PROMISSORY PRESTATIONS: A YUCATEC VILLAGE BETWEEN RITUAL EXCHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT CASH TRANSFERS

by

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Dissertation Abstract

Religion and development promise the people of a Mayan-speaking village of Eastern Yucatan, Mexico, regeneration and well-being. Through interrelated regimes of futurity, the implementation of cash transfers and ritual transactions unfold different aspects of reality.

Drawing on twenty four months of ethnographic fieldwork, archival research and in-depth interviews with development officials in Yucatan, Mexico city and the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington DC, I explore what gift-giving, in particular, conditional and unconditional Cash Transfers (PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES and PROCAMPO) and cargo ritual exchange, contribute to these nested regimes of futurities.

These regimes work to determine the sort of economy that should rule human life now, by teaching what should and should not be expected, developing moral anguish, physical endurance, recurrent joy and gratitude. Development prestations support a long-term transition based on personal, moral and intergenerational change while ritual transactions pattern the future in short-term cycles of ontic renewals that support the long-term enduring power of the elderly.

Advisor: Jane I. Guyer
Readers: Jane I. Guyer, Deborah Poole, Emma Cervone, Sara Berry and Margaret Keck
Sweet your soul ("UOL"), beautiful
Man; you go
To see your heavenly father face.
He will not
Return you, here, above
The earth, under the feathers of
The small hummingbird, or
Under the skin [...] of the beautiful deer,
Of the great jaguar,
The little nightingale
Or of the little pheasant.
Give yourself courage ("UOL") and think
Only in your father. Do not
Be afraid. It is
Good what is going to be done to you...Have a good laugh
Sweet your soul (UOL)
Because you are the one
To whom it was commended
To take the word
Of your neighbors
To the beau/ tiful lord
The one who has descended
Here on the earth...

(Dzitbalché Songs. Song one. In Nájera Coronado ed. 2007)

Therefore that's basically what we finally come to, you and me, it is the importance of a
notion of expecting, of waiting for the future, which is precisely one of the forms of
collective thinking. We are among ourselves, in society, for expecting, among us, at
such and such a result; this is the essential form of community. The terms: coercion,
force, authority, we have been able to use them once, and, they have their value, but
this notion of collective expectation is in my opinion one of the basic concepts on
which we should work. I know of no other generative concept of Law and Economics: "I
expect" is the very definition of every act of collective nature. It is at the origins of
theology: God will hear—I am not saying (s)he will fulfill with, but hear—my prayer.
Violations of these collective expectations can be measured, for example, in the crashes
in the economy, panic, social outbursts, and so on. (Mauss [1934] 1968, II: 117)
Acknowledgments

Understanding gratitude has been one of the consequences of this very long process of reading, writing, asking and engaging on gift-giving that I started more than fifteen years ago. Expressing mine in a few words, calling names in this section, seems to me scarce but ineluctable. However, I do trust the loved and admired people these names refer to, will understand that nothing in me and in this written work is worth a penny without them and, thus, forgive my spare words.

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INTRODUCTION
In a village of around 2000 persons in Eastern Yucatan—referred to here as Ixán—livelihoods have depended for generations on farm incomes and the people’s own propitiation of favorable forces in their worlds. The majority of all adult males in Ixán say that their main economic activity is growing corn, beans, squash and chiles in their field plots (milpas). While their milpas provide them with maize, their main staple food, almost all of them find it necessary to engage in other economic activities as well. The most accommodated families, those who are small holders of land, complement agriculture by raising cattle and keeping bees. Selling honey is the most profitable venture but requires initial investment costs that can be prohibitive, such as paying to rent land outside the village and having access to transportation. During dry years beekeepers must be able to transport their hives to more suitable places where their bees can access flowers and water. Other young people have found steady employment in Valladolid. These positions range from cooks and maids to mid rank state functionaries (among them two bilingual state promoters, two school teachers, watchmen and janitors). Young men in their twenties and thirties, however, most frequently migrate to the tourist centers in Cancún, Tulúm, Cozumel and Playa del Carmen to sell their labor as construction workers and manual laborers. For the most part, these men only stay for short periods of time, which they calculate in weeks and months, before returning to Ixán to take care of their families who remain in the village because it is safer and qualified as having a healthier and “even” way of life.

Recently, since the middle of the 1990s, state support, in the form of cash transfers, has been introduced. These cash transfers derive from international and national policies that also depict the dynamics of the present in terms of a future. These different
futures, and the different means of bringing them into being, meet in daily life, in agricultural seasonality and in the annual ceremonial cycle of community renewal. Unlike many situations of differentiation between state and people, in this case both sides have—or have had in the past—both written and practice-based frameworks with which they approach the vistas of their future. And both have their own experts. This introduction offers a preliminary depiction of their histories. It also develops the concept of “the interface” (Guyer 1994), exploring the non-binary, multiple character of that on-going dynamic, in a case where there is a third major cultural-historical framework at play beyond and in addition to the local Maya, the national and transnational frameworks. In this case the Spanish concept of “promesa” is integral, coming as it does to this population through the Spanish colonial influence and Roman Catholicism. To analyze its meaning and power, I draw on the work of Mauss (1925, 1968, II: 117), Searle (1964), Austin (1976), Vitek (1993), Sheinman (2011) and Testart (1993: 63). The ways in which the people of Ixán now approach the combination of regimes of futurity are described and interpreted in chapters III, IV and V.
Procampo and Progresa-Oportunidades cash transfers have been devised by empirically informed policy makers that, having acknowledged the importance of burden, cargo and supporting repetitive actions for the Mexican indigenous people, have further developed an ideology of monetary support or “apoyo” for the rural poor. Cash transfers were intended to compensate adult peasants for the harsh transition towards free agricultural markets and for the economic reconversion of their children, specifically those born between 1990-2010. This intention, however, unfolded as a monetarist strategy for maintaining electoral and political bases and, potentially, increasing political support among these bases while structural adjustment policies were implemented. As they induce peasants to abandon agriculture and migrate to urban settings, cash transfers have accompanied transitions understood by their promoters under the broad terminology of national development or “desarrollo”. The majority of indigenous peoples working in the fields, however, largely ignored this term and its national ideology until 2003 when the National Indigenist Commission (Instituto Nacional Indigenista) changed its name to the National Development Commission for Indigenous Peoples. Nevertheless, for the last twenty years, policy-makers' and Ixanenses' divergent understandings of cash transfers have intersected in Ixán through the language of ritual transactions, which provides a seed for reframing peoples’ relationships with state representatives in term of promises. Beyond clashes, misunderstandings, mutual ignorance and negotiations, cash transfers were received, controlled and reframed as sufficient or insufficient promissory “engagements” or “commitments” that are expected to promote “rebirth”, “evenness” and balanced relationships between human and non human people. Since the inception of
Oportunidades’ qualitative evaluations, anthropological knowledge has also helped to reframe the Mexican state according to recent advancements in the philosophy of development. In 2005, for instance, Oportunidades adopted capability approach terminology for its main objectives, highlighting future human capital accumulation as the program’s main long-term goal. Ixánenses, on the other hand, have measured and qualified cash transfers as insufficient and uneven support, implying unfulfilled promises of short-term renewals. These temporal assessments ultimately emerge from their ritual practice and knowledge of transforming intentional outlooks into articulated promises. By evaluating what has been given in relation to what had been promised, they deduce that the promissory development of cash transfers have fallen short for them. In other words, state promoted development has been restated in terms of accountable, concrete and short-term promises. However, even though they have found cash transfer money to be insufficient again and again, rather than abandoning its promissory nature Ixánenses request more cash from government officers.

*Maya, Catholic and NAFTA Sources*

I. Maya

One of Ixán’s defining characteristics in its people’s estimation is its former possession of a “testamento” or calendar. In the local memory this book shows the signs of the days to come, and it stands as a fundamental representation of villagers’ understanding of time. A long time ago it was borrowed and, finally, became lost. Lost or diminished also were the local skills of foreseeing time, according to most villagers. However, there are still readable signs in nature, prophetic narratives, and ritual
practices that characterize their future in terms of fulfillment of fate. Elders and ritual experts, who help ritual sponsors organize calendric festivals, read signs in nature to determine whether or not the sponsorship was accepted and whether the incoming year will be prosperous (“miracle”) or not (“punishment”). Ritual “doers” or “makers”, *j mèeno’ob*, here called shamans for the sake of simplicity, also make personal divinations, and through dreams, quartz stones and maize grains tell people their “fortune”. Although prophetic narratives speak of a long-term future and ritual festivals explore the future of the coming year, personal “fortune” most frequently objectifies a life story, or the important set of past-present and future events within a life span.

However, for improving sponsor chances and for propitiating the time to come, ritual experts cultivate virtues of accountability, endurance and responsibility in ritual supporters. Sponsors commit themselves during the lengthy process of collecting the resources necessary for performing festivals, through the controlled expenditures on the festival day and their lives thereafter during the year to the next festival.

Local political authorities sponsor some of the most important festivals while the village’s main families use the Spanish civic organization of Saint Guilds, “Gremios”, to sponsor the sacred festivities. One of these festivals celebrates a stone cross, believed to be a living being which protects agriculturalists and their exploits. In day to day life villagers refer to the cross as Santísima Cruz Tun but its full name, used in prayers and official documents, is “Santísima Cruz Balam Tun, Ki’ichkelem Yùum Oxlahun ti ku”, which literally means “the Most Sacred Cross Jaguar Stone. Beautiful Master 13th god”.

Calendric festivals are understood as exchanges between people and no longer
human masters (Yùuntsilo’ob) and other powerful persons, including gods and idols, who populate and control nature. In these exchanges there is, first, a timely recognition of non-humans’ asking. Nature’s owners, or non-humans, demand regular human festivals as tributes and payments (of respect, food, dancing, etc.) for rain, resources and life. The first task of human participants is the recognition of their duty to “buy” nature’s services from “owners”. Humans are not supposed to survive without the timely management of Yùuntsilo’ob.

Whether or not the Maya and the Catholic calendars were synchronized, a very complex net of “promesas” and “compromisos” or “mookthan” stabilizes the social calendar. Going from the long past to the middle term future, promises, pacts and exchanges and expected returns have also been projected to the natural realm, in particular to the maize reproductive cycle.

II. Catholic

Thanks to discontinuous Franciscan conversion since the XVI century, many Maya ritual practices were translated into the Catholic doxa. Propitiatory festivals began to be explained through the Catholic language of promesas to the saints and, at the same time, started to follow the official church calendar.

A promise is the right response to timely requests. Promising is important because it recognizes the asking will of nature’s lords and proposes a solution meant to “even” the wills of both humans and non-humans. There is a fluid continuity of human and non-human intentionalities, óol (willing spirit), that must be balanced in order to have peaceful prosperity. Therefore, as the most important element of festivals, the
intentionality of promises is the indexical force that carries their symbolic content. Briefly put, promising is a response to asking (by humans and non-humans) that also aims to achieve an exchange that will balance intentions and requests. A compromiso emerges as a consequence of the promise and can be translated as engagement. In negative terms, a compromiso is an unfulfilled promise. In positive terms, compromiso unfolds mutual promises and anticipates common profit. Thus, the native terms “miracle” and “punishment” serve to indicate two possible engagements (between humans and non-humans, but also between humans).

Just as they secure sponsorship contributions with solemn agreements among themselves, Ixánenses commonly use the trading trope “buying life and rain” to explain their expectations in the annual cycle. In order to improve their lives and ensure sufficient rain for their fields for the maize seeding season, from February 15 to 20, five guilds, one from Ixán and four from related villages, present food, dances, prayers, respect and other services to the above mentioned cross. In exchange, they expect life regeneration for themselves, their families and their animals and rain for their field plots from the cross, also a “lord”, and through other rain-lords. Life regeneration is projected to take place in a period of less than one year. Rain, on the other hand, is always expected in shorter terms, most often measured in days. Supporters or “kucho’ob” bear the burden of sponsorship of these festivals, committing themselves to the vernacular institutions formed by ritual elders, priostes or temple guardians, shamans, and owners and devotees of particular saint images.
III: NAFTA

Today the preponderance of agriculture in this entire region is subjected to economic development plans that come from the Yucatan State, the Mexican government and international organizations. Experts have often dismissed the agricultural viability of the peninsula. In the context of NAFTA treaties, economists and policy makers have decided that it would be more efficient to import maize from the more productive northern areas of the country and the USA and to reconvert the indigenous population to other economic activities. Maquiladoras, construction and booming tourism-related enterprises are the options envisaged for the labor force from inner Yucatec villages like Ixán. Even if none of this is explicitly supported by development agencies, there are some development plans that coordinate private and public sectors, for instance, to “develop human capital” according to the needs of tourism enterprises1 and to adapt inner migration to labor demands.

For advocates of the NAFTA treaties, the free trade agreement represented the triumph of post-Cold War international market democracy (Kingsolver 2001). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many saw NAFTA as confirmation that Truman’s “program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing” (Truman 1954) would become, now, universal. As Escobar depicts, at the core of what he calls the “age of development” (Escobar 1995: 35) stands the inexhaustible “promise of science and technology” proposing an always better future (Escobar 1995: 35). However, Escobar also takes for granted that Latin America will experience a post-development

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1For example, from the IADB Multilateral Investment Fund’s project “Linking Public and Private Resources to Improve Worker Preparation and Training in the Riviera Maya (ME-M1041, ATN/ME-11490-ME).
era. He signals “cultural hybridization”, as the manifold and multiple set of
temporalities, modernities and traditions of the region, as a mode of unmaking
development (1995: 217-222). Instead, however, almost all of the current self-
proclaimed “progressive” Latin-American governments have refashioned the term
“development” for their respective national narratives. State driven corporativisms
prioritize their “national development” as one of the main enterprises of their populist
ideology. While these new uses of the term deserve more thorough analysis, at first
sight they appear to contrast and respond to the private sector corporativism-
propelled ideology of free trade and individual entrepreneurship of the Euro-American
conservative revolution, or what is commonly referred to as the “neoliberal age”. From
this ideology, development has been approached as a currently effective
“depoliticizing” discursive-machine (Ferguson 1994:xv), a means of gauging anxieties
of politics of “improvement” and “compromise”, modern states’ instantiations of “self-
fashioning and rule” (Li 2007, 1999: 295) or a way of internalizing “toil” in the moral
landscape of the self (Pandian 2010).

Influenced by Foucault, all of these authors (Escobar, Ferguson, Li, Pandian)
locate an explanation of development functioning in an integral (developee) self, as if
development should, after all, have consequences. As Ferguson has clearly stated, after
considering development failures, proponents and critics alike generally conclude that
more resources and honest efforts are needed to overcome problems of backwardness
and underdevelopment. Therefore, development ideologues do not consider the
possibility that they may have started from faulty premises, but instead they will
approach the problems repeatedly, from the same angle, until their prognosis justifies
their diagnosis.

Nowadays, one of the development expert prognoses focuses on the human life course. Cash transfers are framed within this logic. Worthman has criticized the logics of development’s “dual model”, especially its “magical” links between social “outside-in investment in individual human development and inside-out returns in socioeconomic development” (2011: 447). However, she proposes revising incomplete or inadequate models of development by attending to and incorporating “cultural factors” (Worthman 2011: 444), in culturally diverse “life courses”, in her approach. Presupposing that regular human “life” is modeled by diverse “cultures”, by calling for attention to “cultural models of life courses” (2011: 444), Worthman suggests that “life” has a stable core that is simply modeled into different “cultural” patterns. This normalizes life expectancies through a particular ontology that can tentatively be called American Naturalism. She takes for granted the idea of life as articulated in a particular transition. She conceives of “youth” to be at a point of universal transition, in which the return on some development investment will begin to be realized.

In brief, the entire ideology of development is grounded in promises and it is through their deferral that many kinds of exploitation (extractivism, labor exploitation, financial exploitation, etc.) are made possible. Consequently, this dissertation focuses on the workings of these deferments. I do not consider development practices and discourses so much to be repressive, regulative and disciplinary for a secularized self, the vessel of dispositions (Dapuez et al. 2011), but as promises of happiness of a progressive historicism that dwells not so much in “history” but in every individual “life cycle”. Following Nuijten’s insight that “development
bureaucracy continuously creates great expectations” (2004: 52) and advancing her designation of development as a “hope-generating machine” (2004), my investigation researches how the future is shaped differentially in a Mexican village through different transactions as promissory.

Cash Transfers in Mexico

Following the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), the agrarian reform did not preclude local, community-based forms of land tenure, and rural collectivities maintained significant autonomy in the administration of their lands. The particular localism of peasantry, the “product of concrete historical processes”, shaped the community’s relations with the state more than the agrarian ideology (Nugent and Alonso 1994: 245). As a result, a top-down transformation was considered necessary by the state to assure a new relationship with its base in 1992, when the agricultural previous reform was submitted to a new reform and the rural sector reshaped yet again, this time according to the horizons of free trade with the United States and Canada.

PROCAMPO, the first cash transfer (1993), was implemented for promoting a smooth decline of popular agrarianism while radically transforming the Mexican rural sector as the Mexican state adjusted to NAFTA (1994). The Mexican state has viewed the peasant movements as a solid, popular base that can be relied on for support but at the same time the state has defined peasants as a base to be subordinated (Bartra 1985: 23). Therefore a “second agrarian reform” (De Janvry et al. 1997) would be necessary to reconstruct a different supporting alliance that disarticulates small-holder peasants
from agricultural markets (Bair and Werner 2011). With the constitutional reform of Article 27 in 1992 and the privatization of ejidos land, the Mexican state transformed its principal form of relationship with its supporters through direct cash transfers.

Development experts have created a philosophy and a system of cash transfers, known by their acronyms PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES, to smooth the transition of “poor” agriculturalists towards a more “open” and uncertain future (Koselleck 2004: 265) of individual life cycles. While leaving the peasants’ longer term future to their own invention, the developers offer incentives to the next generation: the schooling of peasants’ children, tourism infrastructure and the possibility of employment in assembly plants financed by foreign investment. According to their plans, in a long-term future of 15 years for PROCAMPO (now extended to 20) and the lapse of a generation (conventionally established as a 20 year period) for OPORTUNIDADES, the transition from “self-subsistent peasantry” to a future devoid of self-reproducing poverty is expected to emerge. Implemented in the winter of 1994, PROCAMPO was aimed at producers with a fixed payment per hectare in the context of the transition to NAFTA. This payment is decoupled from current land use and no new properties have been added since its implementation. PROGRESA, later called OPORTUNIDADES, was initiated in 1997 to improve extreme poverty in rural areas by developing “human capital” in the receivers’ children. Transfers are provided to mothers under the assumption they will use the funds better than fathers. In the shorter run, the economic transition depicted by developers and politicians does not seem to be occurring, but there have been some rapid changes due to the cash transfers’ regime of futurities and expectancies.
PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES monies have supported a new set of expectations. Developers predicted receivers would learn to expect the future to be distinct and different from the past. Future oriented cash transfers do influence people’s prospects, but they do not automatically and comprehensively transfer the developers’ intentions to the receivers, which include a set of ambitions, eagerness, anticipations and hopes based on a particular model of a middle class life of formal education and employment. The main “obstacle” to this life and its correlating values, according to developers, is traditional slash and burn agriculture, because it implies a cosmological “religion”. By transforming the economic mode of production they also aim to transform the peoples’ future into that of ex-agriculturalists. Planners positively express the vacancy of this long-term future as a temporal space that is open to individual shaping and full of “opportunities”. Chapters one and two explore these philosophies of this future in greater detail.

Today a battle for the future in many Mayan speaking villages takes place between development and rituality, in their precise - both spoken and unspoken - promises for a future. In Ixán, for example, the explicit sentiment of being the chosen people, inhabiting the last place on earth that will have water to reproduce life, as well as the memories of being rebels against the whites in the Caste Wars (1847-1901,) galvanizes many social trajectories in a unique future. According to the majority of these villagers, cohesion and authority, often reflexively considered to be qualities of time, derive from people who pride themselves in keeping their word. Accordingly, these people conceive that in the fulfillment of promises resides a great deal of the art of mastering the time to come. This dissertation explores these modes of envisaging a
future, and analyzes how they have intersected within the life of a community that has experienced, for several years, their co-presence and co-enactment. At the center is a new reflection on the concept of “promise”, a term most succinctly expressed in the Catholic concept of promesa that now takes on more mediated meanings and greater importance.

The Gift's Promise

The concepts used for transactions have their own precision. Maya agriculturalists talk of “buying life and rain” and “giving”, in non-western senses of those terms to be analyzed later. Development transfers of cash are seldom represented as “gift” in Spanish ("don", “regalo”) or in Maya ("síij") by either their givers or their receivers in Mexico. The Mexican Secretary of Social Development (SEDESOL) denies that cash transfers are gifts. The word most frequently used to refer to PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES transfers by both receivers and givers is “apoyo”, or support. As I will examine in detail in Chapter II, economists, development functionaries and politicians use the terms “transferencias monetarias” or “apoyos”, respectively, to avoid legal terms such as “donación”, “prestación social”, and the most popular “gift”. Their intentional usage of these substitutive terms works to elide any potential imagining of the State as a corporate person that, to some extent, is obliged to the receivers in some way.

The terms “engagement” or “compromiso” are not particular to recipients' interpretations of cash transfer policies, although they are the terms through which policy makers explicitly explain their policies. As I show in Chapter III, OPORTUNIDADES program “compromisos” (OPORTUNIDADES 2012: 11) are based on a
commonly shared understanding of the total prestation, resembling in certain respects the transfers undertaken in marriage for many people (Mauss 1969: 390). Instead of a conventional contract, a compromiso is the meeting of two unilateral promises that will unfold not in a determined service, in a certain time-date and space-place, but in a more ample set of prestations (such as mutual love, care, sex and food services, etc. in the case of a marriage) through indefinite time and indefinite place. In many ways a compromiso or engagement is more than an obligation. It is the prognosis or the continuation of unstipulated rights and duties through uncertain time. Nevertheless, in order to objectify a compromiso one needs always to refer back to the promise texts, where, even though a compromiso is the meeting of two unilateral promisers, their two promises are not necessarily “even” in degree.

As in the traditional Mexican concept of marriage, the expected duties and rights of husbands and wives are not exact reciprocals of each other. It is not coincidental that a program that designates women as beneficiaries and administrators of the transferred money is described using these terms. The asymmetries of power proposed by cash transfers materialize in a relationship in which the same language that can be used to describe the woman’s duties involved in marriage, specifically in regards to the traditional role of mothers, compose the “co-responsibilities” and “conditionalities” of the program. Nevertheless, the semantic specter of “compromiso” goes well beyond a public understanding of normal intimacy.

“Compromiso” was a term first introduced to Ixán through Franciscan indoctrination that intended to gain hold among the Maya, first by representing Maya institutions in religiously correct terms. When Ixán’s ritualists use the term
“compromiso” they are Christianizing the stronger Maya word “mookthan” (literally, word that ties). The intentional souls (óol) of contractors involved in a compromiso are not necessary tied to the same degree. Although evenness, balance and equivalence are acknowledged as ideals in exchange, the use of “mookthan” always means that there is a person who is tied and another who holds her. In many cases liberation from a “compromiso” is possible through the fulfillment of the initial promise that produced the engagement. In other cases, for instance in loj (redemption) rites, liberation from entanglements, representing pre-Hispanic formalities of slave emancipation in the area, is achieved through propitiatory food offerings. Shamans and lay people perform these offerings to temporarily pacify hungry requesters, called “masters”. The most immediate response to such “requests”, however, is conceived to be a new promise, which initiates further engagement.

Developmental and ritual transfers would be better understood if analyzed according to anthropological knowledge of gifts and prestation because both are considered teleological, quid pro quo transactions that signal a future of engagement objectified in promises. This future is imagined as a better time to come, ideally fostering peace and prosperity for both sets of givers and receivers. The difference, to be explored later, lies less in their designation as compromisos than in the temporal frames within which their social and existential processes unfold. Anthropological knowledge of gift-giving allows us to describe not only the actual effects of exchanges but also the specifics of the transactional modalities that exchangers allege, and anticipate, to be virtuous. For instance, even when cash transfer programs are considered to have “good intentions and bad outcomes” according to their creators
(Levy 2008), they have provoked an increasing hopeful enthusiasm that today extends beyond Mexican technocrats to the transnational development industry and international academia. Despite their failure, they are still praised as a possible means of overcoming poverty in an era where state subsidies and other direct market and resource management techniques are in retreat. Results are also uncertain in ritual exchange. Ritualists who forecast ritual prestations sometimes find that what is returned to them is “punishment” rather than the intended regeneration.

All of these transactions work as sounding lines, probing the waters of the future. However, these transactions are more than just prospective. They also carry with them a performative power that limits and frames the exchangers as they move through a set of unfolding stages of processes that are intrinsically uneven in the commitments they comprise, uncertain in their outcome and also different in the relevant time horizons towards which they are working. This finesse of process is implicit in Mauss’s theory of the gift, but not fully developed in either the original work or subsequent work. While Mauss considered gifts to be synthetic objects that, in one form, conflate ontology, law, economics, politics, morality, and, of course, religion, he also points out that “[t]he terms that we have used—present and gift—are not themselves entirely exact” (Mauss 1990: 72-73). Leaving aside the question of what makes a “gift” a “gift” and not a “present” and further analytically differentiating the terms, Mauss focuses on his argument that “exchanges and gifts” of many kinds in many societies differentially refer to a “common fund of ideas” according to which “the received object, in general, engages, links magically, religiously, morally, juridically, the giver and the receiver” (Mauss 1997: 29). In such a process of engagement the
“gage, wage, -wadium, vadi, that creates a bond between master and servant, creditor and debtor, buyer and seller is a magical and ambiguous thing” (Mauss 1997: 30).

The terms for such bonds-as-processes are variously deployed and understood within cultural and historical contexts, both in practice and in theoretical work. As shown by Parry (1986) and Carrier (1995), the denial of obligation, economic efficaciousness and the imperative of return is at the core of the western everyday notion of the gift. Post-structuralists do not think too differently from native westerners. For Baudrillard (1999), Derrida (1991, 1999) and, to some extent, for Bourdieu as well, a true gift should be impossible to return. Not even realized as a gift, it would only exist under the form of “impossible gift” (Derrida 1991, 1992, 1999). Similarly, others (Weiner 1992; Testart 1993, 1998; Marion 2002: 345) claim that the obligation to reciprocate is only based on an "urban ideology", a "trope" or an "interpretation"; it is not at all enforceable or "given". Many years after Malinowski’s “pure gifts”, defined as disinterested and non-returnable prestations, were thoughtfully critiqued (Mauss 1925; Panoff 1970; Parry 1986), the current debate on gift-giving has not fully taken into account the future possibilities of returns. Bourdieu (1990, 1997) has proposed that timing is one of the most critical aspects of the analysis of gift exchanges. Despite Bourdieu’s suggestion, thus far there has been little work done to analyze the understanding of the future temporality implicit in prestations.

The use of Mauss in many Latin America ethnographies has been biased, reduced and underdeveloped, thanks in large part to the influence of one of his self-identified students, Claude Lévi-Strauss. It is on Mauss’ notion of reciprocity (1969 [1949]), in particular as discussed in Lévi-Strauss’s chapter “The Principle of
Reciprocity”, that much of the anthropological debate has centered in the last century. Sahlins (1974) incorporated both types of reciprocity, restricted and generalized, into American economic anthropology, with the help of Polanyi’s neo-Marxist historicism (1944). Other authors, including Alberti and Mayer, analyzed gift-giving as a time sensitive process. However, following Polanyi, Murra and Wachtel qualified reciprocal exchange in symmetrical and asymmetrical classes (1974: 22), further disregarding Marcel Mauss’s synthetic legacy through an analytics of exchange until the 1990s. The proliferation of reciprocity in Lévi-Strauss, Polanyi, and Sahlins has nearly rendered Mauss’ category unusable and as one of the most contended concepts in the history of Anthropology. Currently “reciprocity” is used to mean, as Graeber says, “almost anything” (2001: 217).

The diminution of the potential richness of Mauss’ argument that bonds are processes is also a temporal one. It was relegated too distantly in the past. Only in Stone Age economics did reciprocity rule most exchanges. Any version of an evolutionary framework suggests that whatever reciprocity might have existed was left behind, or tightly restricted to specific domains of life. But we can only partially blame Mauss for his untimeliness. Even when he describes the evolution of total social prestations into agonistic exchange and, later, of agonistic exchange into modern social contractual exchanges, his evolutionism is not a Darwinian one but rather a more heuristic Lamarckian account of the history and aims of exchanges. In other words, Mauss’ evolutionism is a morphological depiction of forms (historical genesis of forms of exchange) and functions (teleological futures for each of these exchanges). His *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques* does not depict a great
transformation of pre-capitalistic into capitalistic societies. Instead he shows that the complexities of exchanges develop from religious overarching concepts into analytical legal-contractual terms. Moreover, Mauss’ object is how exchange as relationship had changed in different socio-historical scenarios.

