing. This has become endemic of industrialized, westernized cities throughout the world; must it be this way?

Proving that organic agriculture is indeed a viable and an ever-more feasible alternative in the quest for healthier city life is the mission of Unitierra's Colectivo Flor de Asfalto, which began its work in May of 2007. As is summarized in their proposal, they recognize that today nearly half of the world's population lives in an urban setting and therefore relies almost completely on rural agricultural production whose practices and capabilities are subject to the interests of large transnational seed and agrochemical producers.^{liv} Because in Mexico there is minimal national aid for these rural producers, they are rendered unable to compete in the international market and are most often forced to leave behind their rural lives and head for the city. Thus, the urban population continues to grow, as does the distance between urban, industrialized living and rural, agricultural living.

To address this problem, Colectivo Flor de Asfalto proposed a project “to foment food autonomy in the neighborhoods of Oaxaca City” in order to improve the health and well being of families and the surrounding urban environment.^{lv} Through five demonstrative centers “strategically chosen in specific locations throughout the city,”^{lvi} they plan to assert their three principle objectives: 1) to produce organic food, 2) operate an appropriate and functioning water system and 3) create a native seed bank.^{lvii} With *organopónico*, or the Cuban-developed technique of producing organic vegetables in urban gardens,^{lviii} Flor de Asfalto hopes to prove that through this system and the utilization of organic fertilizers, the instructed rotation of crops, constant care and the control of pests and illnesses, 70% of fresh produce can be cultivated at the “direct benefit” of those urban Oaxaqueñ@s “who have expressed interest in the development of these techniques.”^{lix} Within city limits, on roof tops and windowsills, urban residents can achieve a degree of food sovereignty.

I was able to visit Diana Denham at Casa Chapulín, one of the first two of the five demonstration centers in Oaxaca City. Apart from its vibrant color, this deep azul house was by no means conspicuous on its street overlooking much of the city. Indeed, it was not until Diana took me on a tour that it became clear what made Casa Chapulín magnificently unique from its neighboring houses. The flat roof cradled numerous potted plants of various sizes, some surrounded by soft plastic containers or bags, while others by clay pots. Large straw and plastic bags of dirt leaned against the wire fence that lined the roof’s perimeter and a few tiny, homemade sacs of seeds sat in two of the roof corners near boxes of dirt from which crept several tiny, mossy-green buds. Also along the border of the roof rested four tires still in full form. (If I had only known about Adriana’s

gazebo prior to my meeting with Diana, I would have realized the endless potential uses for those tires!) Diana pointed out that “most things are very dry, but we are growing some herbs like cilantro and dill and parsley – you know, things that you would always want to have in your kitchen.”^{lx} Diana also emphasized that they would normally have tomato plants as well, but an “unexpected plague”^{lxi} had devastated the first crop. For me, after speaking with several vendors and producers, it has become quite clear that the unexpected whims of nature and climate are often an independent farmer’s greatest challenge, a reality that seems to make a successful harvest all that much more rewarding.

Diana stressed that her decision to help create Casa Chapulín stemmed from her belief that food sovereignty and the health of the local community were integral elements to the fight currently being battled in Oaxaca by APPO and so many other individuals and groups here and around the world whose human rights and cultural traditions have been violated by unjust international economics and politics. The need for urban food sovereignty, though a small step in an enormous global context, is a creative alternative and a necessary step away from our dependency on government and business forces. Brands like *Bimbo* and *Coca-Cola* that offer a variety of fast foods and soft-drinks are slowly beginning to take over traditional cooking, family time and are on a daily basis harming nature through their destructive production and distribution techniques. As is mentioned in their project proposal, Colectivo Flor de Asfalto is looking to revive a healthy and organic relationship with food production and consumption in an urban setting, where the division between the two is exceptionally large.^{lxii}

To be sure, Diana reminded me, “Lots of (people) here are already doing (what Casa Chapulín is doing). Next time you are walking in a neighborhood, look up at the

roof and you will probably find some plants or vegetables.” The goal of Casa Chapulín is not to create and force these methods, some of which have already long been established, on the urban community, but to help spark a new and more wide-spread interest in healthy living in the city and foster the ability to do so by providing resources.^{lxiii}

Currently, Diana and volunteers, who give their time for an average of three months, are working to create workshops to teach different methods of organic vegetable and plant production as well as various art and physical activities for youth to raise awareness about the importance of healthy production and consumption of vegetables. They also plan to conduct a series of interviews with local community members to better understand their past and current methods of urban agriculture as well as their views and desires for the future of Oaxacan food sovereignty.^{lxiv}

Casa Chapulín and Colectivo Flor de Asfalto want to help revive the knowledge of locals and apply it to current initiatives in urban agriculture. Urban living does not have to be fully detrimental to the environment, human health or family welfare. Food sovereignty and a sustainable relationship within an urban environment is a possible alternative in our changing world.