In her book on gifts, reciprocity and debt in Ecuador, Emilia Ferraro first determines that the “[d]ebt, then, and not the gift is the real topic of the Essai”. She continues, following Bourdieu (1990, 1988), “the gift is an ideal model, while the debt is its reality, its practice (Ferraro 2004: 29-30). Upon this motto, Ferraro develops a very rich depiction of ritual and economic exchanges in Ecuador in which mutual and reciprocal exchanges tend to produce debt-credit relationships. By stating that reciprocity is an ideal, however, Ferraro dismisses the gift, understood as total social prestation, to the impossible field of the ideal. As with many other Mauss interpreters who have refused to even consider the potential existence of total social facts, Ferraro, following Bourdieu (1990), only sees gift ideologies as masking social practices of credit and indebtedness. In this regard she argues,

Social and economic life of Pesillo is set by an eternal but dynamic cycle of loaning and borrowing, producing and reproducing loans. Reciprocity is the ideal norm among the community members, then, all the economic transactions in Pesillo are reciprocal and short termed. (Ferraro 2004: 219)

She goes on to state that reciprocal exchange is always embedded in debt systems. As reciprocal exchange is a “closed” cycle and debt a string infinitely “open”, according to her, the latter set subsumes the former. She shows debt and people eternally serving debt through the example of the San Juan Festival, where people constantly “renew their debts” with the saint (Ferraro 2004: 219). San Juan celebrations, according to Ferraro, always reinforce moral as well as economic credit-
debt relationships by considering the festivals to be payments to saints and souls. In Pesillo, these non-human persons are thought to be responsible for natural renewals but Ferraro, following Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic exchange, instead determines that the ritualized gift and its timing always entail self-deception and “the fake circulation of a fake coin” (Bourdieu 1990: 6). In intending to epistemologically purify the social projection of people’s “debts” onto natural facts, Bourdieu seems to forget that time is not only a social construction but also a given.

As Evens has noted, Bourdieu seems to reassure the western ontology in which “moral rules and natural laws signify mutually exclusive worlds” by suggesting ritual practice confounds the “social” with the “natural” (Evens 1999: 18). Rather than epistemologically unraveling a completely unknowable nature hypostatized in social appearances, I identify Mesoamerican ontology as one of “fundamental ambiguity” (Evens 1999: 17) and “analogism” (Descola 2005). According to Evens, 

In such an ontology, an act can never be either social or natural, but always both and neither. By the same token, nature cannot be wholly indifferent to strategies of authority, since such strategies constitute not only culture or not-nature but also a second-nature. In which case, in this ontological picture of things, it is mistaken to construe ritual practices as simply performative, as if they did not also purport to accomplish something instrumentally. (1999: 17-18)

The terms used here, however, diminish the potential ethnographic richness opened up by the concept of the compromiso as it is used in Ixan. It is in the development of the concept of the promise, as a precise expression of lapses of time, conditions, intentionalities and causality, that I contribute to further anthropological understandings of temporalities of the transactions, particularly in terms of the future. By grounding engagements in ritualized and contract-like language that the participants themselves deploy, I am able to consider promises not only to be
responsible responses to requests and concrete prefiguration of future exchanges, but, above all, as instruments for measuring and controlling engagements across time, into varying projections and realizations of the future.

**Prefiguration of new engagements**

Cash transfers’ ideologues, Carlos Salinas de Gortari and Santiago Levy, crafted them to disengage poor peasants and their children from the waning post-revolutionary state, the same state that had made these peasants its subjects through agricultural reform. These two functionaries replaced CONASUPO price “compensations” (“subsidies”) and the “social prestations” provided by the old “welfare” state with cash transfers. Ideated from the State’s perspective, cash transfers were purposefully implemented as replacements for permanent rights. The State’s obligations to provide a fair price for agricultural produce to Mexican peasants or social prestations to its citizens were replaced by regular amounts of money. This replacement was transitory as well, intended to last only for a transitional period. After some time, 15 years for PROCAMPO and a generation for PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES, the transfer of money from the state to its recipients was designed to end. After this transition, disengagement of the state from its former subjects would be complete. The objective of this disengagement was to leave former cash transfer beneficiaries, now fully capable, for a new engagement, in this case with the free market for rural produce or with labor, both prefigured by NAFTA treaties.

Besides entailing engagements, and future returns, OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers and OPORTUNIDADES services, such as health checks, are categorized as “prestaciones” under Mexican law. Article 7 of the Social Security Law establishes that
“[t]he Social Security covers contingencies and provides services specified under each particular regime, through prestations in kind and in money, in the form and conditions provided by this law and its regulations” (SSL, Art. 7)

The OPORTUNIDADES program, therefore, is considered from the onset to be medical, economic and social “prestations” provided by the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS). Despite the pervasive developmental discourses on “cash transfers” promoted by the same program as a euphemism or avoidance of “prestations”, at the Mexican Institute of Social Security there is also a director of “prestaciones economicas y sociales”. Therefore, according to the law, the Mexican state is not donating “cash transfers” through the IMSS but making “prestations”. Despite the “monetarist” ideology of cash transfers, and the discourses of securitization, OPORTUNIDADES transfers should adapt to this legal discourse before they could be designated as “apoyos”, “transferencias monetarias”, or any other euphemism.

This distinction is important. The term does not only frame the transfers according to the Maussian idiom of “prestations” rather than the developmental euphemisms, but it also helps to resituate the “monetarism” and the historicity of the so called “neoliberal state” (Hilgers 2012) into a longer temporality of these transactions. Acknowledging that both past and not-yet born generations are

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2 “El seguro social cubre las contingencias y proporciona los servicios que se especifican a propósito de cada régimen particular, mediante prestaciones en especie y en dinero, en las formas y condiciones previstas por esta Ley y sus reglamentos” (Ley del Seguro Social 2005, Art. 7)

3 In the “Report to the Federal Executive Branch and the Congress of the Union 2011-12 about the financial situation and the risks of the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS)” establishes that “among the institutions which provides social security prestations or public health security services in Mexico (‘prestaciones de seguridad social y/o aseguramiento público en salud en México”), the first one is the IMSS which provides for 47.4 million peoples, plus 10.8 million of persons through the IMSS-OPORTUNIDADES program” (IMSS 2012: 1).
compromised in exchanges called “prestations”, for instance through the Mexican Institute of Social Security, rather than only engaged in a 20 year transition towards an utopian but also atemporal “free market”, is integral to an analysis of who performs as the ultimate givers and receivers.

In both types of prestations—developmental and ritual—givers try to convince themselves, along with receivers, that after the transaction something good will come next. Clear intentionalities arise in the stakes. However, these envisioned futures are not extensions of the giver, as many studies on gift-giving have concluded regarding, for instance, the Melanesian gift (Strathern 1988). Neither of these prestations could be fully analyzed as future-oriented extensions of agency, memory, and personhood (Gell 1998; Munn 1986, 1992) because they do not necessary cause them. Only ex-post analysis can tell if a gift obliged a return. Whether or not rain and prosperity or development will flourish as consequences of these transactions, no one can say for sure prospectively. Tokens of a prefigured engagement make a return expectable but they are never presented as infallible. What a prestation promises is uncertain and so it should be. Intentional and teleological, it depends more on promises of revenue than on the ex-post enforceable obligation of a payment.

Giving money to the peasants, for the peasants’ children, intends a return. When transformed at school, and in the household, the money given is explicitly called “human capital” by developers. They give money for human capital, expecting eventual human capital returns in development once the child is incorporated into the labor market as an adult. According to this reasoning, “human capital”, once “accumulated”, and only then, will break the vicious cycle of poverty. However, so uncertain is the
social environment that economists imagine they should appeal to promissory gifting, not to mechanical causality. Chapters I, II, and III analyze these exchanges in detail. Something similar happens when ritualists resort to the resource of paying traditional spiritual lords for the right to rainwater and prosperity. So uncertain is their health, their rain and their harvest that, using the language of obligation, they are taught to engage in promising, committing themselves and giving away a considerable amount of time and resources. Chapters IV and V examine these exchanges in detail.

The transactions I investigate here are important mostly because of what they promise, not because of how they oblige or what they return. In other words, they exist not so much due to their efficaciousness or causally proven returns but because of the expectations they convey. Therefore, it is not the aim of this dissertation to evaluate how much rain or so-called development these prestations have brought to this particular Yucatan village. This dissertation studies, instead, how promises inhabiting gifts make life bearable and promissory. I take seriously the implications of promises. For me the most surprising characteristic of promises is that they are not systematically or frequently neglected.

Time and the Future

Working in a Maya village with “problems of time” (Munn 1992) and its other, space, has driven me to rethink some of the all too well established metaphysical categories of Anthropology. A common understanding of the space-time continuum presupposes space to be a stable background against which time can be compared. Detienne (1992) has signaled Augustine’s invention of eternity as one radical movement
for spatializing time for Christendom. From it, he says, we have a particularly Christian idea of time and the event formalized in the world: history. The infinite frame of eternity allowed most Europeans to deduce the uniqueness of every soul and event, and from this uniqueness derives our “historical time”. In this sense, the popular Euro-American understanding of time, nowadays, precludes repetition while it assumes the possibility of never ending change. Historical Anthropology and Ethno-history have taken these Christian premises even further. In the United States that which has been dubbed “historical particularism” has stressed these assumptions. However, when one speaks of “western linear time” in comparison to “cyclical non-western time”, one is perpetuating this sort of spatialization to determine the presence or absence of repetition. The idea that events happen only once is so internalized in our selves that, to some extent, it constitutes them. Otherwise put, we can only constitute our selves, as Augustine did in his Confessions, by presupposing the existence of some all-knowing eye that watches us from eternity, and towards which we should direct ourselves. The infinite god of Christians sets an unrepeatable direction of a vector: as humans go towards god, an omniscient, infinite, eternal god, there will be no return but instead a sanction of the human trajectory.

However, presupposing repetition of “cyclical times”, most of the time, implies assuming a sole, conservative and simple set of skills for pattern recognition. Instead, interpreting returns, disjunctive cycles (e.g. death) and conjunctive ones (e.g. the “seating” of a year) would be a highly creative task of dealing with discontinuity, depletion and renewal (Greenhouse 1996: 150) rather than repetition of just the same.

For the Maya,
Time was structured. Event trends of history repeated themselves from one era to another, and patterns of repeated rises and falls were an essential feature of Maya history as far back as any records show. To the Maya, who composed such books and manuals about the workings of the calendar, it was important to understand that the flow of time and history was readable, almost an exercise in pattern recognition. (Stuart 2011: 24)

Therefore, interpretation of time was a human responsibility, not the prerogative of a god. Without an eternally stable point of view from which to interpret time, i.e. eternity as an infinite space-like frame of time, Maya readings of times were far more domestic. In fact, quoting the report of Bishop De Landa (2011) from the sixteenth century, Stuart reminds us that Chilans were priests and soothsayers who would receive their prophetic words within their own houses, where they would retire and prostrate onto the floor. Then, “[a] god or a spirit perched on a roof beam, would then speak to entranced chilans. One wonders if the ‘perched’ spirits in these cases were singing birds, since the word for both bird and omen is the same (“muut”) in Yukatek Maya”. (Stuart 2011: 24)

In Ixán, one could say that instead of a spatialization of time there is a construction of stable space through movement and timing. Timing space, contrary to our “western” spatialization of time, would entail composing space through regular timely movements. This would be the Mayan ‘indigenous’ perspective and, of course, I am using the terms indigenous (lit. sprung from the land) or “western” parodically. Mayanist scholars have often stressed the existence of an ordered pattern to which cosmos, land, humans, spirits and animals should submit. After fixing a center for movement, orderly motion should start in the east before continuing to the north, west and then south. Instead, I would propose that the continuum of time-space, or the timing of space by establishing an axis mundi and moving, stabilizes space through
action. The question then becomes how many times must people repeat actions for
determinate purposes, such as curing a person of an illness, or how many tortillas must
be given to a spiritual being to satiate her hunger. Thus, the search for equivalence
through repetition and accumulation will be at stake in the projection of any future.
The sense of an unbalanced past and present and the concern for action, as justification
of the future, will also be examined in Chapters III and IV.

Method, location of research, ethnography

Ixán was one of the places where the Caste Wars and the “new religion” (Bricker 1981) of Cruzó’ob were initiated in the Nineteenth century. Situated nine miles from Valladolid, the second largest city of the Yucatan State (48,000 persons in 2008), Ixán is a village with around two thousand inhabitants. Approximately ninety eight percent of this population denominate themselves as Catholic. Not until the late 1980s, when electricity and running water came to town, were Pentecostals, or “los hermanos”, also allowed by authorities to regularly visit Ixán. The conversion of the son of a Comisario, or communal mayor, marked this turning point in the village’s relationship with los hermanos. Today there are two Pentecostal churches, the larger of the two an “Assembly of God”. However, the village’s elite still openly resist and distrust Pentecostals.

Ixán inhabitants are regarded in the whole peninsula as “fierce”, “traditional”, and sometimes as “secluded” and “isolated”. In rural Yucatan ethnic identity depends on villages (Brown 1993); people from this area call themselves “Ixánenses” much more frequently than Mayas, Yucatecos or Mexicans. They consider other Mayan-speaking
villagers that do not come from places founded by Ixán’s migrants to be strangers. Ixán is considered, as are many Mayan places by its inhabitants, to be the center of the earth, *chuumuk lu’um*. Unlike the inhabitants of Kanxoc, another “fierce” and “traditional” nearby village, Ixánenses pride themselves in retaining the traditional police system of rotating “guardians”. The regular Yucatan State policemen do not enter the village unless there is a homicide or another serious problem. Constituted on a rotational basis and involving all the men above the age of eighteen, the guardian system protects and takes care of security as well as organizational issues concerning rotating work services (called *tequio* in Nahua or *fajina* in Spanish). It is constituted of 15 “companies”, each of which is directed by a sergeant. There is a first sergeant and a “comandante” who coordinate them (for a history of this institution see Jones 1974).

Until the last decades of the Twentieth century, the economic map of the Yucatan peninsula was divided according to production of henequen (western Yucatan) and maize (eastern Yucatan). Then, Ixán’s population was considered a typical example of ritualized slash and burn agriculture. Nowadays henequen plantations are all being recycled or abandoned. Social life and festivals in Ixán, however, continue to follow the clear punctuation of the maize cycle reproduction.

The Agriculturalist Guild Festival, or Gremios festival, occurs after harvest (which finishes in January and is initiated in November) but before the burning season that starts in April and could last until May. The agricultural activity of these days in February consists of slashing trees or *bakuche’*, cleaning up the cornfields from weeds and small trees that could have grown. The other major festival, that of the Santísima Cruz Tun, and which full name is Ki’ichkelem Yùum Oxlahun ti ku (“beautiful master,
13th god), takes place in the first days of May, from May day to the third of May, the old Christian day of the Cross. After this festival, the raining season should start but agriculturalists foreseeing rains could also take the chance of “draught seeding” or tikin muuk during these first days of May. Seeding normally takes place in June, but this activity depends on rain.

However, as the economic activity of Ixán’s inhabitants switches from full time agriculture to temporary employment at Tourist centers (Cancun, Playa del Carmen, etc.), an inner fragmentation of this “oecological time” (Evans-Pritchard 1939: 189) of maize makes their living temporalities more complex. Nevertheless, these festivities are good occasions for returning to the village, and to meet with family and friends.

In 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2011, I carried out fieldwork in Ixán, which ranged from one week in 2011 to almost six months in 2009, totaling around 14 months. In all of my fieldtrips I observed and participated in cargo rituals (2003, 2007, 2009, 2010 in the Agriculturalist Guild Festival, in 2005 and 2009 in the Village Festival and The change of the dress of the Christ, among others). I have participated in many cargo sponsorships, most frequently contributing beer, liquor, soft drinks and food to the main sponsors. From the village, I have also traveled to the nearby city of Valladolid to conduct interviews with PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES officials, among other research errands. When traveling to Ixán I frequently visited Mexico City and Mérida, where I spent weeks in libraries, archives, secretaries and other official dependencies.

In a document from the Village’s archive edited by Terán and Rasmussen (2007: 253) and authored by the Comisario Municipal about the organization of the Gremios Festival 1993, the cross is called “Stma Cruz Tun 3 personas Mabentun de la Gracia Oxplantiku, Cichelen Yum”. My translation of the word “mabentun” is “stone box” of gracia, grace and harvest. Another way of calling the cross is balam tun or “stone jaguar”.

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looking for data and the contextualization of them with officials. While I thought these processes of data gathering would be slow, painful and frustrating, I was always received very politely and my questions were answered. I had a similar experience at the Inter-American Development Bank headquarters in Washington DC, which I visited regularly during the last semester of 2008 and briefly in 2007, 2009 and 2011. There I interviewed bank officials, most of them involved in PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES programs or from the Gender and Diversity Division (which also includes Indigenous peoples and African descendants). Informal conversations with International Monetary Fund and World Bank low ranking functionaries took place during 2004 and 2005 in College Park, Maryland where I lived with my family while my wife was taking courses at the University of Maryland. Some of them were neighbors or acquaintances of ours in those days. From them I heard, first hand, popular juicy anecdotes that were frequently commented on by the press, including, for instance, going on a “mission” to one country and handing the finance ministry a report without bothering to change the country’s name on it from a previous mission.

In Washington DC I collected published and internal papers that evaluate the PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES programs in relation to their goals and schedules. Retrospectively, the focus of my inquiry was how the programs were devised to help the implementation of the NAFTA treaties between the USA, Canada and Mexico, since 1993, with particular focus on how the conversion of the rural sector was conceptualized as an “adjustment” to a “transition” towards a free trade future. I determined to what extent, at the IADB, “transition”, “adjustment”, “compensation”, “conditionality”, “incentive”, “reconversion” and other expert terminology express
moral and ideal expectations instead of mere economic “expected outcomes” of the programs. I also focused on futurity: in the projection of rural and national economic growth, the dating of debt and repayment, and the overall time frame of the programs, especially at the key moments of original design and when PROCAMPO was being revised by the IADB and Mexican government (2008). The semantic domains and the parties’ designations of the payments—as compensation, entitlement, or subsidy—changed over this long process of design, implementation and evaluation, initiated in 1993 and 1997, respectively. However, all parties involved in the design and evaluation of these programs made clear from the beginning that they were not entitlement programs, the kind promoted by the welfare state before the so-called “neo-liberal era”. Cash transfers were defined by their creators against in-kind programs and implemented to avoid “bureaucratic” and “corrupt caciquism”, a very well studied laden system of political bosses that vertically integrates the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) from the local to the national. Cash transfers were designed to bypass all the intermediaries and to establish a distant, but effective, relationship between the executive branch of the national government and the targeted poor. Officials and economists at the IADB and in Mexico City spoke of transparency as a goal of these cash transfer programs. However, they also mentioned or alluded to new forms of dependence, gratitude and prerogative that the receivers of these cash transfers should demonstrate.

Chapter one analyzes the context in which PROCAMPO, the first cash transfer program, was ideated and applied. Based on Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s 1978 Harvard University PhD dissertation on development programs and
political support, the PROCAMPO program supported the political-economic transition from peasantry towards NAFTA’s free trade horizon. Cash transfer programs, among other policies, can be explained as a compromise between Mexican populism and American monetarism for the prospect of a common future. In this context, PROCAMPO proposed a particular transformation of the Mexican state subject, the “peasant”, into the poor, as a step toward one of the program’s main objectives, i.e. to bypass local leadership by creating a transitional relationship between the Federal government and its new subjects. In chapter one I also analyze PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES, the next cash transfer program ideated in Mexico, which has received transnational support from the World Bank and the Inter-American Bank. The cash transfer system has provoked increasing enthusiasm among development administrations, beyond the Mexican context, due to claims of high impact at the local level, commodity price effects at the national level and favorable financial terms at the international level.

While attending briefly to the policies’ more general terms, my focus here is on their promissory framing, on the futures that they depict, or simply imply, for local economies and for individual lives and livelihoods. This frames the focus of the following chapters, which turn to the recipients’ integration of the transfers into the daily and annual cycles of life in a practical and political sense, and to their own projection of futures in light of the material, calendrical and ideological interventions that regular cash transfers have become.

Chapter two identifies and analyzes the temporal macro schemas and their calibration, produced and enacted by different actors to regulate peasants’ lives. In this chapter I discuss four regimes of futurity that regulate people’s activities through
transfers in Ixán: the already materialized Mexico-USA-Canada free trade horizon promoted by the NAFTA’s treaties, the national cash transfer “support system” that requires political cooperation with national politics from their receivers, the transnationally produced “universal” life course of human development, and the ritual maize regeneration cycle at the village level.

I begin Chapter three by examining the terms under which benefits are projected, implemented and claimed through a schematic comparison of Mexican policy towards small agricultural producers before and after implementation of the cash transfer programs. This follows a discussion of how the people of Ixán objectify well-being, turbulence and distress through exchange and how exchange is subsumed under an overarching coherent telos. In analyzing the villagers’ reception of cash transfers, their requests to political authorities, ranging from the president to local leaders, and nature’s owners or “lords”, I identify “evenness” as a local category for qualifying equal and peaceful exchanges. Such a category appears as a response to different requests, the most important of which come from nature “owners”, ancestral elders, and gods.

In chapter four I analyze a ritually cultivated sensibility to respond to nature owners, masters, elders, ritual helpers and other requests in general. Based on a sacred system of tributes, current ethics and ceremonial framing given by the “cargo” or kuch sponsored festivals, I describe promises, engagement, exchange and the prefiguration of the short, mid and long term futures on which sponsors and their families depend. I describe in detail the sponsorship of Gremios Festival, the ample net of promises and engagements it implies and the enactments and sanctions provoked by ritual exchange.
Chapter five is dedicated to the promissory as it is constructed through ritual and development in Ixán. Ritually, ethically and socially the promissory unfolds as a precise mode of the future. Beyond economics as a normative discipline, and based on the regular series of requests, promises, engagement, exchange and returns, I theorize that promissory exchange objectifies a virtuous material regeneration. Instead of cultivating a virtuous subjectivity, the prospective results of the ritual engagement should be understood as “rebirth”. For sponsor and participant, wellbeing and wealth constitute more than just a sanction of morally virtuous behavior but a virtuous economic return in itself. This economic return becomes an ideal for evenness in everyday life. The promissory engagement of cash transfers receivers with different state officials signals a series of prospective agreements that can stabilize the livelihood of Ixán’s people.

In the conclusion I sketch the diverse regimes of futurities and the rearrangement of these regimes carried out by the people of Ixán for the short, mid and long term. In particular, I explain how development and rituals of renewals intersect and recompose.

Cash transfer stages

To unravel the stages of cash transfers I noted how development money is used and negotiated. One of my informants at the Inter-American Development Bank told me that it is very common for borrowing states to request additional loans just to balance their debts with the bank. Sometimes states use loaned money to buy time while they try to secure additional funds for the development program supported by
the IADB. In the case of the PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES programs, for instance, the borrowed funds are rearranged as part of Mexico’s national budget and must be approved by Congress before finally reaching their intended destinations.

Political negotiations also occur earlier, when a country requests loans from the IADB and WB. For instance, as a senior economist at the IADB explained to me, the PROCAMPO program should have undergone progressive reform to become a poverty program when President Felipe Calderón assumed office. At the time the IADB was “pushing” the Mexican government to open up the program to all agriculturalists with less than 10 hectares and to cut funding to those agriculturalists with more than 10 hectares of exploited land. These changes would definitively turn PROCAMPO into an anti-poverty program. The new Mexican administration, wanting to keep maize flour and tortilla prices as low as possible, and the big producers’ lobbyists successfully resisted the more progressive agenda suggested by the IADB. In their analysis of these negotiations Fox and Haight emphasize that big producers were in little danger of being left adrift, given that they already received direct subsidies for grain production and marketing (Ingreso Objetivo) (Fox and Haight 2010: 8). However, the Mexican government’s farm policy, described as “sharply biased against low-income producers” (Fox and Haight 2010: 11), did not completely contradict IADB’s suggested PROCAMPO reform, as it would imply cutting funds to producers holding between 10 and 100 hectares, towards whom most of the PROCAMPO funds were directed.

Therefore cash transfer development diverges from traditional development ideology in two discernible aspects. The first aspect implies a change in the development perspective of prompting economic development of the countryside, for
instance during the Green Revolution years, to boost “human development”. “Green Revolution” were terms first used in 1968 by a former United States Agency for International Development director. Between 1940 and the late 1960s a series of research, development and technology transfer initiatives, primarily aimed to increase agriculture production, were promoted to counter balance the political influence of Cuban lead communism in Latin America. However, cash transfer programs are not productive investments in agriculture. On the contrary, all statistics show that migration from rural areas as well as economic conversion away from agricultural activity have increased since cash transfers were introduced. Upon the inception of cash transfer programs, development no longer constituted a set of ideological practices intended to boost productivity, income and economic growth but rather became a long term process of accumulation of human capital among a targeted “problem” population.

However, development only appeared to abandon economics in favor of a humanistic discipline that would enable human capabilities to thrive in a determined population. When they attempt to contribute to the human capital formation of the children of the poor, by transferring capital in the form of cash to their parents, development functionaries only perform an indirect improvement of the economy.

Another remarkable aspect of the development industry since the 1990s is its sometimes naïf trust in money. A top-down confidence in the “multiplier effect” of cash, which I relate to the populist monetarism ideology that has thrived in the USA economic academia since the late 1980s, seems to have put a stop to rural development interventions in the Mexican countryside and necessary investments in health and
education. We still need to quantify how much cash transfers have been diverted from investments aimed to improve the quality and the availability of health and education services. Regardless, development initiatives now prioritize cash transfers to individuals, based on an institutionally supported and disseminated faith in money’s supposedly inherent ability to develop human capital. The total discontinuation of agricultural assistance to the countryside following PROCAMPO’s implementation, along with OPORTUNIDADES’ implicit mandate that children and women should abandon the fields and instead fulfill school and health duties, indicate both the financialization and monetization of rural development. For instance, rather than distributing fertilizers, crops and technical assistance to agriculturalists as they had done in the past, SAGARPA and ASERCA promoters started to offer them new forms of J.P. Morgan crop securitization programs (mainly for maize) to stabilize crop prices in the marketplace of futures.

Development transfers depend on five stages, which I identify as follows,

1. Development Capital Formation in Development Banks
2. Development Banks provide loans to Underdeveloped States for Cash Transfer programs
3. Underdeveloped States’ administration of loaned funds and creation of a national development ideology and bureaucracy for their implementation
4. State distribution of cash transfers
5. People’s reception and use of cash transfers
1. Development Capital Formation

The Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank make Mexican cash transfers possible. The anticipatory knowledge that helped produce these two influential development banks and, overall, the capital invested in them by developed states have been fundamental to the shaping of PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES. The fact that the wealthier countries, in particular the USA, have regularly invested in development financial institutions implies not only that there is capital freely provisioned for loans that will be transformed into development practices but that development programs primarily depend on the decisions of those who have contributed capital and thus wield considerable influence in such banks. The extent to which these stakeholders set the investment objectives for development banks constitutes the less explored stage of international development. It would be fundamental, for instance, to examine which particular national interests promote

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5 For instance, the Inter-American Development Bank is owned by 48 sovereign states, only 26 of which can borrow money from the Bank (including Argentina, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela). However, there are also “non-borrowing” shareholder states among which almost half of the decision power is concentrated. In the 2012 Annual Report (IADB 2013: 28) among them the U.S.A. had a subscribed capital stock of 30,309.7 million US dollars and a corresponding 30.028 percent of the total number of votes. In decision power the U.S.A. is followed by four borrowing states, Argentina and Brazil (each with 10.904 percent of the total number of votes), Mexico (7.010% of decision power), Venezuela (5.761%), and by the non-borrowing states of Japan (5.005%), Canada (4.004%), the borrowing states of Colombia and Chile (with 2.995% each), the non-borrowing states of France, Spain, Germany and Italy (with 1.897% each), the borrowing states of Peru (1.460%), Uruguay (1.170%), and the non-borrowing state of the United Kingdom (0.964%). The remaining 32 countries each have less than one percent of decision power. Borrowing states hold 50.015% of decision power at the IADB (IADB 2013: 28). However, in general, borrowing shareholders are conditioned by loans and by the non-borrowing members when borrowers seek to renew an existing loan or request a new loan from the bank. Therefore, the decision powers of borrowing and non-borrowing members differ. The U.S.A.’s leadership in the Bank policies has increased in recent years. In particular, in the Ninth General Increase in the Resources of the IADB (IADB-9), through the Fund for Special Operations projects the U.S.A. participation in the FSO after IADB-9 in 49.57%, followed by Japan 6.06%, Brazil 5.58%, Argentina 5.18%, Mexico 3.37%, Venezuela 3.23, Canada 3.18%, Germany 2.36%, France 2.26%, Italy 2.21%, Spain 2.21%, the United Kingdom 1.80%, Chile 1.62%, Colombia 1.57%.
transnational development policies that will later imply non-explicit conditionalities for borrower states. Making development investors’ interests explicit and demystifying the process of capital formation for developmental enterprises are crucial steps if we are to ascertain a development program’s intentions and compare these with its *ex-post* outcomes.

2. Development Banks provide loans to Underdeveloped States for Cash Transfer programs

The second stage of PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers occurs when these two banks grant loans to the Mexican state. Always keeping the donors’ interests and goals in mind, PROCAMPO and PROGRESA anticipated and were devised to minimize social turmoil and economic losses produced by concrete policies, including, among others, the creation of NAFTA’s agricultural market (1994 - 2008), the peso crisis (1995) and the Social Security Law reform (1997). However, in addition to implying conditionalities for the Mexican State, these loans also constitute lucrative disbursements for the Banks. In this regard, as a chief economist of the Inter-American Development bank pointed out to me, “people sometimes forget that we are a bank and that we mainly work as a bank. We mainly loan money and make money from these loans, even out of interest rates that are much lower than those of private banks.” Underdeveloped states also benefit from these loans, at least initially, as they are the least expensive financing available to them.

3. Underdeveloped States administer loaned funds and create a national development ideology and bureaucracy for their implementation

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The Mexican State’s management of loaned funds constitutes the third stage of cash transfers. Although the Mexican State has borrowed money from the IADB and the WB to finance PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES programs, it has not constituted independent endowments for them. The financial and political management of these funds only occur when they have reached Mexico’s Economic Secretary (Secretaría de Hacienda) and have been complimented by matching funds from the state. After the loans have been calculated as part of the national debt, a Mexican economist explained to me, and “pooled into the national budget, these moneys cease to be international loans.” Through these processes the state gains autonomy in administering funds and starts diverse state building mechanisms by creating new state entities or reassigning functions to existing ones.

4. State distribution of cash transfers.

State developmental bureaucracies then transfer funds and assistance to beneficiaries. From the executive branch of the Mexican government, through SAGARPA and ASERCA, the PROCAMPO money reaches agriculturalists and ex-agriculturalists. OPORTUNIDADES money is also distributed from the executive branch through Secretaría de Hacienda, later SEDESOL (Social Development Secretary), and its agency National Coordination of the Human Development Program OPORTUNIDADES (Coordinacion Nacional del Programa de Desarrollo Humano Oportunidades). According to the history of cash transfer distributions, a very important criterion has been to synchronize the payments, and increase their amount, with the electoral calendar to maximize the money’s effect on political support.
5. People’s reception and use of cash transfers

Ixán’s cash transfers receivers frequently frame government support in terms of promises. The village’s ritual practice, its knowledge, and the aesthetics it propels, provide this framing through which receivers evaluate the government’s intentions for giving them money. The regular reception of cash transfers in the village has led to discussions of their givers’ intentions, to clarify the terms of transaction for mutual success and, in particular, to assess the evenness of exchange for both parties. The uses of the received money, which I further describe in Chapter III, follow patterns of domestication; the people almost immediately convert the money into maize flour, minor agricultural investments, such as fertilizers, and some alcohol expenditures. In general, cash transfer receivers evaluate the regenerative power of the transfers and what they promise negatively. They qualify both as meager.

As I discovered during my fieldwork, the people of Ixán do not exclusively think of themselves as “peasants”, nor as “poors”. Like other Mayan Speaking peoples, they do not identify themselves by the “indigenous” category of “Mayas” (Castañeda 2004, Fallaw 2004, Restall 2004) but rather with their village, pueblo or kaj, its name, histories (Brown 1993, Eiss 2010) and its Ejido. Besides self-identifying as “poor”, peasants (campesinos) and “Ixánenses”, they also refer to themselves using the category of “masewal”. This category evokes a double liaison that I have deduced from their ritual exchangist practices.

On the one hand, as I have already mentioned, the term “masewal” is a pre-Hispanic cosmopolitan word loaned from Nahuatl. It refers to an old historical relationship of Maya commoners with foreign lords, generically named “dzulo’ob” after
the Itzá-Mactun “dzul” house. Immediately before Hernán Cortes’ arrival to the Yucatan Peninsula, the “dzul” house exerted its power over the region, mainly through their trade of slaves and expensive commodities and tariffs. It is not coincidental, then, that an Aztec institution has been adapted into a lingua franca to express an interface that was agreed upon by Itzá warriors and traders, the Maya population and the existing Nahuatl elite. Beyond the agreement concerning names, such an interface purported relationships that would be diametrically different if one takes one perspective or another. Further historical research, departing from Scholes and Roys’ classic work on the Maya Chontal (1948), is needed to clarify how great festival-cum-market events articulated different populations ideologically, commercially and religiously. In the pre-Hispanic times masewalo’ob and their district representatives, kuchkabalo’ob, seem to have endured a sort of fiscal commerce, conducted by the ah kuch kabo’ob (lit. ah, masculine; kuch, burden; kab, village in the sense of jurisdiction) (Quesada 1985: 664-6) that could have resulted in temporary slavery if they failed to pay their tariffs as expected. Taking advantage of this commercial practice of the Lowland Mayas, Spaniards articulated the repartimiento system, which the Maya referred to as koch, a word with many meanings (obligation, burden, blame, ill, reliant on a future payment, infallible augur and bearing) that are very similar to kuch. Nevertheless, coercion was not the only motivation for sponsoring, organizing and paying their duties on time. Rather, ritual payments in advance should have been considered, as they are today, to be investments for which sponsors expect returns of incommensurable gains.

In short, masewalo’ob were situated somewhere between the patronage of a
master class of dzulo’ob and the class of uncilo’ob, or slaves, who were forced to work to repay their debts. The masewal class would have been afloat between the two other classes; they did not submerge themselves into temporal slavery, nor did they purchase upwards mobility through connubial commerce and ritual expenditures for life renewal, which also worked as tributes to lords. It is upon this ritual and fiscal structure that the repartimiento system flourished in Yucatan once encomiendas reached their limit of economic returns. In the 17th century the term “repartimiento” referred to Spanish functionaries’ practice of imposing commercial contracts on villages’ leaders, who in turn imposed them on their people by distributing money or in-kind products for a determined amount of future commodities. In most of the Yucatan peninsula, even in those villages and settlements beyond the reach of the colonial state, through an in advance payment named in Spanish “rescate” (redemption), in advance buyers (Spanish and indigenous “Principales”) distributed money and tasks for usury returns in cotton blankets and wax (Solís Robleda 2009: 14). According to Farriss (1984: 80), soon after its implementation the repartimiento system become the main method of resource generation in Yucatan.

Baskes, who studied Oaxaca’s repartimiento de mercancías, does not consider coercion to even be a possibility for Spanish alcaldes mayores’ reparimientos in indigenous communities. According to Baskes, the system should be understood, instead, from the Spanish perspective, which views it as a system of consumer and producer credit designed to operate in high-risk colonial conditions (Baskes 1996). In Yucatan, repartimiento took the form of cash advances in expectation of future delivery of goods (Farris 1984: 43). The fact that Spaniards and Indigenous leaders agree on the
repartimiento terms implies that it was not a completely European import, but rather based on preexisting ritual economies (McAnany and Wells 2008:1-14, Bracamonte and Solís 1996: 235, Farriss 1984: 80). Nevertheless, the reasons for exchange were different from the kuchi’ob and masewalo’ob perspectives. For them, these reasons involve the promisoriness of life regeneration. The incarceration of failed cargoholder sponsorships in the Highlands, contra Baskes, still indicate some physical compulsory consequences of failed payments. In Ixán “punishments”, such as hurricanes and illnesses, are considered to be consequences of negligent ritual behavior or social transgression. As personal responsiveness of cosmic renewals Solis also finds the koch term indexes compulsion, obligation and “a marked emphasis on the forced imposition of the contracts” upon villagers (Solís Robleda 2009:15) in the Seventeenth century.

It is fundamental to note that indigenous notions of slavery and freedom, beyond their rhetorical uses, refer to different historical contexts. In particular, the Spanish conquest, the 17th and 18th centuries “repartimiento” system, the Caste Wars (1847-1904) and its renewed “age of slavery” in the hands of Maya military leaders, and the indigenist teachings of the Mexican revolution in Yucatan (Eiss 2004: 132). Redemption and enslavement refer, firstly, to perennial ritual practices beyond such historical contexts. Today cosmic changes that bring “freedom” to the Maya from “slavery” (Castañeda 2004: 36), or freeing people from slavery or being “enslaved” as an actual possibility (on tourist sector jobs as a “new slavery” see Bianet Castellanos 2010: 73) have less to do with the above mentioned historical events than with rites serving to evoke these historical events in a regime of historicity that is very different from the one constructed by western historiography.
Therefore, I hypothesize that the ritual interface that supports an overarching trading trope has been used not only as a ritual device to naturalize tariff payments as promissory gift-giving but also still articulates a knowledge in which people and things are possessed, controlled, owned and reanimated by invisible masters who request due payments. In festivals like the Gremios I have studied, *kucho’ob* exchange their services, beverages, food, and prayers for “life purchase” or *x-maaman kuxtal*. Nevertheless, the promisoriness of such exchanges are not reduced or made less potent by the trading trope as one might consider if one understands a purchase to be a one time, simple and perfectly equivalent transaction between equal traders. On the contrary, supplicating cargoholders expect that their minor favors in food and services will produce a return of major favors, such as a direct life infusion and another one mediated by water, i.e. rain for the plants.

Ixánenses who have long ago also established a continued trade relationship with local and invisible *Yùuntsilo’ob*, whom, sometimes, they refer to as *itzá maako’ob* or Itza people, have based these and other economic institutions on their ritual anticipation and pre-figuration of the future. Ixán’s cosmology, in particular their belief that land, rain, and maize are material objects controlled by invisible masters, stresses the benevolence of “owners’” and “masters’” favors. Ritual servitude or ritual clientelistic practices, such as *loj* (redemption) rites and the ritual feeding of field plot masters (*sakaa* and *huajil k’ol*), sustain these agriculturalists’ exchange categories. Permanent ritual practices of *k’eex* (“exchange”, in both senses as exchanging names but also as sacrifice), *loj* (“redemption”), festival “purchases” of life and rain, *jetz* (“arrangement”) and the local congruent understanding of ritual as exchange have
allowed me to think that these exchangist tropes have been systematically dismissed, first by the Spanish Franciscans, and, later, by Mexican bureaucrats who embrace the notion of “subsistence agriculture”. Considering poverty to be a condition of possibility for an eschatological spiritual age, Franciscans’ millennial apology of poor “Indians” (Kauffman 2010: 122) disregarded Mesoamerican economic knowledge and the practical ritual economics it purported. Later, modernist theology and Euro-American economics classified indigenous economic activities under the simple category of “subsistence agriculture”.

In short, an ideology of due and in advance payment that brought redemption, upward mobility and an ideology of freedom and autarchy to ancient Maya agriculturalists must be considered as a still ruling ritual ontology for the majority of Eastern Yucatan agriculturalists. In the cash transfer cases, Ixán’s masewualo’ob, with the help of this ritual ontology, portray themselves and their state and national authorities as involved in an uneven trade of cash transfers for their political support.

Ixánenses, as I have pointed out, suspect that cash transfers could entail a “ruse”. Jacinta sees the OPORTUNIDADES program as a ruse because the cash transfer money she receives through the program has not increased her purchasing ability. She can afford the same number of commodities now as she could before enrolling in the program. However, the money’s conditionalities do burden her with more work and suffering. Furthermore, Ixánenses believe that the body’s power and life resides mostly in the blood and Jacinta suspects that physicians sell the blood samples taken from the women in exchange for the money given. The daily meetings throughout the week, promoters’ difficult requisites and advice, perceived promoter corruption and unjust
retention of OPORTUNIDADES money as punishment for having not fulfilled women’s 
co-responsibilities all reaffirm the oppressiveness of unfair deals with state authorities 
and, in general, with dzulo’ob. Women and poor agriculturalists see themselves as 
unable to directly negotiate with them. However, they do push local authorities to 
improve their situation and at the same time they control them, they ask for more 
money. Local leaders’ therefore request meager quantities of cash (and in kind gifts 
such a food, construction materials, etc.) from state authorities, who require their 
political support in exchange. This support is mainly objectified in numbers of votes 
received in official elections. Due payment with votes allow cash transfer receivers’ 
representatives, i.e. local authorities, some sort of autonomy, not only from those 
villagers they represent but also in relation to state or national politicians.
Sources of Promises
Chronology of policies. Cash to the peasants for political “support”. The reversible temporality of economy at the interface of bureaucracy and the people.

In this chapter I analyze some aspects of the political economic transition proposed by NAFTA treaties for Mexico. In the first half, I examine the effacement of the revolutionary subjectivity of the “peasants”, and its partial replacement by the developmental conceptualizations of the “poor” and the “indigenous”. In addition to reviewing a chronology of concepts, in the second half of the chapter I discuss an ongoing economic intervention of the Mexican government that is based on the expert knowledge of International organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank. In particular, I show how the executive branch of the Mexican government, by distributing cash transfers to the “rural poor”, intended to convert peasants into new economic subjects in exchange for their political support.

The Mexican countryside has been one of the most radical political scenarios in the twentieth century. From the Mexican Revolution (1910) to the Neo-Zapatista uprising at the beginning of 1994, when Mexico entered into the NAFTA, many researchers take into consideration how the Mexican peasantry almost always defined itself in relation to the Mexican state. Since the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910), when a small class of landowners deprived peasant communities of most of their field plots, the central issue for political conflicts was and still is considered to be land (Wolf 1969; Collier 1987; Harvey 1996, Otero 2004). Until Article 27 of the Mexican
Constitution was changed in 1992, the state was responsible for carrying out land redistribution. Therefore, asking for land from the State seems to finally have defined and redefined who were the peasants in Mexico (Cornelius and Myhre 1998; De Walt et al. 1994; Otero et al. 1995). Following Eric Wolf’s famous definition (Wolf 1966: 3-4.), the volatile category of peasants has been qualified as economic conservatives, atomistic, and self-referred to as “the poor”.

The peasant stands, as it were, at the center of a series of concentric circles, each circle marked by specialists with whom he shares less and less experience, with whom he entertains fewer and fewer common understandings. This may be put another way. There are those close to him, peasants like himself, whose motives and interests he shares and understands, even when his relations with them are wholly tangential. They are ‘we others’, as the Italians say, or, in Mexican parlance, “nosotros los pobres”, ‘we, the poor’. These do not form a group characterized by enduring social relationships, but a category of people with whom interaction and understandings are possible on the basis of common premises. This is the positive reference category of the peasant. With persons falling within this category even-handed relationships are possible. Each may and will seek his particular advantage, but each will be aware of the narrow limits beyond which the seeking of advantage threatens to rupture actual or potential relationships. (Wolf 1966: 46-47)

The same question, “who were the peasants?” occupied many academics as well. Approaches to the fate of peasantry range from Marxism (Dobb 1946), dependency theories (Gunder Frank: 1971, Warman 1972), articulated theory of peasants (Laclau 1971, Mayer 2001), direct erasure of the category (Kearny 1995) or the reemergence as new peasantries (Ploeg 2009). Most academic studies of peasantry have considered “peasantry” to be a “part-culture” (Wolf 1955). Likewise, Redfield states that the “social structure” of peasants and peasant-like societies include relations of “cultural influence” between an “elite half” and a properly speaking “peasant half” (Redfield 1956: 38). Explanations of the category’s ongoing integration into a “wider socioeconomic system” (Hewitt de Alcantara 1984:185) that promotes an always-
dynamic process of transformation of these parts take many forms, including modernization, gradual developmentalists (Redfield 1953), evolution (gradual or revolutionary, Bonfil 2006: 85) or, more revolutionarily, overcoming “internal colonialism” (Stavenhagen 1969, Menéndez 2002) or “semi-proletarization” (Otero 2004:16). These explanations diverge in respect to which form this ineluctable farewell to the peasants might take.

However, the Mexican post-revolutionary state has constituted its peasants through the national ideology of indigenism, giving them a prominent role in political emancipatory narratives. According to Hewitt de Alcantara (1984) “[i]ndigenistas fervently believed in the inevitability of progress from a backward, isolated, Indian society to a modern mestizo, national one” while “[o]rthodox Marxists and deterministic dependentistas were similarly convinced of the unilinear advance of man toward liberation from oppression of all kinds (Hewitt de Alcantara 1984: 182).

Although Cardenismo (1934-1940) failed to achieve most of its stated political goals, its advance of peasant empowerment in Yucatan has been one of its most powerful legacies (Fallaw 2001: 167). In short, while the “peasant” was an imaginary subject condemned to disappear in modernist eschatologies, such as modernization or revolutionary narratives, Mexico’s post revolutionary corporatism imbued the category with a political force that constituted it as the main character of a state-led process of national emancipation. Therefore the implementation of the Ejidal system was more than a simple economic strategy; it implied political and cultural dimensions as well (Zendejas 1995; Green 1995: 268).

While it is true that many people in Mexico refer to themselves as
“campesinos”, the category is nowadays under heavy criticism, not only in academic milieus but in government as well. After the Mexican Revolution, many people, including urban elites in Mexico City, made it clear that peasantry was the main problem Mexico had to solve in order to become a modern nation. In this sense, for a former Minister of Agriculture, an ASERCA functionary in Valladolid told me, the countryside had to get rid of its peasants to finally become productive. Another functionary, this time in the headquarters of SAGARPA in Mexico City, joked about my long research, which I started in 2003, telling me that when I finish it there will be no peasants in Mexico anymore. In Mérida, another ASERCA functionary explained to me that the current barrier to “getting rid of the peasants” was “their religion”. For a computer specialist in charge of controlling the PROCAMPO and insurance programs from a desktop, he had a very accurate conceptualization of what maize means for agriculturalists. These three functionaries come from very different backgrounds, educations and generations. However all three of them work in these dependencies of the Agricultural Ministry, and share a common understanding of their country’s history. They are especially aware of what the 1992 Constitutional reform means for the countryside.

In 1992 a constitutional reform finished one of the main processes started by the Mexican Revolution, ending the state distribution of land to the peasants. The “ejido”, or common land, of almost every single village in Mexico changed from common to private property and became alienable. At the same time, a program of land certification called PROCEDE started to consolidate these new land titles. In agricultural villages people received a title representing the percentage of their ejido property. This
change in the regime of land property had many implications. One of the more 
important is the alienability of land and, subsequently, the virtual end of a form of 
agriculturalism based on a particular regime of commons.

The change in ownership regimes meant that communities or communal land 
no longer pertained to moral persons or villages. Instead, individuals are now the only 
legal owners. This change is meaningful, for instance, when a person asks for a loan. In 
the now all-too-common situation in which she is unable to pay back the loan, the 
financial institution can claim the individual’s portion of the ejido. In Ixán this is 
happening more and more frequently. Representatives from financial institutions come 
to the villages with checks and papers to sign and leave with the land certificates.

Dismantling the multi-dimensional Ejido system, through land commodification, 
also brought swift changes for the constitution of the Mexican state’s new subjects. 
Mexico's 1992 constitutional reform not only allowed for the alienation of Ejidos lands, 
but also made the promotion of “integral rural development” a Mexican state objective 
(Art. 27, subsection XX). Following these and other policy changes, references to the 
role of “the peasants” (campesinos) in the national political narrative began to wane. In 
reframing the national ideology of Indigenism (mainly administered thorough the INI, 
National Indigenism Institute 1948-2003), the state relation to the peasants was 
replaced by an overarching narrative of economic and human development of the rural 
poor or the indigenous peoples, which, since Fox’s presidency, was administered by the 
ex- INI, today known as CDI (National Commission for the Development of Indigenous 
Peoples 2003-). Internationally funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and 
promoted through the Plan Puebla Panamá (2001-2006, now called the Mesoamerican
Project), this narrative imagined a long-term future in which “the integration and development of the Mesoamerican Region” (Mesoamerican Project 2013) would be achieved.

For instance, in its founding document the Plan Puebla Panamá states that,

At the interior of the region (but also in the countries that constitutes the region) there is a great ethnic, language, cultural and custom diversity. By this reason the indigenous question does not admit an homogeneous solution, applicable to every groups (unless in what refers to the attack to poverty and marginalization). (Plan Puebla Panamá 2001: 26)

The document couples poverty with “the indigenous question” as exceptions to the possibility of a homogeneous solution. As “indigenous peoples” enter into the governments and transnational narratives, in close identification with the poor, “peasants” fade away in the whole region of the Mesoamerican project. From the southern Mexican states to Panama, the end of peasantry seems to have been orchestrated to bring the post revolutionary narrative of Mexican Corporate Nationalism to an end. Replacing the peasant with a more universal subject, like the poor or the indigenous, or by combining both as the “indigenous poor”, also imagines a different fate for them—one that does not involve working in the fields.

**NAFTA as a past future**

In the academic literature, the North American Free Trade Agreements (NAFTA), the Plan Puebla-Panamá (PPP), and the constitutional reform of 1992, among other political facts, are frequently referred to as historical landmarks that serve to explain the current geo-political subordination of Mexico to the United States. John Saxe-Fernandez has synthetically called this relationship the “Mexico purchase” (Saxe-
The trope comes from a comparison made by the then U.S. vice president Albert Gore to the importance of the Louisiana and Alaska purchases with the NAFTA treaties, while promoting their approval in the U.S. congress. Therefore, Saxe-Fernandez’s trope applies not only to an explanation of an imperialistic economic annexation of Mexico, performed by “neoliberal” politicians, but also a long temporality of imperialistic and neo-imperialistic relationships. He explains that the United States instantiates a new form of administering natural resources, labor forces and capital that transcends an already ineffective Mexican national-state sovereignty. Once under its rule, the Mexican territory, its natural resources and its labor force would be controlled and exploited not by the Mexicans but mainly U.S. American Multinationals.

From the 1848 U.S. annexation of almost half of Mexico’s territory, ideologically expressed as “manifest destiny”, Saxe-Fernandez deduces a domination master plan by referring to punctual facts in a series. However, Saxe-Fernandez does not explain why his fellow Mexicans would embrace such a manifest destiny. Leaving aside any positive expectancies of the majority of the Mexican people, Saxe-Fernandez limits his focus to the geo-political strategies of U.S. corporations, ascribing an influential role to neoliberal ideology in the political and economic expansion of the USA. Mainly imported from the USA through Mexican elites, the poetic reference to the agency of “neoliberalism” not only sounds hollow and repetitive in his account, but epiphenomenic and subsidiary to the strategic appropriation of economic structures and resources.

Imagining the existence of a transnational agent such as “neoliberalism” could
help to confound her with a vague mass, a mixture of historical era, epoch, or knowledge-power, finally expressing something as synonymous with “evil” (Ferguson 2011: 407). In regards to the systematic hard core economic policies and, in general, the political economy proposed by international organizations such as International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank in the last thirty years, I prefer, following Guyer (2007), to describe them as “monetarism”. As an ideology and a specific disciplinary knowledge, monetarism tends to reduce all economic phenomena into their financial aspects. For instance, as the Mexican case shows, monetarist rural development programs would not focus on boosting production and commercialization of agricultural produce but on its financial securitization over time. In the case of maize, the programs’ main objective was not to promote production or to open up new markets but to financially stabilize its price in the long run through the financial market of futures (for instance, ASERCA 2012).

Today, having been considered left adrift by the New Mexican rural economy (Gravel 2007), small-scale agriculturalists receive incentives, in the form of cash transfers, to adapt to the new conditions proposed by the NAFTA, i.e. the abandonment of agriculture. Cash transfer development programs differ from the former ones, in both their characterization of poverty and in their means and ends of redeeming people from poverty and their destinies as “peasants”. Cash transfers’ “incentives” encouraged people to leave the countryside, opening them up to diverse personal futures, among them, an urban and much more monetized poverty. After international organizations naturalized monetarism as an expert knowledge that should influence transnational policies, monetarist policies such as cash transfers were implemented in
Mexico, which had to contribute to the NAFTA markets by providing a large and inexpensive labor force.

In what follows I analyze the economic transformation of the Mexican countryside that resulted from these evolving development policies.

The Third generation of rural development

According to the development literature, the first generation of rural development programs in Mexico started in the 1960s. The Organization of American States’ 1961 Conference in Punta del Este and the World Conference of Agrarian Reform in Rome, 1966, marked its main trends. Following the model of industrialization by import substitution, the Mexican government intended to face recurrent agricultural crises by redirecting resources to the “impoverished peasant” or the “rural poor” for industrialization. Under the ideological influence of the “integral agrarian reformism” and the “green revolution”, both reactions and alternatives to the communist revolutions, especially to the Cuban influence in the continent, a series of measures were promoted under the label of “extensionism”. The “extension” of knowledge, capital, technology, but also of some distribution of certain vacant soil, was advertised as the solution to rural poverty in the present and in the near future, while the industrialization process was taking place. Many programs were subsequently created with these goals in mind. These included, among others, “Programa de Inversión para el Desarrollo Social” (PIDER) 1973 - 1982; “La Coordinación General del Plan Nacional de Zonas deprimidas y Grupos Marginados” (COPLAMAR) 1977 – 1982; and the “Sistema Alimentario Mexicano” (SAM) 1980.
Nevertheless, in 1982, President De la Madrid made a definitive turn when he privatized 500 public enterprises and inaugurated the so called “neoliberal period”. At that time, the second generation of Mexican development programs was identified with the start of PRONASOL or Mexico's National Solidarity Program, on December 2, 1988. In a context of a debt crisis and structural adjustments recommended by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank granted Mexico social investment funds to smooth out unpopular measures and, at the same time, to cut the social budget. At that time, PRONASOL consisted mostly of in-kind transfers (food, health assistance, etc.) and represented a strong expenditure on the poor. Economist Magdalena Villareal points out,

Despite the fact that the president had decreed severe cuts in the expenditure for social programs, PRONASOL itself held an extremely high budget. In 1992 PRONASOL disbursements represented 4 percent of the national public expenditures and 2.2 percent of the social expenditures. While in 1989 it represented 6.6 percent of the total public investment, in 1992 it had reached 17.3 percent (Valencia Lomelí and Aguirre Reveles 1998: 69). However, during this period, poverty continued to increase. (Villareal 2009: 126)

PRONASOL made possible the radical reformulation of the Mexican State. However, a deeper structural adjustment aimed toward integrating Mexico with the North American Free Trade zone promoted the third generation of development programs. From this political context emerged PROCÉDE, PROCAMPO in 1993, and PROGRESA (later called OPORTUNIDADES) in 1997. According to the first Article of the Presidential bill of its creation, PROCAMPO is an unconditional cash transfer program addressed “to transfer resources to support the rural producers’ economy” (PROCAMPO 1994). On purpose, this rural program was ideated not to promote productivity but to support the switch towards a context in which “prices were determined by the market,
based on their international references” (PROCAMPO nd). According to the general guidelines of the World Trade Agreements, PROCAMPO should be considered a “decoupled” cash transfer, which means that it does not affect crop prices and production and, therefore, should not be considered to “bias” international trade.

PROCAMPO’s miracle.

Appendini has noted that PROCAMPO goals were not economic but political and social (1998:31). Just before the presidential election of 1994, 3 million checks were delivered to producers. At that time, many NGOs protested that the program support was being linked to a vote for the PRI in many states (Appendini 1998: 34). However, direct cash transfers such as PROCAMPO were more than electoral gifts to buy votes; they are more efficacious than that. A detailed reading of PROCAMPO’s bill would be necessary to identify its main objectives. In the horizon of NAFTA, a greater transformation was needed to make an urgent transition from an outdated mode of agricultural exploitation towards “modes of production based on efficiency and productivity principles”. In the first section of the PROCAMPO Bill, preceding the already broad objective “to support the rural producers’ economy” expressed in Article one, its author, President Salinas de Gortari, states eight considerations. These are as follows,

WHEREAS
(1)”That pursuant to the Constitution of the United Mexican State, the State must lead the national development, to plan, to coordinate and direct the economic activity, in the sense that the general interest demands, and in the context of the freedoms recognized by the Constitution;”

(2) “that the countryside represents a particular national priority, because it is the sphere in which the necessity of change is more urgent and significant for
the future of the country;”

(3) “that the constitutional reform of the 27th article, January 6, 1992, as well as its legislation, have established the juridical bases for the rural development from the premises of justice and liberty;”

(4) “that a support system (un sistema de apoyos) that fosters a major participation of social and private sectors in the countryside is necessary, to improve inner and external competence; to improve rural families’ quality of life; and the modernization of the commercialization system, all for increasing the rural production units’ capability of capitalization; that the subsidy-support system so conceived eases the conversion of those areas in which is possible to establish activities of greater profitability, giving economic certitude to the rural producers and greater skills for adaptation to change, demanded by the new rural development policy already enacted, and the application of the agrarian policy contended in the constitutional reform of article 27;

(5) that the same support system promotes new alliances among the same sector and with that one of the private sector in the form of associations, organizations and societies able to face the challenge of competition, though the adoption of more advanced technology and the implantation of modes of production based on efficiency and principles of productiveness;

(6) that due to the fact that more than 2.2 million rural producers who assign their production to self-consumption are at the margin of any support system, and in consequence, unequal conditions against other producers that commercialize their harvests, this system is implemented, which has as one of its main objectives to improve the income level of those producers.