Food for Thought, Reflection and Conclusion

Somewhat hidden on a typical city street in Oaxaca, overlooking an increasingly populated and polluted city with a backyard littered by trash and rotting building materials, Casa Chapulín and the space it occupies is a metaphor for the system against which it and the other organizations and individuals with whom I met are fighting. The battle for food sovereignty cannot and will not be a simple task; long-term change both locally and internationally will not be realized in your or my lifetime. Akin to the trash and pollution surrounding Casa Chapulín, a messy and unjust food system has already left its destructive and long lasting mark on our global society by changing the way food is grown, eaten and viewed in communities spread all across the planet. Big Business has destroyed small family farms, livelihoods and traditional ways of working with and viewing the earth and land and has replaced these traditions with mechanized and modified methods of production and distribution that is neither sustainable for our bodies nor for the environment.

However, like the trash behind Casa Chapulín, this `mess´ can be cleaned with time and energy from members of the local community. What must change is the thoughtlessness that we have as consumers when we throw a wrapper by the side of the road instead of looking for a trashcan or when we purchase *Bimbo* potato chips instead of an orange from a local vendor. We must be actively aware of the impact of our daily decisions and must correspondingly change our lifestyles. Meeting with Val, Javier, Rafael, Adriana, Diana and other activists emphasized that no person who has been blessed with individual and environmental resources and abundance has an excuse to make poor choices. In doing so, he or she would be boldly refusing to recognize the

inter-connectedness and responsibility we all share and the far-reaching influence of our actions. When I purchase a *Coca-Cola* in the US, I am saying that I do not actually care about the amount of environmental destruction and human-rights abuses this brand has impinged upon the world since the early 20th century. Yet, when I promise to try and eat locally and organically or drink fair-trade, shade-grown coffee, I am asserting that I want to be part of the sustainable and just cycle of the sharing of food between producers and consumers without harming small family farms and business, the environment or the health of myself and my community.

To be sure, this ability to choose is a privilege. The general community, which is interested in and capable of the organic production of food, with whom I have worked over the past few weeks in Oaxaca is indeed a privileged community. In a greater social context, those people who *choose* to become involved in agriculture – whose parents and immediate family did not *have* to work the land and rely on the environment to survive – are generally equipped with a western education and the ability to freely decide how they want to live their lives. That agriculture and an often romanticized “return to the earth” is an option for these individuals highlights their intellectual, economic, social and political privilege. I feel all so much more comfortable saying this because this is my background and my personal experience.

In stating the above, I by no means aim to nullify the efforts and extremely well-intentioned individuals and groups who are working to make change toward improved nutritional and community health through urban and rural farming initiatives. Yet, I must specify the ever important difference between the *organic food movement* and the *food justice movement*. The former is achievable only where there is time, knowledge and

amply finances to apply to organic food production and the dissemination of its importance in local communities, an important and often enjoyable commitment where joined together are people who enjoy gardening and eating healthily and who do genuinely care about the state of their health and nature, a scenario that best describes the experiences offered by Adriana and Val. The food justice movement necessarily includes this form of food production, but also embodies a more universal movement that fights first and foremost for political, social and economic justice on behalf of those individuals who are truly suffering from the effects of the neoliberal economy and the presence of the international market in agriculture. I would assert that this is the experience and goals of ITT and CideCI, among many other alternative communities and learning centers that exist in Oaxaca and increasingly throughout Mexico and the world.

Food justice is the ultimate fight for food sovereignty and thus embodies the human and community *right* to choose the food and food system most economically, socially and culturally appropriate, something that is not readily available of our global peers today. Due to our financial and educational privileges, I and my peers of the Western world are able to see the evils of the mechanized, transnational-owned international market and we can reject it. In doing so, the degree of improvement in our immediate lives is not significant statistically or even visually because we have always led a life of privilege and, for the most part, have not had to base our individual or familial survival on the wavering world prices set by the unjust *mercado global*. Contrarily, should this food justice movement achieve its aim and reach those marginalized communities – whether indigenous or poor or minority or rural or inner-city – that are suffering directly from the industrialized world’s mechanically produced

wrappers, toxic-waste, processed food, deforestation, desalination, or desertification caused by the environmental and social racism inherent in so many of our thoughtless consumer and policy decisions, tangible local and global change would finally be achieved.

Healthy food should not only be for the privileged members of our global society, yet in “the fights down here in Oaxaca, there is little said about food.”^{lxv} We forget that food is life and overlook the cultural significance and joy that food can bring to our table, our families and our communities. This fight, like so many others, is no where near won; every effort, however miniscule or slightly misinformed, is crucial to success. I am thus incredibly impressed by the organizations and individuals with whom I have worked and have every bit of confidence that their efforts are making change. I do believe every bit of physical action and awareness is essential and effective in the fight for food in Oaxaca.

In the end, food sovereignty will be integral to and inseparable from the largest and most successful social transformations around the world. My ISP has enabled me to learn about and help support those actions currently being taken in both urban and rural Oaxaca, Mexico to help grow this necessary change.

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- ^{xiii} National Academy of Science, as quoted in Puente PowerPoint as viewed on April 25th, 2008.
- ^{xiv} Puente PowerPoint as viewed on April 25th 2008
- ^{xv} Female participant and advocate of amaranth, Oaxaca. Puente Taller. April 25th 2008
- ^{xvi} Puente PowerPoint as viewed on April 25th 2008
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} Esteva, Gustavo. Discussion at his home in Oaxaca, Mexico. March, 2008.
- ^{xix} *Baños secos*, or dry toilets, are an alternative technology very commonly used by the people with whom I met during this ISP period. They are an alternative for organic human waste disposal that is odorless and does not attract mosquitoes. The bowl separates the urine and the excrement, which are deposited into two, pre-made chambers. Once diluted with water, the urine can be used as a fertilizer for most plants. So too can the excrement once it has been hermetically sealed for several months, depending on the size of the chamber. This is a method that not only recycles human waste, but also saves the 40% of human use water that is used today for the transportation of our excrement.
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- ^{xxxv} Ibid.
- ^{xxxvi} Market vendors
- ^{xxxvii} This statement is my personal analysis regarding the significance of the distance between producer and consumer. By no means am I judging these individuals or their profession. It is information I collected from informal interviews that I believe is telling of the local effects of the current world situation both in terms of food and economically and socially in a greater sense.
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Interviews

Denham, Diana. Interview and Discussion of Casa Chapulín. Oaxaca, Mexico. April 11th, 2008.
3 p.m.

Esteva, Gustavo. Specific Questions and Group Discussion at his home in Oaxaca, Mexico.
March, 2008. 10 a.m.

Guzman, Adriana. Discussion and Interview. Tierra del Sol. Oaxaca, Mexico. April 28th, 2008.
10 a.m.

Javier Zaragoza, Director of El Instituto Tonantzin Tlalli. Interview and discussion of ITT. April
30th 2008. 5 p.m.

Lorenz, Catherine. Puente PowerPoint and Discussion. Puente Office, Oaxaca, Mexico. April
25th 2008. 6 p.m.

Mena, Melissa. Conversation and Interview at Unitierra. Oaxaca, Mexico. May 9th, 2008.
12:30 p.m.

Nadeau, Val. Discussion and interview at Arbol de la Vida. Oaxaca, Mexico. April 21th, 2008.
6 a.m.

Reciprocity and Gracias

Farm work requires both mental and physical work. Thus, imagining ways of reciprocating the time given to me by the people with whom I spoke was by no means difficult. I helped to weed and harvest crops and, with Val, I was able to help preparing and selling her produce at El Pochote market.

I do wish that I could have spent more time volunteering my physical labor; however, the length of the ISP period made it difficult to do so. For example, organizations such as El Instituto Tonantzin Tlalli were unwilling to take me as a volunteer unless I could give three months of my time. This was the same mentality of Casa Chapulín and Adriana, who required volunteers to commit to specific projects significantly more time than that which I had. Though I was personally disappointed that I could not give large amounts of my time and energy actually working in the dirt and for those people who shared with me their time and knowledge, I respect their high requirements as they ensure a more dedicated volunteer force working for a cause I clearly find to be incredibly important.

The time that I was able to work for individuals was very enjoyable and I hope that my energy was helpful, though I recognize that by no means could I have repaid those with whom I worked. A special thanks to Val, an ex-pat living in Oaxaca for three decades, who took me onto her farm and into her home and taught me a valuable perspective in terms of food problems faced by Oaxaca, but placed in an international context. Melissa Mena, my advisor, was also very helpful at the ninth hour in emphasizing the privileged context in which I and so many others find ourselves in terms of our access to healthy food and educational materials regarding organic food and the food justice movement. She and the many others whom I met taught me a great deal about the multitude of possibilities available and the actual, often quite extraordinary change being made in Oaxaca, Mexico.