(7) that it is necessary through direct supports, to contribute to the recovery and conservation of the forests and jungles, reducing soil erosion and water pollution, and promoting the development of a culture of conservation of rural resources, and

(8) that being the highest national interest to support rural producers through a program to raise living standards, preserve natural resources and promote rural development. (Procampo 1994)

From these considerations, one can deduce that change in the countryside, modernization and, more concretely, easing the “conversion” of lands into more profitable activities, as well as improving income levels of “subsistent farmers”, are PROCAMPO’s most important goals for the future. Although numerous, these aims are
very general. In fact, one could argue that the lack of a precise aim was deliberate.

Depending on whom one asks about PROCAMPO, one finds different answers. At the IADB, economists state that PROCAMPO’s objective is to support Mexico’s incorporation into the NAFTA treaties, concretely in relation to dismantling later subsidy schemes. They also recognize that PROCAMPO implies poverty financial assistance for smoothing structural adjustments, too, although this is understated in the program’s papers. On the other hand, PROCAMPO officials and its own web page, at the Marketing Support and Services Agency (ASERCA in Spanish), stress a different objective: to compensate for U.S. and Canadian agricultural subsidies. However, the price compensation argument is insufficient if one takes into consideration that over 2.2 million agriculturalists, according to official documents, produce for self-subsistence and their produce does not reach markets. It appears that while the obvious objective is “to transfer economic resources supporting the economy of agriculturalists” the reasons why such support is needed or performed are left purposefully vague. Furthermore, presupposing the existence of farmers whose products are mainly intended for self-subsistence does not necessarily preclude their commercialization of some of their surpluses in informal markets. Therefore it appears that the program aims to simultaneously compensate for the radical decrease in crop prices and convert “self-subsistence farmers” or peasants into other economic activities.

If the program’s aims were to increase agriculturalists’ incomes and improve the living conditions of poor peasants while, at the same time, dismantling the “support prices” system for some staple crops (the most important of them, maize corn), they
also responded to a higher intention of reshaping the Mexican rural and labor sectors according to the NAFTA productivity rates. The guaranteed price system was devised to guard crop producers’ viability and also protect the purchasing power of low-income consumers. Settled by the State years earlier, the internal guaranteed price for yellow maize in 1990 was about 50% higher than the average international price of imported yellow maize (Hibon et al. 1992: 316). Nevertheless, one of the conditions for signing the North American Free Trade Agreements (NAFTA) was to get rid of any “subsidy” that would distort price formations. PROCAMPO, then, would signify receiving fresh money from international organizations in the form of credits while shutting down expensive subsidies on the maize price to do away with unproductive peasants and convert them into a fresh source of labor.

As the program is considered to be “de-coupled” from agricultural production, i.e. not considered as an incentive to produce more crops (for opinions on de-coupledness see Taylor et al. 1999), the main aim of PROCAMPO was to replace a system of high guaranteed prices for staple crops while Mexico was in transition to the perfect market environment of NAFTA. A 15-year phase-out of above-quota tariffs for corn, dry beans and milk powder was negotiated between Mexico and its partners the United States of America and Canada. Like the tariffs, PROCAMPO was also supposed to last from January 1994 to January 2008. However, the transition towards this envisaged free market did not end the PROCAMPO cash transfer system as it did all border protection and tariff of imports.

The first Unconditional Cash Transfer Program. PROCAMPO and its creator
Following the model of capital accumulation, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari wanted to “modernize” the agricultural “marketing system”, to “promote a higher participation of the private and social sector” into the countryside “for improving competitiveness”, “to improve living standards of rural families” decreed the “transfer of resources in support (‘en apoyo’) to the economy rural producers” (PROCAMPO 1994: 1-2). As a fairly new idea, unconditional cash transfers made their appearance in the development milieu through PROCAMPO. According to the PROCAMPO booklet printed for information purposes, PROCAMPO’s third objective was “to compensate subsidies, especially those developed countries give to some agricultural producers” (PROCAMPO nd: 4) while Mexico was adjusting itself to the NAFTA rural markets. Nevertheless, according to the same official publication, around two thirds of PROCAMPO recipients no longer marketed their products. According to this PROCAMPO booklet, 2.2 million agriculturalists, producing only for “self-consumption” (PROCAMPO nd: 4), were going to receive for the first time a subsidy meant to secure them an income. Therefore the price compensation argument applied to only one third of PROCAMPO recipients.

If not for price compensation, why is the government still paying agriculturalists, after the expiry of the original tariff-linked transitional period? I argue that the continuation of payments is intended to ensure the continuation of governmental support. In a context of increasing poverty, then, taking away cash transfers would imply that the support reattributed to the government could

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6 Fabio Veras Soares records that the first Conditional Cash Transfer was implemented in Honduras in 1990 as Programa de Asignación Familiar. This program’s objective was to “smooth the effects of structural adjustment policies on the poorest families” (Soares 2010: 176).
potentially transform into social unrest and political destabilization. My hypothesis is that cash transfers were instruments devised, tested and perfected through the expert knowledge in American Universities and international organizations' economists, such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, to smooth the negative effects of structural adjustment programs on the very poor while maintaining and increasing political support for the government that implements such adjustments. For evidence, I must now shift further back in time in this chronology, even prior to the programs’ creation.

Himself an author of a PhD Dissertation at Harvard University, titled “Public Investment, Political Participation and System Support: Study of Three Rural Communities” 1978 (published with a significative change in the Spanish title as “Producción y participación política en el campo” 1982), Salinas was well aware of extra-economic uses of development programs in the countryside. Following an economic impact evaluation of two rural development programs implemented in the first half of the 1970s, Salinas’ dissertation and book analyzes the political participation and the support of the government produced by these two programs.

According to his research (Salinas 1978 and 1982), development programs addressed to the rural sector should also be studied as incentives of political participation (“independent variable”) and political support (“dependent variable”) of the federal state and government. Salinas concludes that the more participation a community engages in, the “less dependency bonds it develops with the National State” (Salinas de Gortari 1982: 321). Salinas, therefore, is concerned when communities that had received abundant resources from the State did not seem to develop “attitudes of
support” towards the political “system” (Salinas de Gortari 1982: 321). Immediately, he discusses the importance of the relation between community “local leaders” and community “outer leaders”, like the “radical promoter” (Salinas de Gortari 1982: 324). Both leaders boost participation in the community and solve community problems but they are “very critical towards vote-oriented participation” (Salinas de Gortari 1982: 323). This mode of participation, even if it is useful to achieve the “multiplier effect” desired by development programs, he concludes, goes forward without “attitudes of support to the system” (Salinas de Gortari 1982: 324). Therefore, local participation and development are enemies of support towards the National State. He states this in black and white before his policy recommendations,

Nevertheless, the fact that the most benefited communities from the State actions do not manifest a level of support superior to those that [are] meaningful for not receiving [any] benefit, shows that the State did not build a solid base of support; this is, the big political weapon that was thought could mean public expenditure, has no effectivity for buying political support that the State expected. (Salinas de Gortari 1982: 325)

Bypassing peasant leaderships and the complex series of representation between the people, their villages’ representatives, the party’s bureaucratic echelon and the National executive branch with a cash transfer “system of support” is not included in Salinas’s book’s recommendation of policies. Instead he suggests looking for programs that avoid “counterproductive effects” in terms of agriculturalists’ support to the state (Salinas 1982: 326). Salinas’s implied discovery is that a “direct support system” could be an efficacious means of bypassing all the obstacles between the

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7 For Salinas the outer development leader, who he refers to as the “radical promoter” or “extensionista radical”, incentivizes more participation than the “normal promoter” or “promotor normal”, and is fundamental to understanding growing community participation that cannot be channeled through the “vote” (Salinas 1982: 323).
people and the National government, leaving aside public investment in rural communities, which he has determined, by itself, “does not stimulate participation” (Salinas 1982: 324).

With this research in mind, it is reasonable to consider PROCAMPO to be a transfer of a minimum amount of cash per hectare meant to establish a direct but distant relationship between the State (at the time of Salinas’s writing he also identifies the “Party-state” as a unique entity) and its recipients. Thus, such a direct cash transfer for the rural poor is more than a compensation for the changing prices of crops; in the eyes of its givers it materializes as a farewell gift, a regular amount of money that should maintain indigenous peasant support for the national government without encouraging their political participation. To this end, the main objective of such cash transfer programs is to prompt receivers’ “support for the political system” and to break with local “caciquism”.

“Caciquism” is a well known but still debated form of political representation in which a local leader is considered the gatekeeper of the human, natural, economic and political resources of a community against external menaces (Ouweneel 1996: 248-252, Bartra et al. 1975). Mesoamerican people’s strong political and religious identification with their villages (Tax 1937; Medina 1995; in Yucatan, see Brown 1993) materialize in processes of vesting authority and power in various representations. When human leaders are conferred power, not through legal but rational principles (Knight 2001: 331), they hold an all-embracing decision making capability when representing and negotiating community issues with “the outside”. However, mistaking caciquismo for a permanent form of clientelism of one patriarch over equals indicates a
misunderstanding of the processes upon which leaders are supported and rotated following various bottom-up logics, among which the ritual is not least important.

Therefore, Salinas’ aim of discouraging any engagement in unified and organized political demands against the national government, which could potentially be organized by “radical promoters” from the outside and local leaders inside the villages, could be deduced by juxtaposing his dissertation (1978) and book (1982) with the PROCAMPO program he implemented after signing NAFTA’s agreements and following the Zapatista movement uprising in January 1, 1994. In Salinas’ book’s terms, PROCAMPO’s unspoken objective was debunking and erasing alliances between “caciques” and “radical promoters” by paying “direct” per hectare cash transfers, or support, to individuals and expecting in return the retribution of political support to the national state.

Furthermore, cash transfers signal the death of “extensionismo”, a philosophy of development that actively sought to “extend technology and knowledge” from the metropolis to the peasantry, following green revolution strategies. As I will describe later, after the implementation of PROCAMPO, SAGARPA promoters were not officially allowed to assist agriculturalists with seeds, fertilizers, agricultural knowledge, etc. Cash transactions replaced any in-kind development assistance or services. De-coupled from production, PROCAMPO and, later, PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES sought to implicitly promote migration from the countryside to urban centers. In his dissertation and book Salinas also clearly argues that migrants to the cities are more positive and less critical of the state than rural villagers,

Distrust and criticism of the performance of public officials are notorious among rural inhabitants. Centuries of exploitation, decades of rhetoric and the
unfulfillment of promises do not allow a good confidence level. 62.2% of the sample’s peasants consider that the majority of public functionaries only fight for their personal interests; this can also be observed as a uniform rate in the three studied communities. Migrants are more optimistic: 60% accepted that they (public officials) offer help to the general people, which seems to show that the migration process is an escape valve quite useful to reduce the level of criticism to the system. (Salinas de Gortari 1982: 129)

In this sense, my interpretation is that cash transfers both tie the government and peasants together according to a “direct” reciprocal but asymmetric transfer of “support” but also divide peasants from each other by encouraging migration away from rural areas and economic reconversion. In other words, such transfers intentionally aim to complete a process of disarticulating peasants from rural markets, and political arenas while simultaneously inducing them to support the government. After the abandonment of crops guaranteed price schemes cash transfers intend to legitimize the “dumping” prices of imported maize by transforming small maize producers into petty consumers.

PROCAMPO Implementation

During the spring-summer cycle of 1994, eligible farmers received MXN$330 per hectare, an amount that rose to MXN$350 for the fall-winter cycle of the same year (around US$107 and US$113, respectively, using the exchange rate of January 1, 1994). Initial beneficiaries included 3.3 million growers of corn, beans, sorghum, wheat, rice, soybeans, and cotton. From this group, 2.2 million were declared to be “subsistence” farmers “who assign their production to self-consumption”, according to equivocal

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8 According to Timothy Wise (2009) “the United States exported agricultural products to Mexico at prices below their cost of production, on of the definition of ‘dumping’ in the WTO”. During the period he studied, 1997-2005, Mexican “[c]orn farmers experienced the greatest losses: $6.5 billion, an average of $99 per hectare, per year”. (Wise 2009: 1)
government documents (PROCAMPO 1994). The fact that most of their production was aimed for self-consumption does not mean surpluses were not commercialized inside the indigenous villages. The program implied a budget of US$ 3.5 billion. The program is financed by the Mexican State and by loans from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the World Bank (WB). As with similar programs applied in the United States and in some of the European Community countries, they were devised to “discourage [agricultural] production facing the huge surplus of food it registered” (Calva 1993: 21). However, the same author immediately clarifies that this was “not the case of Mexico, where the alimentary shortage obliged in 1992 to import US$ 6.98 billion of all sorts of food: meat, milk, fruits, crops” (Calva 1993: 21). Therefore, PROCAMPO’s purposeful discouragement of agricultural production depends on financial policies that extend well beyond Mexico.

For an idea of the production and trade of maize crop before and after the implementation of NAFTA, one should recall that corn production did not decrease as many predicted it would, but it only increased from 18,125,300 tonnes in 1993 to 23,301,900 tonnes in 2010. Maize imports, on the other hand, increased exponentially. In 1993 Mexico imported only 210,644 tonnes, valued at $69,727,000 (at a unit value of $331 per ton) and in 2010 Mexico imported 7,260,620 tonnes of maize, valued at $1,436,750,000 (at a unit value of $198 per ton), this being Mexico’s main import. At the same time, the number of agricultural producers in Mexico declined 21% during the 1990s. In this sense, Cargill increased its gross income 660% between 1998-1999 and 2007-2008 (Carlsten 2009).

As a consequence of the policy of discouraging small maize producers, which
was applied through a radical reduction of maize crops, more than two million agriculturalists lost their jobs (Spieldoch and Lilliston 2007). Therefore, PROCAMPO’s initial objective of supporting 2.2 million agriculturalists who never received any “subsidy” prior to the program’s implementation could be identified with transitioning them from agriculture to something else. Nevertheless, after the maize crop prices dropped around 45% and left these small agricultural producers without any possibility of marketing their crops, they would hardly survive as consumers. Most of them left their rural villages, sold their percentages of Ejidal land and looked for another way of life in the cities. As a Witness for Peace report summarizes,

> NAFTA promised lower food prices for the Mexican public due to cheap subsidized grains imported from the U.S. Like most of its promises, the exact opposite has occurred. As real prices for harvested corn declined, prices that consumers pay for their staple grains have skyrocketed. In the first six years of NAFTA, the price for corn tortillas nearly tripled, rising 571%. Tortillas are Mexico’s most important food, representing 75% of the caloric intake for Mexico’s 50 million poor. By January 2007 tortilla prices tripled again, causing massive demonstration throughout Mexico. (Witness for Peace 2009)

CONASUPO (National Commission for Peoples’ Subsistence), the marketing system that helped small-scale producers sell their maize, was dismantled in a process that started in 1980 and was finished in 1999. At the same time, almost 3 million small holders and Ejido workers abandoned agricultural tasks; the majority of these people now receive cash transfers as a minimum subsistence income. Most of them, more or less quietly, grow older and poorer in rural areas or migrate to the United States or to any of Mexico’s big cities as a cheap labor force.

*Is it so obvious what cash transfers are?*

Hitherto cash transfer theories and practices have endured for over 25 years,
through rapidly changing, turbulent and unpredictable conditions to which all parties recurrently react. The continual adaptation of such programs, by both policy makers and their receivers, is the underlying process of my local study of PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES. These unilateral gifts of money from the national state to the poor, that appear to come as predicted by the international organizations, are not static. The negotiations of the terms and practices of the gifts recursively reshape their aims along with the particular relationships established between their numerous givers and receivers.

Cash transfers should be analyzed according to the historical context in which they originate, specifically, the economic knowledge and practices promoted by monetarism since its inception in the late 1970s. The enduring idea behind cash transfers, such as PROCAMPO or OPORTUNIDADES, is to provide poor people with a certain amount of money. By definition, cash transfers oppose in-kind transfers and, more importantly, presuppose markets in which monies can be spent efficiently. Given that the givers presuppose that the receivers of such transfers should or will improve their freedom to choose what to do with the money, a win-win game seems to start. Rather than spending a lot of money on what are seen as cumbersome and inefficient public services, “subsidies” and “entitlements”, monetarist givers give away a limited and much lesser quantity of money that, according to some studies, should have a “multiplier effect” (Sadoulet et al. 2001). Sadoulet et al. propose that there must be indirect effects of cash transfer programs where people put “the cash transferred to work” (2001: 3). In an expression of universal economic principles they conclude that, if the household is liquidity constrained and hence has underemployed and ill-allocated productive assets relative to an unconstrained situation, the cash
transfer should generate benefits at least similar to a credit program—and expectedly higher, since there is no risk of failure to pay. (Sadoulet et al. 2001: 3)

According to the same paper, the multiplier for all households varies between 1.5 to 2.6, being higher for households with medium and large farms, few or no children and non-indigenous backgrounds. However, when I mentioned this paper and the possibility that PROCAMPO might have indirect multiplier effects to a SAGARPA chief economist and his co-worker, an economist in charge of controlling PROCAMPO data, they just laughed about it. The chief economist said that they receive those papers as “compliment”. But he reminds me that PROCAMPO’s only objective is to simply increase agriculturalists’ incomes and “this is why we are not sanctioned by the international organizations”. After I ask him if this is not tautological, that giving money to agriculturalists will of course increase their income in the exact amount of the money given, he laughs again. “Of course” he says, “this is the only reason that PROCAMPO’s objectives are reached. Because, as you said, they are obvious”.

Nevertheless, he explains to me that even though ASERCA and SAGARPA refer to academic papers when they praise PROCAMPO, there is a more complex reality that they do not address. Referring to academic papers like the above-mentioned, he admits that,

They seem out of context, they only use a little projection model to run it out and to get an 1.25 or 1.45 coefficient, and, from it, they give political advice or validate policies. [But] They shall get closer to the countryside. It is very difficult to calculate the [cash transfer] effect into the agriculturalist’s income.

From his words one can also deduce how he would calculate these effects. From our conversation it is clear to me that much work remains to be done, in the countryside, concerning the particular economic effects of cash transfers.
Nevertheless, there are other effects development specialists do not seem to want to consider. According to one chief economist of the Inter-American Development Bank, there has not yet been a serious study regarding the inflationary effects of such programs. Given that the people receive the money and use it immediately, the sellers of some products could raise their prices without consequences for the demand of the product. Instead of saving or investing the money, the receivers of the money need to use it immediately, let us say, for maize or frijol in the Mexican case, then the seller of maize or frijol could take advantage of the aggregated demand and raise the consumer prices proportionally to the increase in demand.

Anticipating New Poverties

At the Inter-American Development Bank a chief economist in charge of evaluating, among other things, the PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES programs explained to me that “there is a secular trend in every country in the world, no country has escaped it, and it is of reducing the countryside population”. For him, Mexico goes “indefectible in that direction”. The abandonment of the countryside, according to his logic, will make the countryside more productive and the peasants will discover better ways of life and better means of living elsewhere. It is worth quoting this economist at length to reveal the overarching and ineluctable logic of his narrative. He maintains that,

There is a secular trend, in every country of the world, which no country has escaped... and it is that of reducing the rural population. Let’s say... if when one looks a regression of what is the percentage of the country population versus the development level, at the global level, let’s say a curve... R2 of that regression is like 0.95... That is ineluctable.... Let’s say... at the same time the income level increases, the countryside improves technologically. When [the
countryside] improves technologically, it expulses people. And Mexico is in this process. Mexico is in this process and there it goes. Therefore, let’s say, one can see the modernization process as a process of countryside modernization and of one of looking for opportunities... yes. In fact, the process is bigger that this one. It is a process of an economic structural transformation that transforms the countryside. It increases the productivity, by any means... it could be by producing vegetables or “whatever”... every country has... but it modernizes the countryside and it involves more technology, more capital, it decreases the labor demand and people go away... That strategy is the strategy that OPORTUNIDADES supports because basically what OPORTUNIDADES does is giving the people human capital. Not to keep them seeding maize but keeping doing the best. And the best for many people is going away. But no one says to the people “study and go away”. [Instead] “Study and do your best”. However, every one is going to do their best. Some will stay. They have an enormous talent and they are, potentially, agricultural entrepreneurs and they will become rich in the countryside. Others will be movie actors and they go away... (laughs) but giving them human capital for doing the best activity, the one they are more productive in.

Nevertheless, when I restated the question and asked if this trend was universal and had not a single contradictory case in “human history”, the chief economist thought a millisecond and answered that in France, more precisely in Paris, the reverse trend is now taking place. There many people are abandoning the lower quality life of the city for the better life the countryside can offer. They are, overall, members of the middle class, tired of commuting and high housing prices. His explanation did not end with a case that contradicts an ineluctable trend but, half-ironically, he told me that his wife likes to grow arugula and that perhaps in a few years they could go to the French champagne to do so.

In short, cash transfer interventions aimed to support the smooth transition of “subsistence farmers”, mainly maize producers, into a reserve army of labor and net maize buyers. By transferring modest amounts of money to these agriculturalists, their wives, and their children, the state’s main objective was to establish a separate but direct relationship with each of these populations. By reshaping the economic means of
living for agriculturalists’ families, cash transfers not only promote their conversion to new economic lives but also towards new economic subjectivities and political leaderships. However, the state functionaries who implemented these programs took for granted the effectiveness of existing health and education facilities and had high expectations of market-driven development for the transformation of ex-peasants’ life aspirations. In this sense, the implementation of cash transfers as facilitators of the political atomization of ex-Ejidatarios through the promotion of upper-middle class life objectives falls short when, as was the case in 2008, maize flour prices spike and cash transfer receivers cannot ensure their subsistence.

In taking on the tasks of traveling, observing and conducting interviews throughout various places, including IADB in Washington DC, Mexico City, Mérida, Valladolid and Ixán, I hoped to observe and describe the subtlety and newness of promissory practices. In particular, of the ritual and cash transfer prestations from which I am reconstructing some practical contexts in which they make sense. However, these contexts are not actual but virtual. They arise from the perspectives of the future that the actors, including both givers and receivers, have in a particular moment. Intermediately, there are creative, or not so creative, misconceptions and misunderstandings. For instance, almost every peasant in Ixán completely disregards the supposed aims of the cash transfers. The same attitude of ignorance and lack of interest is evident among IADB functionaries regarding the agricultural calendar and ritual temporalities of Ixán. For Ixánenses, what matters is the “support” the government gives to its “peasants”. For the transnational functionaries, a long-term economic transition they call “reconversion” is most important. In the middle, I
interacted with many people inhabiting various “scales” who prefigured these nested futurities differentially, according to their position, or imagined position, in relation to the time-space continuum, which could usefully be compared to the continuum of “progress” Redfield described many years ago (1941, 1960, 1964).

The Washington DC perspective assumes that the subject who is supposed to be in need of “human capital” is caught in the midst of a changing world. However, change is not unknown; change is transnationally prefigured. Based not only on expert knowledge but also on the common sense of knowledgeable experts, such a change evokes a familiar notion of progress. As I carried out interviews at the IADB with many Latin-American economists of different nationalities, I discovered that they all have in common some expertise that they learned from the Economic Departments of various American universities. For instance, as I describe below, they anticipate the effects of their programs through the “experimental method” of counterfactuals. However, the missing link among them, in terms of “consistency” and in the common language of the programs they are “pushing”, as they say, into all Latin-American governments, relates to common sense expectations. Even if one could draw a continuum of expectations from Ixán to Washington DC, it is important to know, first, how these expectations have been objectified, limited, and expressed in particular contexts or from which negotiations and struggles they emerged. Despite the characterization of indefinite economic growth, with its own specific market orientation of equilibrium in the long run, as a modern and progressive trend of expectations, there are attendant moments in which there emerges a violent turmoil of prospects. As a result, people have to reorient themselves according to concrete situations, as was the case, for instance,
when NAFTA and Mexico’s 1994 economic crisis determined these new policies. In the following pages I will describe how Conditional Cash Transfer programs emerged as a means of cutting social spending, incentivizing agriculturalists reconversions onto other economic activities and how development technocrats attempt to test and evaluate the results of these programs.

While Salinas de Gortari based PROCAMPO on his Harvard PhD research on political participation and support in four peasant villages, using the program to smooth the way to NAFTA agreements, another important PRI official and policy maker in Mexico, Santiago Levy, a PhD in economics from Boston University, was also working in the same turbulent context. While Salinas and Levy both belong to an epistemic “elite consensus” between transnational policy actors housed in international organizations and US-educated technocrats (Orenstein 2008; Teichman 2004), they also gathered significant reasons for shaping new national policies from the domestic political context. Levy was Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit of Mexico (1994-2000), general director of the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS, Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social) from 2000-2005 and considers himself to be the “main architect” of PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES as well as having “managed the budgetary adjustments during the 1994-95 economic crises” (IADB 2012).

Immediately following the Mexican Peso Crisis, Santiago Levy helped create pension reform (through a new law of social security) that was later replicated by many Latin American countries. The Social Security Chilean model (1981), incepted by the “Chicago boys” brought into power by Pinochet’s government in the late seventies, and the World Bank were also central points of reference and actors in this policy-making
process. According to Tara Schwegler, “the World Bank took prompt notice of the positive effects of the Chilean reform, and by the mid-to late 1980s it had urged Mexico and other countries plagued by underdeveloped capital markets and macroeconomic instability to consider similar reforms” (Schwegler 2001: 12). Schwegler also points out that, in the IMSS reform boasting the PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES program, “rather than supplanting politics with technical discussion, a new form of political wrangling took place through the idiom of World Bank involvement” (2008: 136) by both the World Bank and a team of the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit.

The 1994 crisis was extreme. Within one week of Zedillo’s decision to allow the Mexican peso to float its value dropped from 4 pesos per dollar to 7.2 pesos per dollar. Then the U.S., in concert with international organizations, bailed out Mexico for around $50 billion. Derived from social security reforms, PROGRESA emerged from the “government tool kit” programs (Levy 2006: 15), including PROCAMPO, that were addressed to poor rural households. Instead of discussing the international compromises and the dismantling of the welfare state, Levy prefers to mention the motivation for change represented by the crisis at that time. He states that,

Therefore, along with managing the short-term macroeconomic ramifications of the crisis, which included a rather modest expansion of some existing programs, the incoming administration embarked on the design of a new approach to food subsidies in particular and related poverty programs more generally that would be able to
- incorporate the academic research results summarized earlier.
- Take advantage of the lessons and experiences of Mexico’s own programs.
- Use the crisis as a motivation for change. (Levy 2006: 15)

According to the bill of its creation in 1997, PROGRESA’s goals were:
- To improve education, health and alimentation conditions of poor families, particularly children and their mothers.
- To coordinate actions to keep children at school, attending health and food problems and ensuring that children do not work during school time.
- To support children to complete basic education.
- To change parents’ and family attitudes towards the benefits of education, health and alimentation present.
- To promote community support and participation in the PROGRESA program. (PROGRESA 1997: 39)

The program’s goals do not seem particularly extraordinary. The first goal is to keep children well fed, healthy, and in school, so that they may accumulate what will eventually be referred to as “human capital”. However, we should, of course, consider the national context if we are to understand the program’s implications. Lagarde et al. remind us of the troubled and exceptional origins of the Conditional Cash Transfers,

The debut of the first conditional cash transfer (CCT) Programme, called Progresa (subsequently Oportunidades), in Mexico, was paradoxically rooted in the willingness to cut social spending. As the Mexican economy was seriously hit by the Peso crisis, the Ministry of Finance decided to replace the traditional in-kind transfers to the poor by an innovative experiment that would target fewer, more needy households, and offer them cash on the condition that they comply with a set of requirements, intended to break the vicious circle of poverty. Initially implemented on a relatively small scale, Progresa was found to be an effective mechanism particularly for improving uptake of preventive interventions for children by 2001, and subsequently scaled-up at the national level in Mexico. Its principles were soon replicated in other Latin American countries, and more than 10 years later, dozens of other CCT schemes have now flourished from Honduras to Ecuador or Nepal, with one of the most recent implemented in the city of New York. (Lagarde et al. 2008: 107)

If one compares the budget of the former PRONASOL program to that of PROGRESA at its time of implementation, the differences appear obvious. PRONASOL’s budget was 12 billion dollars during its first four years, averaging around 2,400 million per year (Cornelius et al. 1994: 8), while PROGRESA’s average during its first four years was 517 million per year (Zedillo 1997 and 1998). Between 1989 and 1994, PRONASOL represented an average of .51% of the Gross National Product. On the other hand, in 1997 PROGRESA represented just .04% of the GNP (Zedillo 1997 and 1998). According to
University of Guadalajara researcher Carlos Barba, PROGRESA first represented a “small program among others (just 15.8% of the total resources to combat poverty) with the aims of diminishing populist uncontrolled expenditures that targeted the poor inefficiently” (Barba 2000: 3). Barba continues, “PROGRESA looks for the efficient utilization of scarce resources, that theoretically does not accept populist dispensations” (Barba 2000: 3). The call for an efficient and non-populist use of smaller amounts of money in the context of the Mexican peso crisis, then, discursively justified the shift toward monetarist policies. The basic premise of cash transfers was to provide the poor with a certain amount of money, leaving up to them the choice of its possible conversion. Rather than allocating substantial sums of money for what were considered “inefficient” public services, the monetization of poverty allowed for much smaller expenditures. Cash transfer programs provoked exceptional expectations perhaps as a consequence of been implemented in the context of a huge devaluation, promoted by the 1994 economic crisis, and by the NAFTA’s harsh structural adjustments. Nearly every Conditional Cash Transfer program has the same main objective of breaking, once and for all, the poverty reproductive cycle. This shared objective still stands as a token of excessive expectations.

“Magic bullets” for targeting the poor

In the 2000s when “monetarism” gained momentum, “cash transfers” surfaced as the new solution for poverty. “Invented” in a context of monetary crisis and structural adjustment via the interface between PRI Mexican functionaries trained in economics at U.S. universities and international organization experts, such as those
from the World Bank and the IADB, Conditional Cash Transfers were replicated in many
other countries. The international development industry (including not just aid donors
and multilateral organizations but also the researchers, experts and consultants funded
by them) found in the category of “cash transfer” the “magic bullet” (see Birdsell in
Dugger 2004) that would finally solve the problems of poverty and backwardness. De
Janvry and Sadoulet, two World Bank consultants and economics professors at the
University of California Berkeley specializing in poverty and agriculture, state that
conditional cash transfers (CCT),

[H]ave been hailed as being among the most significant innovations in
promoting social development in recent years”. Nancy Birdsall, president of the
Center for Global Development, was thus quoted in the New York Times on
January 3, 2004 as saying, “I think these programs are as close as you can come
to a magic bullet in development. They are creating an incentive for families to
invest in their own children’s futures. Every decade or so, we see something that
can really make a difference, and this is one of those things” [Birdsell in Dugger
2004]. In all cases, the program’s objective, possibly in addition to other
objectives, is to correct for market the failures associated with non-internalized
positive externalities. CCT thus seek to create incentives for individuals to
adjust their behavior toward matching the social optimum. Subsidies are
provided in exchange for specific actions. As such, they act like a price effect on
the action; they are expected to induce individuals to increase their supply of
the action by raising the price for this action via a conditional cash transfer. (De
Janvry and Sadoulet 2004)

Leaving aside the “magic bullet” trope, De Janvry and Sadoulet prefer to explain
how conditional cash transfers function with more economic concepts. They apply
notions such as “incentive”, “adjustment”, “supply”, and “price” to metaphorically
explain how CCT should work. They propose that cash transfers incentivize people “to
adjust their behavior toward matching the social optimum”, without the market bias
promoted by subsidies and in-kind transfers. While promoting particular actions, CCT
are also believed to increase the “supply” of the determined “actions” simply by
“raising” their price. Nevertheless, beyond this simple market modeling, it is important to keep in mind that this “price effect” is being applied to mothers’ consuetudinary actions, including feeding their children and sending them to school. Economists and CCT proponents are amplifying the range of application of such notions as “price effect”, “adjustment” and “incentive” by applying them to what poor mothers apparently cannot, or will not, do well enough on their own: feeding their children, sending them to school, vaccinating them and taking them to health checks. This goes well beyond simplistic economic explanations of human behavior. Economists, through these modelings, presume to objectify mother-child relationships as if, firstly, they could implicitly blame mothers for raising their children in economically inefficient ways and in contexts that, development theorists assume, reproduce parents’ poverty. Secondly, after objectifying these complex familial contexts of poverty reproduction, they attempt to intervene in family relationships by conditioning mothers to receive regular transfers of cash for actions that, a priori and without further explanation, are considered sufficient to break the poverty reproductive cycle, e.g. mothers supplying a social optimum of alimentation, health and education to their children.

Although family relationships could be modelled by simple economics and regular transfers of cash could effectively alter poor mothers’ behaviors concerning their children, it remains unclear why creators of cash transfers believe that poverty is an endogenous and inheritable phenomenon that parents transmit to their children. After Amartya Sen and colleagues developed the “capability approach” (Sen 1985, 1999), concluding in the 1990s that poverty should be conceptualized, beyond income, as a capability deprivation, or, more precisely, as the lack of human capital in the poor,
development ideologues and the international donor community turned to the use of transfers of small amounts of money as poverty’s potential solution.

The new confidence in money’s ability to create and accumulate human capital in the poors’ children was reconstituted in a long link that reunited development capital providers, such as development banks and the donor community, and a population of beneficiaries. Following the traditional idea of a capitalist who transfers, under certain conditions, a definite sum to an entrepreneur, who in time would produce an innovation leading to economic development (Schumpeter 1934: 191), the conversion of development capital into human capital was supposed to occur through transfers of cash. The particularity of cash transfers as an investment in new entrepreneurs resides in the fact that developers considered cash transfers to be performative tokens of the entrepreneurial capacities of their receivers. By incentivizing the production of a determined set of know-how and skills necessary for thriving in what Ong has called a “Western ecology of expertise and enterprise” (Ong 2005: 349), developers’ capital should multiply into more capital, after its first conversion from cash into human capital.

In this new context where family relationships could be optimized to meet the social optimum, new expectations of economic growth, personal improvement and a change of life for many poor arose with the old idea that poverty is a consequence of a lack of capitalism. Immediately upon its implementation, PROGRESA was said to have increased receiver family incomes by around 30%. However, after a few years of improvement, in 2008 the extreme poverty reflected the same indicators as in 1992, four years before PROGRESA’s inception (Fox and Haight 2010: 16). Therefore, breaking
the cycle of poverty reproduction is an unfulfilled promise for the majority of receivers.

According to an evaluation from the World Bank (De Janvry et al. 2006), in the last ten years more than a quarter of the peasant population has left the countryside. Moreover, the peasants who remained have lost a third of their incomes, in comparison with their earnings from the previous 20 years. The same report acknowledges that, over “the long run”, economic “shocks” have worked as “fábrica de pobres” or a poor factory (de Janvry et al. 2006). In this sense, many supporters of the program also wrongfully state that “extreme poverty” beneficiaries, which is equated to the World Bank standard of the “extremely poor” (less than a dollar a day per person), no longer exist after receiving OPORTUNIDADES incomes (according to the SEDESOL measures). Such an incorrect statement could be shown by simple arithmetic: one Apoyo alimentario for the household ($18) + one Apoyo alimentario “vivir mejor” for the household ($9.60) + one infant allowance ($8.40) = $36 a month. This amounts to more than one dollar a day for the child. However, if one scratches the surface of the supposed success of the program, one can see beyond development propaganda. One World Bank document from 2004 states that in Mexico, [d]espite the gains between 1996 and 2002, particularly for the extreme poor, poverty remains widespread as in only slightly below levels prevailing before the 1994/1995 crisis’.“ (World Bank 2004: 1).

The same World Bank that funded the PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES Conditional Cash Transfer Program in Mexico, and subsequently similar programs around the world, admits that poverty in Mexico in 2004 remains unchanged, if not worse, from the period before the program was put into effect. Once again, in another official
document, this time from CONEVAL (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development 2012), one finds that the majority of Mexicans in 2010 are poor (46.3%) or extremely poor (11.4%). In the Yucatan state, between 2008-2010, poverty increased from 46.7% to 47.9% (CONEVAL 2012: 17), while extreme poverty increased from 8.2% to 9.8% in the same period (CONEVAL 2012: 17). Thus, poverty did increase steadily, showing that in 2010 48.5% of Yucatan’s total population was poor (36.8%) or extremely poor (11.7%), 1.7% above the Mexican average (CONEVAL 2012: 11).

CCT programs were so generally stated and so inadequately adapted to specificity that when they do fail it is always easy to place the blame on the recipient. By portraying cash transfers and their conditions as pertinent remediations of poverty, CCT programs suggest that any continuation of poverty suggests failure on the part of poor parents, who must not have appropriately spent the monetary benefit. However, there are other ways of explaining the failure of PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES to break, once and for all, the poverty reproductive cycle. For instance, in his book significantly titled “Good Intentions, Bad Outcomes” (Levy 2008), PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES ideologue, Santiago Levy, acknowledges that the current social policy that he also designed contributes to trapping the poor in poverty and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES runs the risk of becoming permanent. “Despite increased years of schooling for future cohorts of poor workers associated with PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES, firms are unlikely to offer them formal jobs and they are unlikely to

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*CONEVAL’a 2012 Report considers that a person is “extremely poor” if she has three or more deprivations, or “carencias”, out of six possible deprivations included in the Social Deprivation Index: education backwardness, access to health services, social security access, household facilities, and access to food. According to the 2010 survey “methodology”, the population under the extreme poverty line had to have, in August 2010, at least the above mentioned three deprivations plus a monthly income below MXN$ 684 (in rural areas) and MXN$ 978 (in urban areas).*
seek formal jobs” (Levy 2008: 229)

Levy goes on to suggest further social security reform as a possible solution to this problem. If the Mexican state no longer requires employers to contribute to social security for their employees, Levy argues, then, employers would be more willing to hire PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES subsidized youths. Instead of requiring firms to pay for social coverage (from health coverage to pensions), the necessary funds would be collected through the direct consumption tax from which the state could get 5% of the Mexican GDP, proposes Levy. This reform, Levy argues, would provide universal social coverage and, at the same time, foster productivity. Once again, Mexican development would involve a bold pro-market monetarist movement, i.e. taxing the poor with a regressive tax scheme\(^\text{10}\), counterbalanced by the populist one of providing that which the Mexican people had prior to neoliberal reforms, i.e. universal social and health coverage.

Qualitative CCT program evaluations directed by Mercedes González de la Rocha and Escobar Latapí, especially their quasi-experimental impact evaluations from 2007 to 2008 (González de la Rocha 2008), claim that students with “long exposure to the program and particularly indigenous women, achieved substantial changes in their schooling, their occupations and in their fertility” (Escobar Latapí 2012: 186). These findings contradict the quantitative evaluation (Freyje and Rodríguez 2008; Yaschine 2012) that “concluded that the program has no impact on occupation” (Escobar Latapí 2012: 188). Nevertheless, Escobar Latapí, the current qualitative evaluation researcher

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\(^{10}\) It would be useful to compare the fiscal reform proposed by Levy, which started to be implemented in 2013 by Mexican President Peña Nieto, to regressive USA fiscal systems such as the ones Newman and O’Brien (2011) analyze. In a detailed fiscal sociological account, they relate the effects of regressive tax systems to the production of systematic poverty.
of the OPORTUNIDADES program, proposes that any failure to accomplish the program’s main objective, i.e. breaking the poverty reproductive cycle by enabling children to one day get a “better job than their parents” (Escobar Latapí 2012: 185), can be attributed not to the program but to Mexico’s extremely “rigid and resistant class structure” (Escobar Latapí 2012: 186).

Alejandro Agudo Sanchíz, a former qualitative evaluator of the PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES program, has also acknowledged Mosse’s (2005) critique of scholars who assume aprioristic effects of development policies, specifically in terms of predicted policy impacts of CCT. He suggests that by diminishing or ignoring preexistent practices in OPORTUNIDADES receivers’ communities, researchers also dismiss the production of new effects. Concurrent with my observations in the context of Ixán, Agudo stresses that local leaders have used the traditional tequio and the community village systems of sanctions in Chiapas to recreate further incentives for receivers’ compliance with the program’s co-responsibilities. At the same time, reinforcing entitlement relationships, receivers represent the state as “patrón” or boss through traditional gift-giving and debt relationships (Agudo Sanchíz 2011, 2012).

In light of this evidence that reveals cash transfers fail to achieve their main objective, how are they continuously justified within the development industry that exports them everywhere?

The Counterfactual foundation of a new “poverty”

One recurrent topic in my conversations with economists at the Inter-American Development Bank concerned methodology. After politics, both national and
transnational, economists indicated that the most serious parts of their job could be referred to as “counter-factual”. Contrary to its reputation among historians, this metaphysical entity has a very good purchase in the current development industry. Counterfactual theories of causation have focused on singular causal claims in the form “event c caused event e”. Where c and e are two distinct actual events, e causally depends on c; if and only if c were to not occur, e would not occur. David Lewis, the creator of the most elaborate counterfactual theory of causation, explains that,

We think of a cause as something that makes a difference, and the difference it makes must be a difference from what would have happened without it. Had it been absent, its effects—some of them at least, and usually all—would have been absent as well. (Lewis 1973: 161)

According to the development literature, an experimental “impact evaluation” is constructed to answer the counterfactual question: how would outcomes such as participants’ well-being have changed if the intervention had not been undertaken? Counterfactuals refer to potential case studies that in the “experimental approach” objectify the “impact” or the “effect” of a particular policy or “intervention” by establishing “a comparison between what actually happened and what would have happened in the absence of the intervention” (White 2006: 3). Experimental impact evaluations seek to answer cause-and-effect questions through Randomly Controlled Trials (RCTs), which are thought to be capable of isolating causation. By a strictly random process, RCTs distribute subjects into an experimental group and a control group. In other words, they look for the differences in outcomes that can be directly attributed to the causes implemented by a program (Gertler et al. 2011).

At the IADB as well as in other Development Banks and development organizations, counterfactuals are said to be the gold standard in impact evaluations.
Development banks, agencies and many Economic departments have even established an “exclusionary policy” which recommends that no programs be funded unless their claims can be supported by RCT-based evidence (Scriven 2008: 11). Federico is a junior economist at the Inter-American Bank. After meeting at the house of some common friends, he offered to explain to me the “economic aspects” of development. We met a few times in the Bank to discuss general issues, PROCAMPO, OPORTUNIDADES and, more concretely, his work there. After our first interview, Federico had been sent to Peru to negotiate with the government a program that at that time he called “one laptop per child”. According to Federico, the Peruvian government wanted,

To pursue a program for distributing laptops to the elementary school children. Going to the very poor schools and giving them a laptop per child... and theoretically this is going to improve the learning process of those children a lot... therefore, yes, the government thinks the program is successful. They want the IADB to do the evaluation. They cannot do it because it is not going to be trustable. If they do it, nobody will believe in it. Then, the IADB should do the evaluation. That’s the good thing about the IADB, it also has external credibility.

The Peruvian government went to the Bank not only to ask for a loan to support the program but also for their free evaluation of the program. Nevertheless, some difficulties emerged in the process. At first the government representative opposed an experimental approach to the evaluation. The reasons were not epistemological, but practical. One group of school children would be given the laptops while another group would be observed over the course of more than one academic year proceeding with their normal learning processes without laptops. Conflicts could arise between receivers and non-receivers and between givers and non-receivers, even if they could be minimized in some form. Beyond local concerns, however, the negotiation of the experimental impact evaluation has an important political economic side. The Inter-
American Development Bank staff wanted to pursue the counterfactual experimental evaluation not only because they consider it to be a more scientific way of determining the effect of a program in a particular case but in order to validate and replicate the program everywhere. Federico says,

Then, we go there and chatted with them... we want to make the evaluation because the evaluation is going to be very important not only for Peru but also for the other countries of the region that are in the same situation, in the same model. Then the IADB has incentives... Besides the good thing about the IADB is to do that evaluation... it won’t be fair if Peru pays for it, because [ultimately] it is going to benefit the whole region. Then, better it pays the whole region... for the good of the whole region and to the creation of knowledge is what we should do... therefore, I now... I am going to want... I did not start yet but I am going to say... look, we pay for the evaluation but it has to be experimental. And there we are going to see how the government reacts.

At that time, Federico reflected on these two sides negotiating over the initial steps of a supposedly very popular program that involves a government taking a soft credit from the bank and, later on, giving laptops to the poor children, but also establishing an experimental impact evaluation as a standard for every country in the region.

Among other programs, Cash Transfers have been repeatedly validated by counterfactual evaluations. For instance, the certitude that Conditional Cash Transfers programs will break the cycle of poverty once and for all is presented as if it were based on indisputable counterfactuals. However, in the best case scenarios counterfactuals can only test some variables, not an entire promise. Using counterfactuals, for instance, one can “estimate that completed schooling for both boys and girls will increase, on average, by about one-half year” (Todd and Wolpin 2006: 1386) by building up a model for comparison,

The model predicts that without the subsidy, girls will complete 6.29 years and
boys 6.42 years of schooling. Had the program been in existence from marriage, given our estimates, children’s mean years of completed education at age 16 would have increased by 0.54 years for both girls and boys. (Todd and Wolpin 2006: 1403)

Although Todd and Wolpin’s paper is based on PROGRESA data and concerns only the PROGRESA case, its prognosis is only applicable if every condition remains unchanged. But even if we allow that all conditions remain consistent, which is almost impossible, would half a year of additional schooling per child really be sufficient to break the cycle of poverty reproduction?

On the other hand, evaluation specialists like Michael Scriven have shown repeatedly that what development functionaries call Randomly Controlled Trials, and the counterfactuals they produce, do not match the minimum requirements of being considered “double blind” (Scriven 2008: 12). Double blindness means that neither the experimental subjects (in both the treatment and control groups) nor the experimental administrator should know that they are taking part in an experiment or a program evaluation. According the the same author, designing and applying RCTs to human affairs presuppose insurmountable problems,

Such studies are of course open to the unintended explanation of their results by appeal to the Hawthorne effect or its converse, since it’s usually easy for members of the experimental and control groups to work out which one they are in. Hence the common argument that the RCT [Randomly Controlled Trials] designs being advocated in areas like education, public health, international aid, law enforcement, etc., have the (unique) advantage of “eliminating all spurious explanations” is completely invalid. It was careless to suppose that randomization of subject allocation would compensate for the failure to blind the subjects (as in single blind studies), let alone the failure to blind the treatment dispensers, a.k.a. service providers (the requirement that distinguishes the double-blind study). The RCT banner in applied human sciences is in fact flown over pseudo-RCTs. (Scriven 2008: 13, emphasis in the original)

The Hawthorne effect Scriven references relates to the experimental bias
produced in experimental subjects as they interpret themselves as being subjects of experimental situations. When analyzing an old experiment at the Hawthorne factory, a researcher called Henry Landsberger discovered that worker productivity changes were attributable to their realization that they were being studied, not to the light intensity changes they were subjected to (Landsberger 1958). In short, the Hawthorne effect appears when experimental subjects react in response to their conscious awareness that they are under experimental observation. For instance, a perverse variation of the Hawthorne effect occurred in a Peruvian school during an evaluation of a Conditional Cash Transfer program attached to education and health.

As another member of the Inter-American Development Bank told me, when a program similar to PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES was evaluated in an indigenous village in Peru, the children who did not receive the cash transfers (control group) obliged the children who had received them (treatment group) to clean up the school. After some months of disagreement and negotiation, things calmed down and everybody seemed to accept that the Conditional Cash Transfer program did not imply counter-prestations or “conditionalities” to the other segment of the population that did not receive the benefit. This example shows that the control group’s negative reactions against the treatment group were due to the fact that both groups knew and inferred something about CCT programs, specifically what conditionalities should be imposed on the receivers. Both groups involved in the evaluation acted on their awareness that they were being studied and reinterpreted the program. Put in other terms, and beyond all the ethical claims that could have justifiably arisen, zero or single-blind evaluations like this one show that there will be always an interpretation and a
reaction among the studied population. People will think about what is happening to them and the realization that they are part of an experiment or in a control group necessarily biases to some extent the entire testing of a program.

However, what seems more problematic than the above mentioned negative Hawthorne effect, and much more common, are cases in which, as in the program named by Federico “one laptop per child”, positive reactions are induced from the top down. Tested in Perú and “pushed” from the bank through the whole region, such a program has a clear reference to Nicholas Negroponte’s “one laptop per child” project. Negroponte announced his project in November 2005 at the World Summit on the Information Society and it was later evaluated, implemented and reevaluated in the USA for the One Laptop per Child Association he also founded. The fact that before any pseudo-RCT evaluation in Peru, someone in the bank recommended Negroponte’s program to Federico to be promoted in Peru, should be regarded as part of the program’s expectations that could be spread into its evaluations. Such expectations, or others, may or may not have been attached to a zero or single-blind evaluation, and in effect positively biasing it. Regardless, it is worth acknowledging the potential influence of such expectations.

In other words, to recommend a line of credit, to evaluate and to implement a similar dispensation of laptops or cash transfers in various countries is, firstly, related to the good outcomes already attributed to a similar program and, secondly, to the Hawthorne effect that biased the first and following evaluations of other programs. In brief, the contagiousness of development expectations in such previously evaluated
“good outcomes” are impossible to isolate in pseudo-experimental designs.

Moreover, the counterfactual disambiguation alleged by the development industry produces more concrete expectations for development. Development then works beyond the “hope generating machine” (Nuijten 2004), as Nuijten depicts. By normatively establishing causes and effects, the counterfactual development expectation machine, after implementing the evaluated policy, has no other choice but to blame the real world when it has not coped with such expectations. In anthropological terms this could be also compared to the “anticipatory knowledge” concept Tara Schwegler coined to refer to “knowledge marshaled by political teams in anticipation of the knowledge claims of rival teams” (Schwegler 2008: 382). However, the efficacy of the counterfactual, unlike that of “anticipatory knowledge”, does not rest in its ability to keep power relations ambiguous but in a once and for all radical disambiguation.

In the particular case of CCT, Gaarder et al. state that,

CCT impact evaluations provide unambiguous evidence that financial incentives work to increase utilization of key services by the poor. Further, the evaluations indicate that cash transfers, accompanied by information social support, weight monitoring and micronutrient supplementation, can stimulate healthier feeding practices and improve young children’s nutritional status dramatically, particularly the incidence of stunting. (Gaarder et al. 2010, my emphasis)

CCT evaluations, according to a comparative study carried out by Gaarder et al., only state that there is evidence that CCT have increased the poor’s utilization of state-provided health, educational, and food services. In the language of counterfactual causality (Lewis 1973) invoked by almost all the pseudo-RTCs, there is a counterfactual effect of CCT, which is namely an incremental increase of the utilization of health, educational and food state services. After this statement, the conclusion Gaarder et al.
arrive at is tentative and not at all based in counterfactual thinking. Despite the fact that the authors have identified nothing more that the possibility that CCTs might improve children’s nutritional status and dramatically avoid stunting, they continue to say with certainty that, under certain conditions, CCTs “can stimulate healthier feeding practices and improve young children’s nutritional status dramatically”. Why? Immediately following their claim, Gaarder et al. clearly establish the conditions necessary for such good outcomes to occur,

However, the mixed picture with respect to outcomes—vaccination nutritional status and, where we have data, morbidity and mortality—suggest that encouraging utilization when services are of poor quality may not produce the expected effects. Moreover, the mixed results suggest that assumptions about needs, household decision-making and causal relationships might not be entirely correct and thus our expectations for impacts, given the current program designs, may be incorrect. (Gaarder et al. 2010)

Cash transfers may have have encouraged the poor to use state provided services (such as health, education and food assistance), but the quality of these services remain poor. Could it be, then, non-coincidental that cash transfers were implemented alongside structural adjustment processes?

Development program evaluations’ positive biases, named Hawthorne effects or, more generally redundant causalities, frequently come from the same modernization and developmental narratives that gave birth to development banks. In particular, the institutions that spread CCT worldwide, evaluate them or contract independent evaluation teams, fund them, and help implement them, seem to only be reproducing, through pseudo-RCTs, a counterfactual expectation, rather than identifying CCTs real effects. Thus, if a development bank has in hand a previous positive evaluation of a program, resulting in recommendations of further evaluations and the production of a
positive leading case in Latin America, it is more than anticipatory knowledge that is being created. Knowledgeable expectations for development are being created and reproduced. In general, when pseudo RTC experiments isolate a cause that the underdeveloped world cannot reproduce, externalities such as the alleged impossibility of firms to offer formal jobs (Levy 2008: 229) are highlighted. Therefore, explanations of externalities that impede a program from working properly are frequently capitalized by the development agency, which continues to ask for more funds for new programs to be evaluated and implemented. Put in another way, if state services to the poor were optimal and firms were likely to offer them jobs, wouldn’t cash transfers be superfluous?

The ontological importance of ill formed counterfactuals through pseudo-RTCs resides in remarking upon the actuality of the virtual more than in transforming the actuality of the actual. Otherwise put, the imperative of development morphs itself into a transnational prefiguration of the future and, through counterfactual causality, produces trustable expectations. Keeping in mind that all indices show that after almost 20 years the poverty reproductive cycle has not ended, it seems necessary to reevaluate development’s methods of evaluation in relation to development propaganda.

*Moral economists: adjustment and incentives at the interface of bureaucracy and the people*

In explaining the reasons for transitional programs such as PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES to me, another economist from the IADB spoke of “personal adjustment”. A hypothetical 25 or 30 year-old agriculturalist facing the new
free trade reality of 1994, he concluded retrospectively, would have to do an
“immediate personal adjustment” if he was not receiving the PROCAMPO money. Such
a personal adjustment, clarifies the economist, will surely mean going to live in the
city. Even when IADB economists consider this migration, and the “economic
reconversion” it implies, to be desirable, PROCAMPO’s aim is to smooth out and to slow
down this very transition. Not “keeping the people farming but helping them make the
transition”, he clarifies.

Once I mentioned that the transition was imagined as taking as long as 15 years,
from 1994 to 2008, president Calderón later extended it for six more years, the IADB
economist pointed out that that was “an inconsistency in the program”. He continued,
“you cannot attach the program to an activity”, expressly to agriculture. In other
words, by failing to achieve the condition of been “decoupled” from any productive
activity, he stresses, PROCAMPO, after all, has become a subsidy for small-scale
agriculture. The inconsistency, nevertheless, comes from maintaining, “that the
program is transitional and the issue is to make a personal adjustment” while at the
same time that,

You are paying them to keep doing the same activity, then the guy is going to
keep doing the same activity. Because you are paying the guy to do the same
activity, then, he will never adjust, he never is going to go... to the city... then,
you are not giving the incentives to do it.

From his words one can imagine that the program only becomes meaningful and
effective if it ends. In other terms, the sense of an ending for long-term transitional
programs like PROCAMPO or OPORTUNIDADES, according to this IADB economist, is
what makes the program an “incentive” for recipients to “adjust”. Therefore,
development program designers could still blame politicians for failing to end
PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES at the scheduled times and thus failing to produce poor personal adjustments to the promissory economic conditions of post NAFTA labor markets.

When I asked him to elaborate upon this notion of adjustment, the economist continues,

Adjustment would be... when you change to another activity you have to... you downgrade your level of life. If you are a physician, for instance, and you want to work as biologist, for example, it would take five years... and in these five years you are going to be poor because you are adjusting, adjusting...With PROCAMPO what should have been done is to identify who were damaged and having given them a payment. One has to know if that is possible, first, a payment that should be independent of the fact that the person keeps her activity or not. On the contrary, one has to accommodate things... it was to decrease their income to make them adjust... if the guy does not adjust and remains in the countryside you will have to pay him forever, because he always will be there, and the impact will be forever.

According to this expert, perpetually paying agriculturalists for an adjustment that they will never carry out is the potential worst-case scenario. Nevertheless, adjustment occurs, for him and most economists, in the individual landscape, as self-obligation. Economists and government officials incentivize peasants to self-adjustments through poverty. Such an impoverishment of peasants is a controlled moral experience for them.

PROCAMPO was implemented to help people change. Cash transfers seem to allow a different experience of the future, an open ended one, which the peasants lack. Therefore, cash transfers were imagined and devised by economists to condition receivers with moral obligations but also, at the same time, to incentivize them, in the case of PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES through the accumulation of human capital in their children.
According to current development expert knowledge, the relationship that the economist-giver has with the poor-receiver is not at all a plain obligatory legal bond between the two but a moral relationship (that conditions and incentivizes) grounded on the certitude of counterfactuals. The desired transition, articulated by Salinas and Levy through regular transfers of cash, should take place in the inner part of the self where personal adjustments are made and human capital accumulates. In short, cash transfer givers expect that non-returnable economic transfers incentivize change in their recipients. The sought after economic “reconversion” should spring from a change in the receiver’s moral attitude towards the future. It could not be expressed as a legally enforceable obligation. Cash transfer “apoyos” or supports purposefully task the poor peasant with the burden of lifting herself out of both peasantry and poverty. The dissimulation of the “transfer” communicates a moral drive under the monetary form. The regular cash amount stands in for old “price compensations” and “social prestations” due by the state to its citizens but it should also be understood better as a controlled State abandonment of peasants to reframe themselves in their own moral terms. “Adjustment” is an economic euphemism for a virtuous self “reconversion”. The expected outcome of the cash transfer transition includes both the economic and moral reconversion of ex-peasants. Outside of the regular nature of rains and moons, moral bureaucrats teach ex-peasants to accumulate choice in the form of “human capital”.

Cutting them off from “apoyos” or support, cash transfer ideologues argue, will “incentivize” the poor and ultimately produce a virtuous subjectivity out of the peasant’s assumed ataraxia. A single, long-term transfer of cash (for around 20 years in both PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES) is considered sufficient for
developers to adjust adults to entrepreneurial activities (preferably in urban environments, but exceptionally in the countryside) or as a once and for all accumulation of human capital in children. As both programs work almost in synchrony from their beginnings (in 1994 and 1997, respectively) to the present, I will show in chapter V that from the perspective of receivers, fathers and children take monetary gifts for disengaging themselves from the national state, a state that has, from the revolution to the 1992 Constitutional reform, produced peasants as its political subject. In chapter II and III I will describe how the state requires the mothers and partners of these new projected subjects to help in their conversion.

Leaving aside around one million wealthier agriculturalists who also received PROCAMPO, in this chapter, I focused on the Salinas de Gortari government’s program for the transition of 2.2 million, primarily indigenous, agriculturalists. The Mexican government considered this group to be “self-sufficient” peasants heading towards NAFTA’s horizons. Through monetization, the master plan was to convert them into NAFTA’s poor. However, the achievement of this goal was only partial. In the last 20 years, the majority of indigenous peasants were not categorically transformed through cash transfers. The generational change and the program ideated for inducing it (PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES) has been more successful in homogenizing and propagating horizons of expectations. In the following pages I will leave behind the denunciation of the overarching effect of neoliberalism or, better put, populist monetarism, on communities, which fails to address how newness is produced, to instead investigate how people engage with the future temporalities proposed by international organizations and the national state and, more concretely, how a
promissory economy was developed from the bottom up, while international organizations and the Mexican state sought to achieve the monetization of poverty.
In this chapter, I will discuss four temporal macro schemas and their calibration as they have been proposed by different expert knowledges to regulate the lives of peasants and their children. The first is a generational transition to the new economy proposed by NAFTA, instantiated by cash transfers in an approximately 20-year span of time. Based on transnational ideals of development, Mexican and Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) economists have set this long-term engagement as a necessary period for the “reconversion” of the rural population.

The second temporal scheme emerges from international organizations’ “human development” model, in the context of the already mentioned economic conversions. Its main objective has been the once and for all accumulation of human capital in the children of the poor. Worthman has called this development’s “dual model” because it implies first an “outside-in investment in individual human development” and later “inside-out returns in socioeconomic development” (2011: 447) from the individual to her community. The individual lifecourse has been, then, modelized as a universal temporal curve where human capital accumulates in childhood, through constant transfers of money, health, care and education, while at some point in her youth the individual starts making incremental returns to the community that has fostered her growth. In short, this model patterns the human life course as a consecution of human capital as a necessary condition for the creation of
economic capital. The “dual” human development model with its two marked stages of the human life course (one from childhood to the first youth, the other from the youth to adulthood) implies the functioning of at least two generations. According to the direction of various transfers (receiving in the first stage, to giving back in the second) it constitutes a sort of intergenerational exchange model that always lasts more than 20 years.

The third is a transitional span taken by the Mexican government to implement these transformations through monetary “supports” or apoyos. Theoretically, rural development policies in Mexico depend on six-year presidential terms. Nevertheless, the development support programs of Salinas de Gortari (PRI 1988-1994), Ernesto Zedillo (PRI 1994-2000), Fox (PAN 2000-2006) and Felipe Calderon (PAN 2006-2012) have expanded in the same direction, intending to secure direct individual loyalties to the state. Simply stated, cash transfer programs established direct relationships between recipients and the executive branch of the Mexican government through the monetization of poverty. As a result, local leaders have lost power and politics have been nationalized while “striving” has become the quality of current temporality. In a present continuous tense, the reconfiguration of support between the state and its population points towards the harsh transformation of peasants into the poor.

A fourth temporal schema is enacted ritually in Ixán. Agriculturalists, sponsors and ritual specialists, following the ritual calendar, reflect on temporalities of maize regeneration. Following the year-to-year cycle of cultivation, harvest and preparation of the soil for a new cultivation, they pattern time in nested cycles. Mainly through major celebrations, such as the Gremios de Agricultores Festival, they look for material
regeneration in a term of less than one year (maize cycle and health and power for the people of Ixán), social engagement between sponsors through bi-annual terms, the formation of “elders” or ritual specialists (people who have learned a particular function in these sponsorships) in the middle and long term, and the formation of a mostly invisible class of elders and lords, those which inhabit the natural realm and are called Yùuntsilo’ob, in the very long term. All of these temporal schemas are marked by transactions. These transfers are given as anticipatory answers to uncertainties of what is to come next (in time).

1. Developmental cash transfers and the NAFTA expectations now

The PROCAMPO program was first designed to last 15 years. The term went from 1993 to 2008, accompanying the full enforcement of NAFTA’s liberalization of crops and foods such as maize. In 2006, Felipe Calderón promised a new PROCAMPO to increase voter support. In 2008 PROCAMPO was renewed for 6 more years. This new PROCAMPO was not much different from the old one. There were no substantial entries into the program and the changes that were included only implied more control in terms of clearing the list and getting rid of deceased or illegal recipients. In 2013, the program will turn 20 years old and the IADB will have the results of an evaluation that was initiated in 2009 (IADB 2010, ME-L1041). The envisioned time horizon towards which development cash transfers were given away, popularly called NAFTA, has already arrived. Nowadays it has lost its entire promissory glow and has instead taken another form as it is lived and experienced. The free market is no longer a promise but a difficult reality for many.
In Ixán as well as in other rain fed fieldplots, PROCAMPO calendrics entail a yearly dispensation. People expect it in April, May or June. SAGARPA’s functionaries alert the farmers through the press according to a particular schedule of disbursement each year. When it is paid, people in Ixán cash their checks or, nowadays, withdraw the almost US$200 amount that is given for two hectares, the amount of land the immense majority of “procamperos” have been allowed to declare since the program was implemented almost twenty years ago. They almost immediately spend the money on food, mostly on maize bags ready for consumption. Since 1994, every year some people complain to the village PROCAMPO comptroller. They want to get into the program and receive their money for working at the Ejido as the rest of the Procamperos do. There are around 200 recipients of PROCAMPO in Ixán and more than twice that many who did not enter the program in 1993.

Cash transfers have entered into their receiver’s lives as the intergenerational change has also taken place. Many of Yucatan villagers represent themselves, now, as moving away from agriculture toward an “easy” employment in the service sector, or a “smooth job” or “chamba suave”. As the tourism industry in Cancún grows exponentially each year, ever since its invention in 1973, temporary jobs are said to abound. However, nowadays, the majority of the labor force does not obtain a “chamba suave” but are instead hired as manual laborers. Most of the young people leaving villages imagined themselves switching from physically intensive activities to attending to tourists or performing less demanding jobs in the service sector. Among the most successful of these people were those who could afford to buy their own cars and become taxi drivers. Instead of leaving bodily effort and tiring tasks in their past,
they find more of them in their new temporary jobs that the so-called “Riviera Maya” offers. A majority of male workers have gone from the field plots to construction sites, where new hotels, neighborhoods or restaurants were being built, only to come back again after their contracts expired to burn, to seed or to harvest their field plots.

The generation that was schooled while these changes occurred, even if they did not get the easier life they were promised, still believes it is possible for their children. Constant political discourses on the potentialities of the tourism sector to employ an “indigenous” labor force, have sometimes impulsed the Commission for Indigenous Development and different NGOs to finance some “indigenous tourism” ventures all over the peninsula (some of them are analyzed in Alcocer et al. 2010).

Schematically, one can identify at least three generations with different horizons of expectations in the NAFTA development ideology. These are just ideal types and should not be taken as representatives or categories for the classification of real persons but they do serve to crystallize assemblages of expectancies and hopes. The period of 1973-1993 agglomerates the ideas and images of a great transformation that materialized in the construction of Cancún.

In Ixán people now over the age of fifty know it well. A transition between two worlds occurred. One without running water, with no or few grade levels in primary school, no electricity, no need to travel outside the village to get a job and with their grandparents’ “traditions”; the other with “open roads” to all the good and bad things coming from outside the village including, for example, Walmart stores, resorts, new roads, television, telephones, and cars. This generation saw or heard the creation ex nihilo of Cancún, in the early 1970s. At that time in Tulum, a few kilometers south, the
people were convinced that the explosions of dynamite, cranes, lights and other phenomena the grand constructions brought to their eyes and ears were announcing the end of the world.

In Ixán, 130 kilometers from the sea, the people did not witness these changes. The generation born between 1950-1970 did not frequently think of working in the tourism industry. In contrast, members of the generation that grew up with the 1970-1990 expectations, or who assumed them naturally, have all heard of tourism and the changes that occurred throughout the peninsula. Now some of them regularly go there to work. Tulum, Cancún, and Playa del Carmen offer them jobs as well as a mixture of joyful and fearful excitement. However, they contrast potential income with the “lack of tranquility and evenness” that they say they need to live. Staying at home at least once a month, in the village, helps them withstand so much traveling and work in the Riviera.

A second generation of new expectancies popped up after the PROCAMPO program was implemented to ensure Mexico’s incorporation into NAFTA. One could date this generation from 1990 to 2010. The people born in this period grew up with two cash transfers. PROCAMPO, aimed to help older agriculturalists, such as their fathers, survive the transition to the NAFTA world and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES to help them in their households and schools to start more productive duties.

After NAFTA there is another way of avoiding working in the fields. By traveling every day one can get a temporary job, for instance, in one of the few “maquiladoras” that came to the region in the nineties. At that point, NAFTA opened up to the international capital possibilities of taking advantage of a very cheap and industrious
labor force. In the villages, maquiladoras were thought to be the perfect solution to long commutes to the beaches and having to spend nights away from home. Given that some maquiladoras have their own buses, many women were tempted to work at such a “good job”. However, according to some statistics (Lapointe 2000: 258), the repetitive labor required by maquiladoras usually limits the length of employment to no more than two years. For “hard workers”, as the villagers consider themselves to be, maquiladoras seem to purposefully fatigue their employees with the aim of rotating them every two years. In order to ensure that their labor force remains young, between 16 and 35 years old, maquiladoras require that their workers work up to 16 hours a day, six days a week. One of these “maquiladoras”, in the textile industry, hires only female workers. The people that I interviewed about this particular maquiladora told me that it imposes the same or worse work conditions as the others. For this they blame its Chinese owners and managers.

Depending on different generational expectations—which I conventionally group into three sets of people born between 1950-1970; 1970-1990 and 1990-2010—economic development and NAFTA temporal schemes accompany and promote the fading away of a peasant way of life so that another, more western-like individual, may spring forth. PROCAMPO support is given to older farmers, an immense majority of whom had entered into the program in 1993. OPORTUNIDADES support is aimed, on the other hand, at their children, as it is almost exclusively administered by mothers. Women are required not only to administer the money OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers provide, they are also made responsible, through “obligaciones and co-resposabilidades”, for the success of the life transformation and economic conversion
of future individuals.

2. “Human development” or the universal moral imperative for investing “human capital” in poor children

NAFTA treaties have liberalized investment and commerce of almost everything, including staple foods in Mexico such maize and beans, since 2008. Nowadays, “free trade” no longer works as a distant promissory land. NAFTA has helped to accelerate expectancies of development in the present. The children of the poor, who receive PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers as they grow up and prepare for the future, are objects as well as subjects of a set of expectancies of development that is more universal than the NAFTA labor market. The more open-ended objective of the OPORTUNIDADES program is the development of potentialities and capacities, or the investment in “human capital” for the next generation. Therefore, the temporal images that the program provokes in beneficiaries and developers are not of a long-term progressive transition, such as NAFTA’s, but of a great transformation marked by a purpose. In short, OPORTUNIDADES is “conceived as an instrument of human development” (OPORTUNIDADES 2011: 21) and its major aim is “contributing to break with the intergenerational cycle of poverty” reproduction (Oportunidades 2012: 12).

The conditional cash transfer OPORTUNIDADES’s main “monetary support” is called “Apoyo alimentario” or alimentary support. In 2011, it consisted of MXN$225 (around US$18 at September the first 2011 conversion rate) and is given once a month for the whole household. According to the 2012 OPORTUNIDADES Norms of Operation
booklet, there is another monetary support called “Apoyo alimentario vivir mejor” which is aimed to “compensate” the “international increase of alimentary prices”. It consists of a monthly stipend of MXN$120 (around US$9.60 at September the first 2011 conversion rate). A family could also profit from other OPORTUNIDADES sub-programs addressed to infants (MXN$105), older people (MXN$315), primary school scholarships (from MXN$150 to MXN$300) and high school scholarships (from MXN$440 to MXN$960). However the maximum amount a family could receive a month (combining alimentary support with scholarships) is MXN$1560 (US$125) for those families with primary school children and MXN$2520 (US$202) for those families with high school children.

Considered exemplary in the transnational development industry, PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES has served as a model for many similar programs all around the world. The reasons for its perceived success are many, but an important one is the program’s sanitized depictions of the canonical transformation of poor children into “human capital” bearers, in short “human development”. As OPORTUNIDADES aims to halt “the new generation’s inherit[ing of] poverty and the impossibility of generating incomes that allow them to overcome their [poverty] condition” (OPORTUNIDADES 2012: 2), its action is considered transformative, discrete and measurable. The reasoning is simple, perhaps too simple: for the prestation of money, poor mothers will feed and send their children to school and health checks. Once hospitals, alimentation and education have secured a normal brain development and education has broadened the children’s potential choices, they will become productive youths. As youths, they will engage in economic activities that will lift them out of the circles of poverty.
Nevertheless, such development programs take for granted a transformation of youths from support receivers into support givers.

For most individuals in younger generations, cash transfers are referred to as something only old men and women receive. Although there is a new sub-program for people over 21 years old who opt to continue their studies, official documents state that, as of 2012, there has been “no impact of the program in University applications”. However, these youths are the ones expected to undergo an economic “reconversion” and “adjustment” from one mode of life to another. They are in the process of transforming themselves into definitive economic agents, either by switching from agriculture to another economic activity or by leaving high school to engage in any full time labor.

Therefore, it is critical that in the coming years developers shift the focus of support from the children’s (0-20 years old) to the parents’ generation (20-40 years old), who are going through major economic transformations and challenges, for instance having children, taking care of them and developing economically productive activities. If this tendency continues, the treatment of developees as non-productive adults or, put plainly, as children, there is more need for a more respectful and balanced relationship between developers and developees.

*How should OPORTUNIDADES money accumulate “human capital” in the children?*

Unlike unconditional cash transfers such as PROCAMPO, OPORTUNIDADES imply some contra-prestations, “el cumplimiento de sus obligaciones” or “compromisos” (OPORTUNIDADES 2012: 11), or the fulfillment of the receiver’s obligations and
engagements, for attaining the proposed transformation. Item 3.6 in the program’s book of rules, Reglas de Operación Oportunidades 2011, specifies, “Rights, co-responsibilities, obligations and suspensions of the beneficiary families” (OPORTUNIDADES 2011: 28). In item 3.6.2, titled “Co-responsibilities”, one reads that “The fulfillment of the co-responsibility” by the beneficiary family is “essential for the fulfillment of the program objectives” but is also the condition sine qua non for perceiving the monetary support (OPORTUNIDADES 2012: 10).

These co-responsibilities are itemized as follows:

- Enroll children in school and “support them so they attend classes in a regular fashion”
- Register for the assigned health unit
- Attend health appointments
- Attend monthly health talks

Point 3.6.3 also describes obligations. They are itemized as follows:

- Use the cash transfers for the “improvement of the family’s well being”, especially children’s alimentation and education.

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11 The 2012 booklet, for the first time, includes possible exceptions to attending the regular talks. Families with a member who falls under one of the following categories are not required to attend: an anemic or undernourished child, a diabetic, a “sexually active woman” who uses a long term contraceptive method, a “sexually active man” who has had a vasectomy, a pregnant woman with health checks and undernourished pregnant women. It would be very interesting to inquire of the program designers if two of these exceptions, which require no special care from the mother receiver nor any time consuming disability, such as families with members including “sexually active woman” who uses a long term contraceptive method or “sexually active man” who has had a vasectomy, are considered by themselves as “contributing to break with the intergenerational cycle of poverty” reproduction (Oportunidades 2012: 12).
• Support the basic education fellows to attend classes in regular fashion and to improve their “aprovechamiento” or improving their educational profiting.

• Present the national health card in every health check

• Participate in health talks.

• It is the “mother’s responsibility or that of the person who is responsible for an undernourished child” to attend the health center every time personal health mandates.

• Give the monetary support destined for the “major adult” to them.

• Receive and consume alimentary supplements.

• Keep family conformation updated.

Once a month, compliance of these co-responsibilities and obligations—I refer to them generally as conditionalities—are monitored and sanctioned by OPORTUNIDADES promoters and health personnel. Monthly suspension of benefits will follow if recipients do not concur with the required health talks or health checks, if the student misses classes (4 or more unjustifiable absences), or is suspended from school. An indeterminate suspension occurs if the beneficiary fails to collect the cash transfers twice, does not use her bank account for four months, does not fulfill her or her family’s health co-responsibilities during four consecutive months or six alternate months, if it becomes impossible to prove the beneficiary’s survival, or for other administrative reasons. Definitive suspension would occur when someone “sells or exchanges” alimentary supplements received from the program, when beneficiaries present false documentation, utilize the program for electoral, religious proselytism or
profit making, when the family surpasses the socio-economic conditions fixed by the program, when the family does not allow surveys of its socio-economic and demographic condition, does not accept its certification, or if the only member of the family dies (OPORTUNIDADES 2012: 14).

The program is devised to identify the beneficiary holder or “la titular de la familia beneficiaria” as mothers over the age of 15 (OPORTUNIDADES 2012: 17). On behalf of her family, each beneficiary holder receives the total monetary support or “apoyos monetarios”. The family could request that the beneficiary holder be changed when “she no longer lives in the household, had died or become physically or mentally disabled, studies or has a job or had been identified erroneously” (OPORTUNIDADES 2012: 18). OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers are supposed to only be spent to support livelihoods and children’s education. Therefore, as they receive the money mothers are also burdened with “obligations”, “co-responsibilities” or, in general, “compromisos”.

The burdens of these developmental tasks, along with the conditionalities of the program, rest on the women receivers. In Ixán, these women must attend regular weekly OPORTUNIDADES meetings that stress their responsibilities regarding their children’s transitions towards better lives. These meetings, then, indicate another form of normalcy women should attain. How, exactly, do the designers of the program propose mothers go about transforming the received money into “human capital”? Such a transformation is above all a moral one and it demarcates a universal temporality of development. For this program in particular, that of individual “human” developments. Taking for granted that mothers will fulfill their “compromisos” (“obligations” and “co-responsibilities”), the program’s designers suggest that children
will embody human capital in three main forms: through state health, formal education and through household food. Alimentary support will provide the basis for the moral leap that women are “co-responsible” for or “obliged” to make for their children. By law, these women are truly situated intergenerational links between the state and their children’s future.

**OPORTUNIDADES** discourse perpetuates their situatedness as well. For this program, the Mexican state avoids references to the social prestations it owes to Mexican citizens as much as possible. Instead, it uses a language of “co-responsibilities”. The OPORTUNIDADES program rhetoric prevents discussion of the Mexican state as the provider of social, economic and medical prestations. Instead of “prestaciones sociales, médicas y económicas” the state provides mothers with regular transfers of cash. A second hypostatization is performed when the OPORTUNIDADES documents avoid even mentioning a mother’s prestations to her children. This exclusive focus on specific effects, phrased in quasi-contractual terms, not only treats the mother as a mere “conduit of policy” (Molyneux 2006: 439) but it does violence to the complexity of the mother-child relationship that would generate the preferred adult capacities. Assuming that it is not necessary to consider the complexity of the mother-child relation, and avoiding even mentioning the father-child relationship as a capability enabler (Dapuez and Gavigan: forthcoming), developers prefer to express and legislate mothers’ behaviors in quasi-contracts, which do not have legal effects but instead refer to moral tropes of “obligations” and “co-responsibilities”.

Mothers, for instance, are morally obliged to use the cash transfers for the “improvement of the family’s well being”, especially for the children’s alimentation
and education. However, this is only a quasi-contractual “obligation” because it does not provoke a “binding obligation” that causes any enforceable debt. In short, a mother who does not improve her family’s wellbeing and does not spend the OPORTUNIDADES money on her child or children cannot be sued or contractually obliged to reimburse the money to the state. The state is similarly not held legally accountable for the promises it makes through cash transfer programs as the efficacy of the cash is dependent on the mother’s ability to properly administer it and fulfill her responsibility.

As many researchers have pointed out (Molyneux 2006, Agudo Sanchíz 2010, Delgado 2013) Conditional Cash Transfers addressed to women take for granted a gendered distribution of care and burden mothers with the sole responsibility of child development (Franzoni and Voorend 2012: 390). Disregarding the potential of fathers to contribute to their children’s futures, the state can only suspend the agreement and stop paying the mother if she does not follow through with her “co-responsibilities”. This is the extent of the state’s enforcement of the program’s conditionalities. Under no circumstances can the state enforce the fulfillment of such quasi-contractual obligations, so the mother’s prestations cannot be considered juridical obligations. They could constitute a debt without responsibility (natural obligation) or just moral obligation, but never a lawful debt. Thus, according to the law and the developer, the prestations mothers are supposed to provide for their children are a “natural obligation” or a “moral obligation”.

Why has the state chosen to speak to the mothers using the language of obligation?
According to Jane Guyer,

The most striking revelation to us may be that gift law has come to occupy a space where obligation is defined and enforceable. But there is profound distinction between a “binding obligation” and a “natural obligation”. In French law, payment of a natural obligation is unenforceable. It is “never characterized as a gift” (para 240) because it cannot be configured as gratuitous (with “donative intent”) and is not revocable (as is gift, under prescribed circumstances). (Guyer 2012)

In the above quoted paragraph Guyer, following Hyland (2009), describes how gifts were the object of the law and how the law needed not only to translate them but to isolate the contagion of gifts under the law of contracts in a market society. The Inter-American Development Bank and the Mexican state have chosen to frame their cash transfer programs into a language of natural obligations, without characterizing them as legal gifts, i.e. gratuitous transactions, neither as transactions that imply binding obligations in the legal sense. As cash transfers givers justify them in the light of a future wellbeign (after economic reconversion of peasants or their children), cash transfers serve to dissolve a legal binding obligation the Mexican state have with its subjects.

The notion that the new Mexican State intends to reframe in the sphere of natural obligations between mothers and children, however, comes from the lawful idiom of the real in the marketplace: “prestación”. As defined in Latin, French, and Spanish in most Roman derived Civil Laws, “prestation is the object of an obligation”. Prestation has a long etymology that relates to praestation, (the action of giving but also of manumission or to redeem slaves), praestantia (excellence or preeminence of persons and things), to provide and to give a loan, staying a priori, etc.

Social prestations, Prestaciones sociales in Spanish, are the objects, for instance,
that the Mexican people are supposed to receive from the Mexican state. Under the Mexican Social Security Law, OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers are designated as a “prestación” that the state owes to the Mexican people, by virtue of their status as citizens and is complimented by free medical assistance in poor regions. This includes Oportunidades Medical assistance, provided by the IMSS-OPORTUNIDADES medical infrastructure. Cash transfers are legally part of such prestations, but in this case they are administered by the Secretary of Social Development (SEDESOL). The Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS) then provides the health facilities, personnel stipends and some basic medicines, while the Secretary of Social Development hires and trains promoters, administrating and disbursing the OPORTUNIDADES cash transfer money they receive from the Secretary of Finance.

Cash transfers should then work as virtuous links between the people and the state, for instance, reincentivizing mothers to take their children to the hospital, as part of the intergenerational prestations the state administers. However, when a whole range of prestations from the state to its citizens, including entitlement subsidies, education, health services or “prestaciones medicas”, “social prestations” and “economic prestations” are being replaced by “cash transfers”, their receivers complain. Contrary to development expectations, cash transfer receivers point out that they were in better condition before they began receiving the transfers. To that end, they perceive their state as failing to adequately support them.

In Ixán, often cash transfer money is used to pay for cab rides to the city’s hospital, paying private doctors, or buying medicines when free medical assistance or free medicines are not enough. While development functionaries consider cash
transfers to be positive reinforcements for improving the health and education of poor children, many Ixánenses instead interpret the cash as tokens of the Mexican State’s abandonment or as meager compensation for the lack of state investment in their economics, health and education.

Stipulating, binding, adjusting and releasing in a Maya village

After NAFTA, more than just structural adjustments became necessary. Economists are often critiqued for being strictly concerned with the economic aspects of reality. Neoliberalism is also sometimes defined as a regime that only cares about marketplace mentalities. On the contrary, what I am examining here is an integral enterprise for transforming humankind through moral adjustments promoted in many countries by the economists of transnational “development” banks, according to a counterfactual prognosis.

However, morality of exchange does not exclusively emanate from cash transfer practices, or, on the contrary, the marketplace is not automatically an amoral purchase in Ixán. In Ixán, as I am going to develop further in the next chapters, sale relationships are also imbued with moral and religious feelings. Besides the autochthonous notion of payment, the binding consequences of an agreement entail a far more important aspect. It should be noted here that the English terms “commitment” or “engagement” lack the forceful images that “compromiso” in Spanish and “mookthan” in Maya Yucatec call to mind. More accurately translated as “entanglement”, contractors tie themselves through words when they use verbal phrases such as “mook than” (lit. knot word but also word that knots), or “k’aax than” (lit. tied word but also word that ties) to
make engagements, alliances, pacts and commitments. It is also worth noting that when cash enters into these self-enforced agreements, it also is embodied with some of their tying quality. While many anthropologists consider sale, distribution and gift-giving to be very different phenomena, the expressions for such transactions are almost interchangeable for Ixán ritualists and Maya speakers when they allude to a previous stipulation. As I will describe in the following chapters, ritual promises are reminiscent of the early and classical Roman unilateral contract of “stipulatio”.

According to Watson,

This was a verbal contract; the promisee posed the question, “Do you promise...?” and the promisor immediately replied, “I promise...,” using the same verb. Only the promisor was bound. The contract, however, should not be seen as by any means necessarily involving a gift or as being of a gratuitous nature. Stipulatio could be used for all sorts of transactions. (Watson 1991: 239)

An etymological analysis, while far from comprehensive, could still help illuminate traditional, “perverse” and equivocal use of these words. “Promise” comes from “promissus”, “promissa”, “promissum”, the past participle of the verb “promitto”. As a compound, “pro”, first, signals the anticipation of action, while mitto refers to the delivery of something sent (missum). Nevertheless, there is always the possibility that the anticipated object could remain undelivered. When promised, the object has not yet been sent, delivered, or given but instead exists, at least, in its linguistic form. Once promised, the promised person, thing or service is then rendered into a stage that exists prior to any actual movement and appears as an object that blurs Austin’s initial distinction between the constative and the performative.

In Spanish, “compromiso” adds one more preposition to the “pro-missus” complex. The particle “cum” signals mutuality. In this sense the “cum” preposition
signals, once again, a temporal mark. As an indicative and subjunctive conjunction, it indexes a particular how and when. In many sentences it is translated as “after”. If this sense predominates, at times “compromiso” or engagement would be referring to a delivery back and forth in time. Succinctly, “compromise” would therefore mean “after-promise”. Literally, after something has been delivered. However, this does not imply that the promised object had moved, and that the transaction has been completed. Engagement is always previous to contracts and sometimes a substitute object facilitates the transaction of the main exchange object. It is also something delivered that could definitely be understood as a substitute for the promised object that works to keep the engagement alive. Taking for granted that a promised object does not exist because it is previous to any actual movement that could transfer it from one possessor to another, is to diminish the value the interjection “pro”. At the same time “pro” is a temporal marker of anticipation, it also works to index a present time, a now that anchors the performative solemn vow. It does not seem coincidental, then, that the interface of Ixán’s leaders and Mexican politicians is expressed in terms of “promesas” and “compromisos”. Although sponsorship and matrimonial engagements differ from political engagements there seems to be at stake here a special confidence in such terms. Ixánenses’ repetitive use of the term “engagement”, as mookthan or compromiso, does not deplete its meaning, as Lévi-Strauss might have argued referring to other foundational terms for gift-giving relationships, nor does it render them mere floating signifiers (1968). The repetition of these terms only shows that there is no categorical differentiation of exchanges into diverse “spheres” but rather the work of a more plastic interface. In other words, people use such terms for different contextual
totalities but toward the same aim of centralizing many semantic domains into one. People use the same terms differently in Ixán, Valladolid, Mérida and Mexico City. “Compromiso”, for instance, instead of springing forth as a limitless process of semiosis, in which one interpretation indefinitely generates another, returns to constrain its users to a determined circular definition. Among Spanish-speaking Mexicans, “compromiso” connotes a Catholic contractual deal in which all parties agree to submit themselves under God’s arbitrage. In Middle French, since the 13th century, “compromis” signals an act of already made mutual promises with the aim to abide an arbiter’s decision. In Ixán the succession of requests, promises, gifts, engagement, reception and returns, considered to be normal conditions for actual exchanges, contextualizes engagement (mookthan) as mutually binding support. Intelligibility of an interface of “promesas and compromisos” for Mexicans is strengthened by understanding the importance they place on the matrimonial arrangements for a matrimonial agreement. In this sense, as suggested by Mauss (1969: 390), Mexicans seem to understand the matrimonial institution as the last total contract Western people endure, as it implies a compound of duties and rights (love, care, food, sex, etc.) that should be exchanged, ideally, during the entire lifetime of partners.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} Marriage arrangements, in Ixán, also iterate the same ritual phases I have described above, with a special emphasis on exchange. There are two “agreements” between fathers of brides and grooms. The two-step agreement is translated into Spanish as “concierto chico” and “concierto grande”. The small one involves the to-be groom and the bride’s father. The big one involves both extended families, plus an intermediary, most often a maestro cantor, or a shaman. In the “small one”, the groom’s father visits the bride’s father with gift of alcohol and tobacco to politely asking him for his daughter’s hand. There he assumes himself to be humbly asking. Once he has been partially accepted by the bride’s father, and only after the bride has talked to her father and mother about the convenience of this marriage, the “big” agreement could take place, also in the bride’s family house. For this agreement the father brings alcohol and a ritual expert. The whole process is similar of any other ritual request. Later, when the parts are
Gifts, sales, or whatever the transactions might be, are always referred to as promised prestations according to Ixán’s highly formalized ritual life. So too are development cash transfers. However, from the developer perspective, the money given to the recipients of PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers is intended to induce adjustments and to incentivize change but only in the inner landscape of the self. Oddly enough, the economic or para-economic notion of “adjustment” represents for Ixánenses stronger ties to break but also concrete promises, which development technocrats are not disposed to formulate as such.

Thus, the promise of development or, more concretely, the promise of accumulating human capital in the poor’s children, has been only figuratively posited as a pledge by the development agencies, and in Ixán it lacks any contractual force. Otherwise, the poor could make the claim to development officials that their children were not taken out of the poverty cycle as promised.

In western economics, “adjustment” appears as a public budgetary measure that would induce some agent, internal to the individual, to restrain or subject another, also inner, agent. Adjustment is a call of responsibility, one that should be internalized and addressed to an inner self and which serves to control any conspicuous externalization. Incentives work the other way around. Money rewards a particular set of actions or inactions. In the case of PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES, this includes making sure that children complete their schooling and “reconvert” themselves to produce further

considered having reached an agreement, a dowry is exchanged to seal this “engagement”, called “mookthan” and “compromiso”. When I asked unmarried friends of mine when they might become engaged, they told me that they did not have “enough money to buy a woman” yet. The trading trope, beyond excusing their long-term bachelorhood through a boast of masculinity, reaffirms the seriousness and expenses of engagement, marriage and later family business.
“adjustments”. For PROCAMPO, the main objective is to minimize the unwanted effects of these “adjustments” and “reconversions”, i.e. ensuring that the now ex-peasants remain out of extreme poverty.

The state and developers portray people without human capital, and always peasants, as trapped within a repetitive material world. The spirit of development, on the contrary, should be composed of the same matter with which decisions are made. To give money away to the poor seems, in this moral context, not only a moral enterprise but also the condition of morality itself. Or, otherwise put, it is the condition of a precise morality in which the future, as an open set of possibilities, illuminates the present and the past. Money, even the small amount of cash transfers, stands for an ideal regime of futurity in which the beneficiary should have opportunities and make choices and decisions by herself.

Reconversion, thus, should be considered a progressive attitude, rather than a definitive state of mind or a set of skills, geared to future employment. The PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES designers and implementers justify the cash transfers as shapers of inner moralities through their production of expectancies. For them, health and education are only the means by which good choices can be accumulated into “human capital”. Capital is, of course, the key term. Capital, as it is always supposed to do, will reproduce itself. It is in the new morality, as an open-ended self-reproductive capital of possibilities, that the developers trust. Therefore, development officials intend for cash transfers to produce an inner self that would be prosperous in expectations.

3. The Mexican State harmonizes the suffering condition of its people.
PROCAMPO (1993) and PROGRESA (1997) made a clear-cut switch from in-kind transfers and services (agricultural consultancies, development of new products, implementation of irrigation, marketing of crops, agricultural schools, etc.) to financial services (securitization) and monetary transfers. Although their implementations were sensitive to election calendars, national and state news and other events, their main aims were also a radical reduction of rural populations and the preparation of new generations for a different labor market. However, in the national realm, money is also conceived as a “support” coming from the “Mexican government”, although most of the money received is actually coming from the Mexican State through loans taken from multinational organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank.\(^\text{13}\)

The designers of PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES prescribed that the obligations for the men would be relegated to the fieldplot “milpa”, or other newer economic activities, while the women’s obligation would be centered around their children. By supporting the development of human “capacities” in the next generations—through compulsory education, for instance—CCT operate as regular engagements between mothers and the national state. As women are defined as the primary receivers of the transfers, and households are defined by the extent of regular food production and consumption, CCT are intended to regulate a state of normal everydayness. But they are also, above all, moral gifts obliging mothers to produce human capital in their children.

\(^\text{13}\) Among others, the Inter-American Development Banks borrowed, in 2009, a loan for PROCAMPO ME-L1041 for $750 million; in 2002 a loan for PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES ME-044 for $1,000 million; and in 2009 a loan for PRO CAMPO ME-0213 for $500 million. The World Bank borrowed in 2012 a loan for OPORTUNIDADES, IBRD-P115067 for $2,753.76 million of US dollars; 2011 loan for PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES, IBRD-77080 for $ 1,503.76 million US dollars and IBRD-79680 for $ 1,250.00 million US dollars.)
PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES are also expressed as the direct object of the verb “to give” in political advertisements and government propaganda. They are most often called “apoyo”. The resulting action and reactions are not only transitive but also asymmetrically reciprocal. As I have shown in chapter one, monetary support given to farmers was devised to create a return of political support for the federal government. Even if transfers are represented as unable to be reciprocated, the cash transferred from the Mexican state to its beneficiaries always induce a sort of architectural relationship where receivers consider themselves to be supported by “government” cash transfers, and, they in turn have a reason to be supportive of the government. This is not to say that the supporting reciprocal relationship is symmetrical and extemporal.

OPORTUNIDADES promoters are trained to use harmonizing discourses of loving care to convey the desired emotional and moral framing of the cash transfer to women beneficiaries. These discourses of loving harmonization employ many analogies of disarrangement and “unevenness” that women in Ixán identify as both bodily symptoms of their poverty and the discomfort that cash transfers evoke in them. As I will analyze receivers’ perspectives in the next chapter, in the following lines I will investigate the terms, concepts and principles with which the beneficiaries are encouraged to understand OPORTUNIDADES money.

In addition to detailed socio-economic explanations of the concept of “structural poverty”, OPORTUNIDADES cash transfer promoters receive emotional and moral training to assist in transitioning people out of poverty. In many short courses, taken in 2006 and before, promoters were taught about the “suffering condition of the
poor” and the “love” required from promoters to change this situation. Calling to mind a new-age point of view, documents for promoter training purposes stress “the organizational culture of promoters” and remind promoters that program beneficiaries require their “amorización” (sic). “Amorización” is a neologism used to denote the action of expanding love (amor) from the top of the OPORTUNIDADES program to its beneficiaries (OPORTUNIDADES 2006) but it also seems to be an intentional play on the word amortización (amortization), which would imply to redeem an invested capital. According to an OPORTUNIDADES PowerPoint presentation, this loving coaching is fostered by the “creativity”, “learning” capacities, “leadership” and services from the “participatory organizational culture”, and is passed through promoters to reach the heart of a model beneficiary. In the presentation, this beneficiary is visually represented as an oval that contains four concentric circles. At the center of the oval is an “A”, representing this loving capacity of “amorización” that the promoter should attempt to harmonize with her own loving capacity (OPORTUNIDADES 2006).

The purpose of this “amorización” is to break the poverty reproductive cycle. According to another PowerPoint presentation created for promoter training purposes, “[w]hat allows the poverty to be transmitted from one generation to another”, is the “higher school desertion rates” and the “higher illness and malnutrition rates” (OPORTUNIDADES 2006). It also states that by attacking these two “causes” of extreme poverty the program will break the vicious cycle and help to “develop” next generation’s “human competences”. Along with other OPORTUNIDADES documents, this presentation stresses the “negative experiences” of previous “in-kind support programs”, and the negative conditions “our country” (Mexico) “still suffers”.

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According to the presentation, these include,

“discrimination of the poor, indigenous, non-cultivated (‘no-ilustrados’) people, and women”,
“paternalism”,
“public servants’ arrogance”,
“dismissal of the citizens’ rights”,
“privatization of the public sphere”, “
“bureaucratization”,
“conformism”,
“self-sufficiency”,
“indiscipline disguised as freedom” (indisciplina disfrazada de libertad),
“conflict due to immaturity” (conflictividad por inmadurez),
“individualism”, (OPORTUNIDADES 2006).

In these OPORTUNIDADES document representations, therefore, poverty is not so much constituted by a lack but by various activities of suffering. The training of OPORTUNIDADES promoters (OPORTUNIDADES 2006) presents nine slides rhetorically organized in halves. Displayed on the first half of the slides are the qualities required of the promoters (love for Mexico, professionalism, honesty, etc.). A rhetorical transition then reads, “because our country still suffers”. Following this transition, on the second half of the slides, are the negative conditions enumerated above. Rhetorically speaking, these slides’ trope stresses not so much the need for change but the qualities needed for the transformation to occur. The presentation highlights personal values as capable of transforming a reality that “still” endures in Mexico. The sentence “Mexico todavía padece” emphasizes the temporal nature of such suffering and, to some extent, the role of suffering in the imminence of change. But instead of taking the form of reasoning (we suffer from A, therefore we need B) these slides take the form of a call (we need B because we “still” suffer from A). The presentation calls for people with qualities and wills of transformation first and foremost. The program requires “engaged and skillful
persons” willing to work according to the following principles: “respect for the people, public service attitude and love for Mexico” (OPORTUNIDADES 2006). This call is addressed to promoters to facilitate a manifest destiny. In the repetition of these rhetoric constructions, attitudes and aptitudes come forward. Promoters are called on to control the distribution of life changing “cash transfers”. Such transfers are always portrayed as transactions that entangle receivers into a bondage of conditionalities while, at the same time, by harmonizing them, also open up immense sets of opportunities for new generations. Conditionalities and possibilities refer back and forth to a model of the subject, or better put, towards a universal model of “human development” in which freedom is the consequence of responsibility.

The young woman who provided me with a copy of the presentation seems to have lost the will of change that the OPORTUNIDADES document demands. Karina was, in 2009, a 23-year-old woman born in Cancún. Her mother came from a traditional Valladolid family. But after marrying a man from Mexico DF, the couple moved to try their luck in Cancún in the early eighties. Nowadays, Karina lives with her boyfriend, who is also from a traditional Vallecana family. Nevertheless, they are not wealthy; nor are they house or landowners. He works as a psychology professor for a small salary at a new private university. Karina was, at the time I met her, unemployed. Previously, she was earning a modest living training and working as an OPORTUNIDADES promoter. She remembers those times happily and considers “having some money and knowing people” to be the best part of the job. Going to the villages and talking to the people was, according to her, very gratifying. However, she also remembers the dark side of the job. She did not like the way promoters treated “the villages’ people”.

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Development promoters are authoritarian, she says. Usually, they lie about going to some villages and they keep the travel allowances. Most of them do not go, she says. She also remembers arbitrary acts against village people. They treat them as if they are stupid, she points out. She tells me that since she abandoned the OPORTUNIDADES program, almost one year earlier, she has not been able to find a job. However, she would never go back to work as a promoter. She is tired of almost all of the bad things the OPORTUNIDADES training PowerPoint says Mexico “still suffers”. She also claims that this is not going to change.

What most strikes me is that her pessimistic view of the future is similar to the OPORTUNIDADES diagnosis of the present. Karina told me that the problem is not only the government, but the Mexican people as well. In her analysis she left aside Mayan speaking people from the villages and did not include them in “the problems Mexico still suffers”. Instead of taking suffering as a condition of possibility for change, she does not see all these supposedly bad habits as suffering at all. However, for many people in the Development industry, suffering, as an obligating index, seems to motivate immediate action, compensations, and, at the same time, a promise of change. In the development discourse, the poor deserve being freed from their suffering and, to some extent, also being freed from themselves.

In Ixán where suffering is very well conceptualized, often as a supportive capacity, often as burden, “government programs” are not considered to be enough support for peasants. As I am going to discuss in Chapter III in my analysis of the reception of various transactions, Ixánenses have different understandings of suffering and support according to their gender, their relative position in the village hierarchy.
and their economic activity. Some agriculturalists complain that the same policy
dynamic that distributes cash transfers also reduces people’s incomes while
devastating small-scale maize markets. OPORTUNIDADES beneficiaries, on the other
hand, complain about the extenuating tasks the program imposes on them, adding to
the burden of their normal activities.

As regular sources of money, however, most families count on these incomes to
buy maize for consumption. As a “little help” that to some extent, once again,
“supports” the people, the cash transfer programs (PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES)
reveal an insufficient participation in and understanding of the “peasants’ lives”. The
problem here is not so much that the promoters live in a completely different world—
most of them are bilingual and they live in villages that resemble Ixán in many
aspects—but that the repetition of a development discourse, which is sometimes a bad
translation of a text produced in the United States for the U.S.’s poor, implies a moral
construction unrelated to Ixán’s concrete forms of poverty.

Despite their complaints, women in Ixán regularly endure the program’s
required talks and tasks and today it is considered their duty to do so. However,
exchange in Ixán goes far beyond “the indigenous Euro-American understanding of
gifts as ‘transactions within a moral economy, which [make] possible the extended
reproduction of social relations’” (Strathern 1997: 294, she is also quoting David Cheal's
The Gift Economy 1988: 19). Exchange in Ixán is a consequence and a reflection of
requests, promises and commitments or engagements. Poverty in Ixán induces the
people towards very sophisticated languages of asking. Such a requesting language
ranges from the obvious demands of money from a neighbor or family member to
formalized oral rites addressed to nature lords. Actually, the ritual genre called “rogativas” in Spanish stresses the needy and impoverished condition of the one who is asking for resources from the specific lord or nature “owner” in order to produce compassion, commiseration and empathy. The potential giver and the requesting person establish an asymmetrical relationship, based on elective affinities most often expressed in highly hierarchical terms of kinship, love and slavery (mother-daughter, father-son, lover-loved, master-slave, etc.).

The purposeful actions of the development promoters, on the contrary, can only induce discipline as a moral tradition for accumulation. In the OPORTUNIDADES discourse, the suffering condition of poor Mexicans does not deserve compensation but should promote, by itself, a moral transformation. The developers and their poor are unable to see that poverty, suffering, and endurance resume their normalcy in their everydayness. Instead of understanding the local and moral forms of poverty, developers reject poverty as if it is universally experienced and understood. Disregarding poverty as a cyclical vice reflects the moral reasons supposed by developers and promoters for its avoidance rather than the local subjectivities built up from it. However, if the cash transfers remain meager, ensuring that a family stays on the verge of misery, it is because they are supposed to promote moral reactions, not affluent consumption. The program receivers conceive of the money as an insufficient “support” that transforms into a painful attachment. At the same time, many people in Ixán place their confidence in nature lords to resume their pious dispensation of rain, maize, animals for hunting, fruits and vegetables, as if the ancestral economy was still in operation.
Our question needs to focus, then, on whether and how this moral and temporal framework from the past has been reformulated in some way, in response to a changed economy and a changed relationship with the state. This question is taken up in greater ethnographic length in the following chapters. The next section provides a basic sketch of the ancestral resources and expert knowledge of local givers brought to bear on the present.

4. Ritual calendars and expectations of rebirth

Mayan-Catholic redemption takes place in material and this-worldly events instead of producing a heavenly segregated “economy of salvation” (Parry 1986, 1994; Cannell 2005 and 2006). The economy of redemption Ixán’s sponsors pursue is not premised on unidirectional transactions. Even though sacred “masters” or “owners” are not perfectly coeval to the people and are mostly situated outside the village, in the forest, they are said to reciprocate the people’s offerings. However, these returns are not between equals. Sacred lords, virgin images, Mayan-Catholic crosses, saints and, sometimes, the Christian God, respond to the offerings only if they are rightly and timely addressed. They “request” (k’áatik) offerings. The lords’ requests, as well as other symptoms that communicate divine will, take the forms of “warnings” or of “punishments”. Ixán’s people always consider that lords “receive” offerings and gifts (they frequently use the verbal phrase ch’a’ or “appropriate”, but also máat, in the sense of “begging”). Kucho’ob or ritual sponsors, if portraying themselves as initiating exchange through opening gifts, make it clear that these gifts imply a request. Therefore they always represent themselves as requesting or buying life, i.e.
responding to a previous demand made by masters and gods or acting in the same manner as these masters do, ie. "begging” or “purchasing” something in advance.

After the offerings are given to the lords, ritualists expect masters will be pleased, calmed and satisfied. Then, lords will take care of the people, the animals, the fields, the weather, and administrate and “work” for them successfully. Rain, health and prosperity, as well as poverty, tragedy and disgrace are results of the timely human exchange with yùuntsilo’ob (lords or masters), or human neglect or denial of exchange with them. That is to say that they will reciprocate only if the practitioner has a committed “engagement” with them. In these unequal exchanges most of the offerings have the explicit aim of “appeasing” and “feeding”. In this sense, prayers take a familiar but hierarchical form. For instance, when I was taught to pray by an old sponsor he suggested that I ask favors from divine entities by familiarly calling them “little-father” or “little-mother”. While everyone in Ixán is expected to make requests of masters and gods in a humble way by praying and showing respect and engagement with them, kuchó’ob or festival sponsors act as representatives of the family and the entire community in calendric festivals that are critical for their rebirth.

Particular care is given not only to the art of engaging people and divine entities but also to its logical opposite. As Vapnarsky (Personal communication) has encouraged me to note, there is a whole series of polite linguistic and non-linguistic modes of procrastinating “engagement” in social activities. As commitment or engagement is a central institution, and through it, almost everything is expressed about politics and ritual life, as a lingua franca, people use excuses to politely reject or intend to deflect engagements. This social art of non-commitment is a fundamental tool for keeping
oneself centered in one’s own business but still appearing to be responsible in the eyes of others. Polite deferral of requests could also help give particular engagements the importance they deserve. Otherwise, a person who engages in many sponsorships or ritual activities could be thought to be incapable of performing any of them in a very committed manner. Putting one’s intentions in another task could be a perfect excuse for not contributing towards a common sponsorship. Most people understand that other people are also highly intentional beings and that coordinating wills is not an easy task. Besides, people also prefer to not crookedly engage others in common businesses because an ill-formed agreement will surely end badly.

There exist many codified strategies for both asking and deflecting engagement. Alcohol and tobacco always work as tokens of engagement (Gabriel 2004). They are well associated with the task of asking someone else to engage in ritual or social activities. So much so that a friend of mine jokingly told me that when he sees a person carrying a bottle of liquor and cigarettes approaching his house he hides himself. Once the parties have smoked tobacco and consumed shots of liquor, the conversation then turns towards the main intention of the visit and the request being made of the host is difficult to reject outright. To do that, most of the time, the person will say that he or she is not feeling well or carrying a long illness or, while accepting to give the service or the object asked for, also making it clear that he or she is not sure of being able to fulfill the request for various reasons. Having to work outside the village or having too much work to do in one’s own fieldplot are always effective reasons to defer engagement.

The verb māat, demanding, asking for, to beg, or to order, has a variety of uses,
from asymmetrical requests made by Yùuntsilo’ob or gods punishing or causing social or personal harm and tragedies, to humble supplications in human prayers addressed to them. Accepting or receiving a gift or offering is also frequently rendered in the transitive máatik, and a requested gift or offering is also referred to as máatan (past participle). Asking, therefore, appears as the most important task or obligation in many contexts. Before giving, receiving and giving-back, the three Maussian obligations according to which almost all gift analyses are framed, the request, at least in this Mayan speaking village, emerges as foundational to the initiation of every exchange.

Many people who request the work of a ritual specialist or shaman called “j mèen” seem to intend to put Yùuntsilo’ob masters or owners in their places or, more specifically, to temporally resituate them in their far pastness in order to secure a possible short-term future. However, instead of just “redeeming” themselves or compensating old-time-spiritual owners for a future, ritual sponsors stake themselves with promises. Dexterity in promising is fundamental to balance a turbulent milieu in which demands can transform into turmoil and disaster. In Ixán, ritual activity as future oriented action tends to recompose not only social and phenomenical relationships but the materiality of beings as well. Sponsors expect material rebirth at the four major calendrical festivals:

- February 15 to February 20, Gremios or Guilds Festival.
- May 3 and 4, Fiesta de la Santísima Cruz Tun, The Festival of the Sacred Cross Tun.
- July 23 and 24, Cambio de traje del Santo Cristo de la Transfiguración (on uneven years) or the Virgen de la Asunción (on even years), The change of the
dress of “Christ of the Transfiguration” or “Virgin of Assumption”.

- July 31 to August 7, Corridas (bullfights) or Fiesta del Pueblo, the village festival (with a new host every day). Each day of bullfight is propitiated by one nojoch kuch and his helpers.

Kucho’ob sponsor these festivals for their prosperity and that of their family, crops and animals, but shamans indicate that the prosperity of the whole village depends on the performance of these sponsorships. In this context, “buying” future “life” and “rain” should be partially compared to the local ideas of “redemption” (“loj”) and to “getting power” through exchange expressed in particular rites in these festivals. Buying is based on the purchaser’s intentions, or better put, on the ex-post evaluation of the result produced by these intentions as a transcendent act, i.e. the change in the possession of an object. Power, poderiil or paajtalil, is also imagined as a material but invisible effluvium that enables some forms of futurity (generally called “rebirth” or ka’a sijil) and avoids others (categorically called “punishment”, castigoo, jaats’ or toop). In a skeptical fashion one might suggest that the power inhering in things is nothing more than Ixánenses’ expectations of renewal that have been projected onto an object.¹⁴

¹⁴ Until the 1990s few scholars had suggested that the temporalities resurrected in Mesoamerican ritual exchanges might be more actual and enduring than the temporalities of “world systems”, “capitalist fetishistic exchange”, “articulated peasants” or even “progress”. Nor had anyone argued that Mesoamerican ritual exchange logics were much more complex than the discrete Marxist categories of capital, money and commodity or their others, reciprocity and gift (Gregory 1982). John Monaghan’s (1996) partial incorporation of Mauss’ insights benefitted from the fact that he did not consider gifting, selling, and lending as rigidly opposed terms (Appadurai 1986). However Monaghan stopped short of describing “gift-exchange” as an open-ended, ongoing and prospective relationship of “engagement” among humans and non-human persons. Instead he preferred the term “covenant” (1995), which gives us an ex-post and more rigid conceptualization of a mutually beneficial deal. In a paper on the
In what follows I am going to describe a common characteristic of ritual activity that could shed light onto the local logic of things (an ontology produced mainly by reflection on ritual practices) to leave the art of promising, as a necessary and balanced responses to demands, to the next chapters. To conclude this chapter, I return to the temporal arcs of engagement analyzed in its opening sections. The first one, according to the village givers’ perspective, parallels the ritual engagement that is personally requested, in that it works on an annual cycle, while also invoking more distant horizons of mutual implications and feedback effects. The ritual calendar entails one-year long cycles of renewal, which in turn are composed of two-year long sponsorships. Although I will elaborate more fully on this particular engagement in the next chapters, here it is necessary to point out that ritual engagement not only models ecological time, and its reframe on occupational time (Evans-Pritchard 1939), but it also helps Ixánenses control promises coming from the State, the NAFTA free trade horizons and the more abstract development cycle of accumulation of human capital, especially in the shorter time frames of the first temporal arc. Ritual promising and engagement are, then, fundamental to understanding a philosophy of endurance, continuity and insistence based on ritual practices that remake the time to come as promissory. Before analyzing the ways Ixánenses make and remake the world as promissory, in its various temporalities, I will describe some key local notions to understand how the world is. These notions come from common peasants but are

transformation of Nuyoo (1996), he argues that Mesoamerican gift exchange has moved from obligations into “reciprocal contracts” for mutually financing sponsorships. In his descriptive ethnography of Nuyoo society there is not a clear downplay of spirit gifts and spirit exchanges as in other cases. In fact, in his chapter entitled “Earth and Rain”, Monaghan clarifies that Mesoamerican ontology differs radically from “the division between spirit and matter [that] is axiomatic in Judeo-Christian thought”. He clearly states that for Oxaca’s Nuyoo people “there is almost nothing in the world that is not alive” (1995: 98).
further developed by shamans who, using their expertise of the invisible, play the role of believable specialists in the true nature of things. In the following chapters I will examine how the one and two year periods of promises and engagements help the people endure longer or indefinite temporal frames, such as those proposed by the State, NAFTA and human development.
Promises in the Life and Politics in Ixán
Reception and deployment of the money by the people

This chapter discusses how the people of Ixán objectify wellbeing and distress through exchange. Conceptually and empirically, transactions in Ixán should be addressed by first identifying the tasks required to achieve an always desired result: “evenness” (toj). I prefer to translate toj as “evenness” because it denotes visible and invisible qualities of objects, intentions, persons and things. Moreover, as a reference to proportion, balance, harmony, calm and tranquility, toj also implies an imperceptible state of affairs in contrast with heated, turbulent, or distressed beings. As they are inner and non-apparent, these qualities are believed to inhere in intentions, spirits, or human and non-human persons until their results, whether crooked and twisted or rightful and balanced, are made apparent.

As every exchange implies the purposive rearrangement of people and property in appropriate ways for such an end, evenness is both the condition of possibility of any intelligible regularity (grounds for intelligibility) as well as the most desired and intended result (most frequently expressed as “rebirth” or ka’a sijil; lit. two birth), which works as an overarching normative ideal. As the most general objective of all exchanges in Ixán, including money and in-kind transfers as well as human acts of good will in general, evenness is considered to be an ontological quality with many particular semantic domains of application. To explore such a broad notion of “evenness”, applied to all aspects of life, from health, humor and moral rightness to
aesthetics and the correct price of a commodity, it is necessary to analyze its particular uses and, later, to draw some conclusions about how normative and empirical grounds pattern each other. In particular, how do people learn, teach and exchange, expecting to “even” their world through transactions?

For Ixánenses, invisible winds are understood to be responsible for almost everything, and thus calming these spiritual fluids is of remarkable importance. Evenness, once again, subsumes almost everything under an overarching coherent telos.

Likewise, the common greeting bix a bel? (how do you do? lit. how is your road?) is responded with “toj in wóol” (even is my soul or will). In asking such a question one is not only interested in ascertaining the other’s intentional path (twisted or right) but is mainly concerned with his or her material health. To describe this ontology figuratively, the enjoyment of a steady calm in the local mechanics of fluids corresponds to being in good spirits, in right health and intentionality. In this sense, óol refers more to spiritual volition than a personal soul, like pixan. Both souls are tenuous but material. Good mood, health and honest volition synthetically indicate the evenness of such a substance, in a setting where people lack a clear-cut distinction between physics and metaphysics.

For shamans this mutual reflection is further present in general ideas concerning the human body and its diseases, including the belief that an illness is an epiphenomenon of a more fundamental instability of effluvia. Even the common substantives k’oja’an and k’oja’anill, “sick-person” and “sickness” respectively, according to Guemez Pineda (personal communication), are composed with the k’oj archaism,
meaning “mask”. Therefore, one can also think that every person exists as only a mask behind which hide either calm or turbulent fluids. On the contrary, *ki’óol* means healthy, happy and joyful. Meaning literally *ki*’ (graceful, beautiful, enjoyable) and *óol* (intentional soul), the terms almost express the causation of the beautiful intentional soul in the state of being which is healthy or happy.

Enjoyable dancing, perfect bodily motion and aesthetic beauty, in general, are usually qualified by the adjective “even” (see Kray 2005 for a detailed depiction of evenness and tranquility in bodily schemes). In Maya Yucatec, steadiness (*toj*) and justice (*tojil*) is also supposed to be shown in the price (*tojol*) of a commodity. Moreover, when native Mayan speakers describe phenomena such as social unrest, dangerous high-crime areas such as suburban Cancún and injustice in Spanish, they frequently use adjectives and nouns that are not particularly meaningful (such as “desparejo”, “revuelto”, etc.) projecting semantics that are appropriate for Maya but lack the same assumptions in other languages. However these concepts have deep onto-moral echoes in Maya Yukatek. Terms such as *xa’axa’ak* (disordered, jumbled, mixed, turbulent, etc.) and *xe’ek’* and *xa’ak’* (mess, jumble and mix up) constitute an ample semantic domain, which ranges from the morally wrong to the ill-made, sick, decomposing or other different processes of fission. For instance, Ixánenses often told me that Ixán’s nearby villages had been populated with factions of families that emerged as a result of turbulent relationships or from quarrels between political parties in the past. Therefore, the local notion of change assumes that, at some point, it is timely that violence and chaos should erupt to decompose and recompose beings.

In the same vein, Ixánenses consider strangers and excess threatening to their
village’s fragile equilibrium. For instance, they consider a drunken man staring at a baby to be dangerous because in his inebriated state he is too heated and could unbalance the precarious temperature stability of a newborn, simply by looking at her. Visitors from other villages also arise “winds” that could provoke instability and upset ordinary Ixán life. Shamans say the same about invoked spirits. A shaman told me that his responsibility lies in not only calling and “downloading” these spirits, but also in then delivering them back to their rightful places. Once the báalamo’ob are called, one has to be very careful about sending them back. “One has a prayer to call them. But they have a prayer to go away too”, says Mauro, a 74 year-old h-man. “If they stay here you will get a bad wind”, he warns.

In this sense, many also suspect that Pentecostal “hermanos” dissolve not only the village ritual traditions but also its spiritual and material harmony. “Evangelical sects” are considered “divisive” by most of the ritual elite. Ritual specialists mock them and their prayers. In 2009 they said that hermanos did not get extra water from the gods, through their “loud” prayers and chants, but that they were subjected to the same “punishment” the other agriculturalists received that year. Mauro makes his dismissive view of hermanos very clear when he says that he will believe them only when he sees much better harvests from hermanos’ milpas. In the end, “punishment was even for everyone” this year, he says. It is worth noting that in his later sentence Mauro uses the word “even” to both qualify the regularity of a very negative term, a loan from Spanish “castigo” or punishment, and state the normality of “punishment”. In short, punishment is also a resource for maintaining evenness. Instead of jaats’ (to punish, to whip, to cut) or toop (to fuck, to make a problem, to scrub, to clean)
“castigoo” connotes a teleological sanction of wrongdoers that it is also meant to correct them.

As fatherly and motherly interventions, punishments and miracles regroup and restore the normal. Incarceration is one frequent example of the restorative functions of punishments. If a person becomes too drunk in the village, he or she is expected to have violent outbursts. In short, one can consume the same amount of alcohol in a tranquil and peaceful way or to cause trouble. In the latter case, people normally expect the drunken man to return to his old problems. For instance, if someone accuses another person of theft, then the accused is expected to respond angrily and go to the accuser’s house to insult him and invite him to fight. Therefore, everybody understands that alcohol normally “heats” and “messes up” the inner balance of a person to the point of causing problems for others. Following this line of reasoning, the village is considered to be an entity that is also thought to be “messed up” by the drunkard’s overindulgence and thus the village’s guards should catch the trouble-maker and “punish” him in the village’s jail. In these cases, punishment is no more than driving the person into the cell room and letting him sleep until he is released the following day.

As almost everything is spoken of in terms of order, stability and evenness, and there is a manifest will of readdressing chaos through almost compulsive ritual activity, it is also interesting to ask if there is an even more basic concept of entropy being repressed through “evenness”. The normalcy of catastrophe brought about through hurricanes, the overthrowing of governments, apocalyptic droughts, pests, famines and social unrest, appears in almost every single depiction of the future constructed by
Ixánenses.

It is not simply a story told by ancestors; it is a common set of expectations learned from infancy in many different narratives. Today its actuality recedes towards the long-term future and nobody will consider it to be imminent but rather a middle to long-term possibility. However, the normalcy of catastrophes and miracles is also a source of pride, as if it proves that these villagers are destined for greater things than other people. The centrality in the village of the story of a non-human living being—a lost book—is related to this perception of the time to come and the people’s expectations. Most people say that “thirty years ago”, a metaphoric way to say a long time ago, a living book was used to foretell the future and, above all else, to help the ritual specialists counterbalance or “even” the future through constant ritual equilibration.

Local recompilation of oral narratives (Aban May 1982; May Dzib and Noh Dzib Noh 1999) identified the village with the axis mundi, its cross idol and its lost book. Known as “testamentoo”, a name derived from the Spanish references to the bible as testaments (“Nuevo testamento” and “Antiguo testamento”), Ixánenses say that ancestors (nukuch máako’ob) used the book to prognosticate,

> [h]ow the [visible] world will be over, when is going to be maize, and which are there possibilities to do things for humans and animals to survive. And how to work the earth. And, there, it [also] talks about what is going to happen in the time to come. (Aban May 1982: 13)

As with the Santísima, Ki’ichkelem Yùum Cruz Tun Oxlahun ti ku (“beautiful lord, 13th god Cross Tun”), everyone in the village considers the lost book to be a living being. Every year it revealed a new page on its own, an agriculturalist told me. However, there were people “who wanted to read many pages in advance and forced the book, and
made it bleed”, he pointed out. When I asked him if he has seen the book bleeding, he responded that he had not, that he had just heard the story from older people. Another person also told me that all inventions are prognosticated in this book. The airplane, the bicycle, the radio, everything is in the book. The location of the book is unknown today. Villagers believe that it was first lent to the village of Chichimilá, and then to Mérida and to Mexico City, and some people believe that now the USA’s “gringos” have it, “because they are inventing all these things”.

In 2009, Ixán’s Gremios festival sponsor, here called don Damián, explained to me that, once a year, the book, by opening a page, let the ancient people “see” all the new year’s events. Then, many of the ancient persons cried, knowing the bad things that were going to happen in that year. He also told me that the book would come back to the village, by hook or by crook. People in Ixán consider the book a constitutive part of the village and often refer to it as the “Santísima Cruz book”.

*Making requests to the president Salinas de Gortari*

On October 25, 1990, president Carlos Salinas de Gortari visited Ixán. According to a petition archived into the village Comisaría, published by Terán and Rasmussen as a book of comisaria’s documents in 2007, during his visit the community of Ixán requested from the president,

- 4km of pipes for current and drinkable water
- 8 kms of paved road
- a building for a library
- a Technical and Bilingual secondary school (with housing)
- a credit for local artisans
- rehabilitation of the comisaria’s roof
- construction of a chapel for the Santisima Cruz Tun
- “a minibus for supporting Indigenous theater company“
“a three ton truck for Ejidal Transportation”
supports to promote agriculture, porcine and poultry farming
construction of an Ejidal house
2kms of wiring to bring light to the Santisima Cruz Tun Chapel
digging a well into the Santisima Cruz chapel
an improvement program for 170 houses
construction of a community theater
300 hand grinds
a 24 hour physician service in the health center
To investigate the location of the local lost book of prophecies (Terán and Rasmussen 2007: 195-196)

This record of the October requests, dated November 15, 1990, is signed by the
comisario Municipal, the comisario ejidal and a representative of the village Artisans.
On March 21, 1990 the village representatives also addressed a letter to the president
requesting a state-run tool shop. On October 25, 1990, there were four more individual
petitions to the president. The first requests the paving of 8kms of roads. The second, a
“house for books”. The third, a new temple for the Cross. In the fourth petition, the
people of Ixán ask the president for the “whereabouts of the Book of prophecies which
name is Ixán of the Santísima Cruz” that “was taken away at the beginning of the
Nineteenth century, because of innumerable sufferings of the Spanish rule”.

Carlos Salinas de Gortari soon responded to at least six of these petitions, and he
ordered the pursuit of the most expensive one, the construction of a new temple for
the village cross. In the village, on October 25, 1990, he also “promised” that he would
do everything he could to return the book to its village. He commissioned the director
of the National Indigenist Institute, Dr. Arturo Warman, to create a search committee.
In the village, some people also formed their own committee and an elders council to
oversee the search. On November 18, 1990, Dr. Warman was received by the village
authorities and spoke with three elders about the book. In an act of the same date, the
Comisario Municipal writes that Warman warned them that with the little information he had “the search is difficult because there are Maya books in different countries and he asked them to make a [local] investigation by writing a document and sending it to him to see where he finds the same content” (Terán and Rasmussen 2007: 197). In the same act, a person was commissioned to do the local research.

On January 12, 1991, this person sent a letter to Warman asking to be designated as a researcher and telling him that he had already done some recompilation work. Even though the letter is signed by two persons, some parts are written in the singular first person, for instance,

please, you, send me my designation as researcher”, while others are in the plural first person “we do not want the Danish stranger [here they mention the name of a well-known anthropologist] to interfere with our work, certainly, for many years he has been stealing information from this village. (Terán and Rasmussen 2007: 206)

Therefore, it is possible that the whole village is being invoked as the active agent “we” in the statement “we do not want the Danish” while at the same time as a passive victim of the Dane’s supposed theft of information. As distinct from the village book, “information” about the village has its own value.15

On March 14, 1991, the people of Ixán, its comisario municipal and its secretario, sent a letter to the Governor. In it they saluted the newly appointed Governor but immediately asked for her help for the “most needy which are the Mayan indigenous, because we do not want to continue enduring (“soportando”) more ruses and lies from

15 During the 2009 Gremios festival, while I was conducting an interview outside the house of a ritual sponsor, a drunken village sergeant came out shouting. Both of his nephews were chatting with me. Addressing me from a distance of around two meters, he told me to “get out of this village, go back to your village...” and then, addressing his nephews, he pointed to me and said, “he is doing the same that the Englishmen do, he is studying... for fucking us, for fucking the poor... he will write the book”. Interpreting, reading, writing and collecting information are closely related activities for many Ixánenses.
the functionaries that come here to Ixán and promise and do not fulfill (their promises)” (Terán and Rasmussen 2007: 213). In their missive, the comisario and his secretary complain that the village people have done everything that had been asked of them, while those functionaries responsible for the construction of a new temple for the cross, the installation of running water, the paving of roads and repairing the comisaria roof have done nothing. In the end, they ask the governor to carry out an audit to see how the money is distributed, “because you see there are appearing many ‘ladrones del pueblo’ or ‘people thieves’, like the ones you are sending to jail, now” (Terán and Rasmussen 2007: 214).

The Comisario and his secretary sent even more letters of complaint to the president, the governor, the communal president of “Zaci” or Valladolid, INI’s president, and the CONACULTA president. After Salinas authorized one billion pesos for the temple construction on May 1, 1991, most of the village’s preoccupations seemed to be channeled into the lack of information about the book of prophesies. According to the letters, at that time the search commission increased from two members to twelve. In addition to the elders council, the search commission included a Secretario General, a President, a Secretario de trabajo, a Secretario de consejo, two councilors, and six “Seguidores”.

In a letter to president Salinas de Gortari, dated May 20, 1991, the community of Ixán denounces Arturo Warman and says that he “does not want to fulfill [his promise of finding the book]”. They continue to claim that, after giving him all the documents collected by the commission, making a proposal for the search and doing everything he had asked, Warman “denies our expenditures and denies receiving us in his office on
April 18 of this year. We are sure our book exists yet, the last [time it] was read [was] in the year of 1942, in the Valladolid Cathedral, in the fourth centenary of its foundation” (Terán and Rasmussen 2007: 2125-26). Immediately after, the letter says that the people of Ixán do not want Dr. Arturo Warman to come back to the village, nor any other personnel from the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, INI) unless they also bring the book back with them.

In terms of a concern for ‘evenness’, Warman and the government were not adequately matching the efforts of the villagers, as promised. The villagers’ use of the term “gasto” or “expenditure” to describe an unequal exchange between the parties, precisely when they say they have done everything to find the book, is especially poignant. The expenditures they want repaid are not explicitly noted in this or any other letter. “Expenditures” appears to be the monetary expression of the many tasks, duties, and errands afforded by the Ixán’s commission and denied by the INI director. The term gasto, a loan from Spanish, is also the one chosen to refer to all the services, monetary, and in-kind expenditures a festival implies for its sponsor. The letter addressed to the President denounces Warman’s denial of evenness. While the letter characterizes Warman as refusing to help, to fulfill the promises and to pay back the alleged budgetary debts to Ixán, it portrays the President as helping and constantly “visiting the indigenous villages”. Concretely, they ask that the President “realize our situation” and they also claim to be “expect[ing] support for the search of our book, only to comfort our spirit”.

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A new chapter of a lost book

In October 1991, a new researcher was tasked with finding the book. Edith Argueda Ruiz was not born in Yucatan, but she was interested in learning Maya because she was studying, according to a letter she wrote, Mayan “geroglíficos” (sic) and she wanted to know the village culture (Terán and Rasmussen 2007: 237). While she was residing in the village taking Maya lessons, Argueda Ruiz came in contact with the directors of a cultural venture “Teatro Indígena Campesino” which had been established a few years prior, and has many youth participants. Based on her contacts, the government granted Argueda Ruiz the task of creating a new proposal for finding the book.

She began by organizing a new search committee and a research center with the people of Ixán. She then visited functionaries in Mexico City, Merida and Valladolid, including Dr. Arturo Warman, the Yucatan Governor, and the Valladolid President. According to one of her letters (Terán and Rasmussen 2007: 241), the governor asked her for reports of Ixán’s political problems (the change of a Comisario), its health issues and the village’s alcoholism problems. She made the reports. She also conducted interviews, recorded oral narratives about the book, transcribed them and, after two years, she gave some photocopies of manuscript legends to the village authorities. These were not photocopies of the book, but a compilation of stories. She also provided this compilation to President Salinas de Gortari during his last visit to Yucatan, according also to Terán and Rasmussen, misrepresenting it as the sacred book of Ixán (Terán and Rasmussen 2007: 46).

When Argueda Ruiz returned to the village, people discovered that the magical
book was not recovered after all and that she had told the President that she had found it. Believing that she had lied or had given them something other than the book of prophesies, the authorities felt deceived. They called for a general village assembly on May 19, 1994. During this assembly, the Comisario Municipal, Comandante, Secretario del Comisario and Comisario ejidal all informed the sergeants and the people of Ixán that Ms. Argueda Ruiz, who had been working in the village for two and a half years, had denounced the village authorities to the President Municipal of Valladolid, according to the village authorities at that time “without any motive”. Following this charge, the authorities decided that she was to be expelled from the village the following morning, on May 20th, at 9AM. In the meantime, she was to be incarcerated.

Argueda Ruiz spent the night at the village jail. According to witnesses, she screamed and felt abused. When the guard confiscated her shoelaces before putting her behind bars, Argueda Ruiz asked if the soldiers and sergeants were also going to take her underwear and rape her. She was both terrified and furious. Outside, the authorities told her, the people were demanding punishment. Nevertheless, tension faded as the hours passed. The soldiers of a company and the comandante stood guard outside the “Palacio Municipal” building. Everything was quiet and, after dark, people resumed their normal lives. At 9AM Edith Argueda Ruiz was liberated. She immediately drove her car out of the village and never returned. Manuel, who at that time was the Comandante, i.e. the responsible authority of the village guardians, shared this story, among others, with me. The expulsion of Argueda Ruiz configures an episode of an ongoing process of searching for the village book. In the episode this outcome seems to have restored some evenness in the unequal engagement of the village with outside
investigators. However, the unequal exchange represented by the robbery of one of the village’s most precious treasures cannot be forgotten. Ixánenses consider knowledge, above all, to be time prognosis. Therefore, narratives concerning the village’s deprivation of such a living object that predicts the one year long term future have been preserved and are now distributed through books written on the lost book (Aban May: 1982, May Dzib and Noh Dzib 1999).

Subsumed under an overarching concern with evenness, the village leaders’ engagements with researchers, the state bureaucracy and state representatives all involve efforts to restore the lost book to the village while taking care not to lose any more sacred knowledge or information in the search process. As villagers were concerned with the ways in which the promised money was spent, their concerns regarding the fulfillment of the promise had less to do with money. In Argueda’s case, her punishment, at least, seems to have sanctioned the unfulfillment of her promise. Authorities recognize and respond to unevenness through punishments. However, as the book belongs to the village, and thus belongs in the village, its very absence, its being “out of place”, still provokes unevenness. Things are not as they should be. With the book, the village has also lost its preeminence and its capacity to relate the visible and present to the invisible and future. The village is thus a victim. The book has been stolen from it and the gringos now become rich making all sorts of inventions appropriated from its pages. The fact that the book is thought to foretell catastrophe and innovation, thus containing important information about how exactly to ensure equilibrium, speaks more to Ixánenses’ preoccupation with evening the future than complaining of a decadent present. Their actions concerning the lost book perfectly
show how Ixán’s people identify and react to unevenness. They do not merely try to restore an ideal past; they engage in future oriented tasks to deal with what still needs human improvement. The future presents itself, for them, as a riddle to be solved, even when the enigma has lost most of its legibility with the loss of the book.

*Exchange for evenness*

Cash helps to encode some conundra. Cash payments, like ritual payments, also order people and things according to a paradigm of evenness and justice. In short, if all participants get what they expect from an exchange, wills should be satisfied, calmed and steadied for some time. As tranquility and evenness are quintessential qualities of life in Ixán, transgressions viewed as disruptions are punished. If someone neglects her civic duties, for instance, she is ordered to pay a fine or go to the village jail as compensation for the disquiet provoked in the village.

Likewise, it is not considered appropriate for children to leave their homes after 6PM, the time that the invisible “owners” of the terrain assume their positions in each corner of the house plot to guard it. If children run on the field at this time they could cross owners and “bear a wind” in their bodies, the consequence of which is illness. Space-time and movements, therefore, have a correct order that, once jumbled, must be rearranged. Interestingly, the language of these “arrangements” revolves around an “evenness” that can be attained through payments.

As spiritual owners offer their fruits, territories and services to the people, gatherers, peasants and hunters should also “pay their work” (*bo’otik umayah*), literally, with food offerings in particular (Vapnarsky, forthcoming). However, payments are not
only understood as compensatory, i.e. retrospectively paying back some work already done, but also as propitiatory. Paying in advance to yuuntsilo’ob, lords or owners, is among the duties of successful economic agents such as agriculturalists, hunters and gatherers. Prayers, offerings, and festival sponsorship are thus considered fundamental parts of economic life. They are conceptualized by the Spanish terms “costumbre” or “tradición”. In the interface with Spanish speaking people the efficacy of these tasks is considered merely symbolic. However, for Ixánenses, the success of any economic activity hinges on proper ways of requesting, giving, receiving, giving back and thanking. In this sense, by producing “evenness” through ritual means, they aim to positively affect the future.

Inversely, ruin, disgrace, suffering and lack of sufficient means of living all directly index some sort of human neglect, moral mischief or an incapacity for attaining evenness. In particular, unfortunate conditions are directly related to some sort of moral (deceitful or negligent) condition of the agent while performing exchanges with “owners” and attempting to equalize turbulent wills.

In advance, the future fulfillment of duties and promises equalizes and allows people to live peaceful lives. However, this is an ideological language in which the ideal balance of exchanges is ephemeral and reaching “even” states of being necessitates much work. Contrary to what many people in other areas of the world might think, peace, and in particular evenness, in Ixán does not arise from inaction. Inaction, especially ritual inaction, as I have often heard from shamans, has a causal connection with punishments, the worst of which is described as a huge hurricane that would destroy everything in the village, also known as “the wind”.

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Therefore, the aim of every sacrifice, offering, gift and, in general, exchange is to restore a particular balance or equilibrium of subtle effluvia. Abstracting the sequence, one can say that transactions are the means to attain invisible evenness and that once this airy evenness has been obtained, material evenness should follow. This is perhaps why almost every ritual name, with few exceptions such as “cleansing” and “nurturing”, refers directly to forms of exchange that tend to equalize airy wills and invisible spirits on both sides of the material interface (represented by buyers and sellers or receivers and givers as external containers).

In people’s narratives the logical series of events contains, then, the following temporal orders:

a. material disorder, poverty or ruin,

b. exchange towards invisible forces,

c. invisible evenness of effluvia and

d. material wellbeing.

Therefore, any promissory future necessarily depends on reaching invisible evenness through exchange.

Economics as timely dexterity

In Ixán money as well as other resources should be spent in a very controlled and “even” manner. Ritual sponsors, for instance, with the help of ritual experts, write down every contribution and expenditure in a notebook. They are required to learn the art of ritual administration. The main aim of their fastidious record keeping is not to ruin themselves through such enterprises and to reach normal regeneration. But it
does not follow that money appears to them as an abject object. Today in Ixán, when
the most important commodity some people produce is honey, many remember the
good days when they exchanged maize for money, around “thirty years ago”. The
purposeful isolation of local crop markets peaked with the implementation of NAFTA
treaties, and almost none of them still exist today. In this sense, the only completely
local conversion of maize into money takes place at the village mills, where people go
to grind their soaked maize grains, paying an in-kind percentage, or to buy the maize
paste to make tortillas. However, the monetization of daily life in Ixán is an ongoing
process that seems to harm no one as long as it is, of course, “even”.

However, not everybody in Ixán necessarily wants to obtain money in the form
of a regularly scheduled salary. People who have been more formally educated might
desire a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly stipend. Nevertheless, there are many young
men who elect to work when they need to, i.e. going back and forth mainly to the
beaches as construction workers, for determined periods of time, and getting paid by
the day at construction sites. These men pride themselves in being freer and having no
strings attached to them. The price differences between Playa del Carmen or Cancún
and Ixán, for instance, allows for the possibility to thrive locally with their earnings if
they administrate them very carefully. Their money is most often reinvested in the
maize field plots (mainly for buying labor in the village), in animals such as pigs and
chickens, or in the construction of new houses.

In Ixán, cash transfer payments to mothers (every two months) and
agriculturalists (once a year), produce feminine and masculine monies. Following the
government’s justification for the PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES program payments
being given to women in particular, people recall that women are more careful with money than men are. When asked about the reasoning behind these “women monies”, as they refer to OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers, Ixánenses say that women invest money in their households while “men will get drunk” outside them. Today’s OPORTUNIDADES brochures continue to relate gender with effective expenditure, stressing that their receivers engage in less “risky behaviors”, among them “alcohol consumption”, than non-participants (OPORTUNIDADES 2010: 28). Men’s drunkenness, according to this middle class ideology, can be linked to the inefficient expenditure of resources, which is also predicated on ritual life and ritual drinking.

However, according to many Ixán women, the exchange OPORTUNIDADES represents today is not at all advantageous for them. In 2009, one OPORTUNIDADES receiver told me that there is a “ruse” with these monies. She maintains that every single peso she receives, in fact, must be spent on the “co-responsibilities” with which the program burdens her. “Before this law”, she says, “we do not spend too much money. Now we have to pay for everything. They give you the support but later on you have to pay more than the double what you used to pay”. Here she is referring to the major costs they now face, including not only maize and the inflation of food products, but also medicines and transportation. According to the program’s set “conditionalities” for receiving the money, mothers are obligated to attend health talks (almost daily in the village), send their children to school (ensuring that they adequately advance), and check their health and that of their children in the village but also in the Valladolid Hospital (around 9 miles from the village). To fulfill this last obligation, women must hire a collective taxicab, spend the entire day waiting for a
number, talk to the physician and buy medicine. This process could very well take days and sometimes requires the participation of the whole family. The worst-case scenario, according to many women, is childbirth and, subsequently, taking care of the baby as well as the conditionalities the baby brings with her. As childbirth is no longer permitted in women’s houses, if they want to keep receiving the cash transfers, they must travel to the Valladolid Hospital. Sometimes women have to make this trip three or four times during the course of the pregnancy. The fulfillment of these requirements, without fail, is thought to bring states of uneveness to women’s bodies.

Clinics and hospitals are horrible places for Jacinta, a forty-year-old mother of three in Ixán. Before the birth of her nephew a few months earlier, she tells me, her sister was required to travel to the hospital at least three times. Both Jacinta and her sister receive OPORTUNIDADES benefits. Jacinta suspects that the blood extractions carried out by medical doctors at the hospital, especially after giving birth, are collected in exchange for the cash transfers. “I do not know”, she says, “I think they profit from the blood they take from you, the doctors... it is a lot...” In response, I expressed my doubt that those kinds of things could happen and insisted that not only is selling blood prohibited but that the small amount of blood extracted could never add up to a sellable and profitable amount. She laughed but still maintained that there are a lot of extractions, that extractions for “analisis” are too frequent and that they are surely a “ruse” for the OPORTUNIDADES given money.

The oppressive conditionalities imposed upon women is exemplified by the 2009 case of a woman who, after twice visiting the hospital on different days, died, along with her baby, without medical attention. Some of the women who recounted this story
to me, or other similar stories, highlighted the fact that physicians in Valladolid and Mérida force women to take baths after delivery, which not only disturbs the particular temperature balance of women who have just given birth but also sometimes provokes their dead. Once again, the discourse on disgrace revolves around a lack of temperature balance and, in general, “evenness”.

For instance, the health checks and baby controls that take place at Valladolid Hospital make women complain about traveling back and forth, even to the nearest towns of Chichimilá (4 miles) and Valladolid (8 miles), which is considered a source of personal disorder. Roads are places where people encounter never casual accidents and uncanny beings. Women and men use the adjectives “restless” and “turbulent” to qualify the effects of such conditionalities in everyday life. The money they receive, even when considered to be beneficial for their children’s destinies, cause them a lot of trouble. Distress and turmoil appear as embodied effects of the program’s conditionalities, yet again, when Jacinta complains,

We have to prepare food, feed the animals, do the cleaning, take care of the children, and they still ask us to participate in daily meetings, do all these stuff (which conditionality refers to, i.e. health check ups. etc.), and besides, doing fitness exercise for not being fat... you should stop eating too much, they say, but this is my body ... one is harming oneself ... but one has to follow their command of participating ... we are doing fitness exercise all day long because we are working!

Women like Jacinta feel burdened with many tasks in an uneven trade for money they represent as merely a “ruse”. While promoters aim to convert them into family managers working toward a redemptive generational change, women receivers, who are excessively expected to exercise, “diet”, and carry out many other activities, five days a week, speak of symptoms of bodily imbalance. In this sense, the most
important aspect of this CCT arises from its promises, not from its actual effects. Or better put, it arises from the disproportionate relationship between great promises and meager results.

According to the information provided by OPORTUNIDADES web page (www.oportunidades.gov.mx/Portal/wb/Web/oportunidades_montos) the maximum amount a family could receive as support each month is MNX$1660 ($119 on a conversion rate of June 27, 2012) for families with children in primary and secondary schools, and MNX$2680 ($193 on a conversion rate of June 27, 2012) for families with children in primary, secondary and high school. If a family has one or two children, they could receive MNX$305 as “alimentary support” plus up to three allowances of MNX$160 to MNX$320 for children in primary school. Then, one family with one child in first grade could get MNX$360 (around $26) and one family with one child in sixth grade, MNX$625 ($45). This information is for the first semester of 2012.

These amounts contrast with the lofty promises of empowerment that signals a shift from paternalism to maternalism (Agudo Sanchís 2010:534). Paradoxically, both force mothers to be more responsible for their children’s economic destinies. By promising economic redemption in a 20 year long period, i.e. in a future where current children will be adults, developers not only procrastinate the actual results of their work, but also add more duties to already burdened mothers. In this case, mothers must also take on developmental tasks. Keeping in mind that any development failure could always be rationalized as the result of mothers’ mismanagement of their children’s schooling periods, the uneven distress they speak of is understandable.

Given that these programs offer no explanation for poverty other than the lack
of self-reproductive human capital, the agency of caring mothers is assumed to be fundamental for successfully breaking the “poverty cycle” problem. The “correct identification of the problem”, then, depicts it as a “situation where lack of income, education, and health in the households means low human capital for the persons, and this does not allow to generate a sufficient income level to satisfy their basic needs and therefore to reach a full development of their basic skills” (OPORTUNIDADES 2012: 58). International organizations and the national state, thus, provide cash to mothers who are made fully responsible for its proper administration.

In such an enterprise, developers burden mothers with the impossible task of not reproducing “their poverty” in the futures of their children and relieve themselves from any responsibility for the success or failure of their program. Through a transaction of cash, the developer resituates a social problem, such as poverty, into the family sphere. Their flawed reasoning implies that poverty is a familiar self-reproductive phenomenon. Taking for granted that all other economic phenomena would work perfectly (the existence of a demand for a labor force of high schooled youths, for instance) by avoiding the familiar reproduction of poverty, they promise poverty can and will be eradicated by empowered mothers.

In addition, “entitling family mothers as receivers of the program” seems to have been purposefully designed by social developers to isolate the Mesoamerican men’s well-known practices of spending surpluses on ritual activity, and, above all, on ritual drinking. According to the program ideology, “targeting” women must reinforce the immediate conversion of OPORTUNIDADES money into ready for consumption maize (instead of the dispensious ritual consumption of alcohol), into their children’s
long-term schooling (instead of involving them in countryside activities) and into state-controlled children’s health (instead of using traditional medicine). Such switches imply that the promise of generating “human capital” for the next generation should arise from *a priori* objectifications of not only differences between generations but also in the reinforcement of gendered clichés in the indigenous division of labor. By constructing implicit sets of oppositions (alcohol versus food, fieldwork versus school, traditional versus allopathic medicine, fathers versus mothers) OPORTUNIDADES program discourse promotes a divisive effect in its money on its receivers.

In short, the OPORTUNIDADES conditional cash transfers aim to assure the subsistence of very poor families as long as these families vaccinate their children, send them to school and the women attend health talks. The explicit purpose of these transfers to women is not to give them funds to allocate as they wish. The program is structured so that receivers have no opportunities for any other choice other than using the amount received for the long-term purposes mandated by the policy. Besides assuring equal, however limited, “opportunities”, the third objective of the program is to “promote gender equality and to empower women” by making their position in their families “stronger” (Oportunidades 2011). The preferential treatment of daughters (mothers receive from 5% to around 10% more for daughters than sons) also aims to “empower” the next generation of women.

Nevertheless, once inside the household, money tends to lose its gender. Most often the cash transfer is pooled with money coming from sewing and embroidery work, along with men’s temporary masonry earnings from outside the village. Inevitably the pooled funds are converted, first, into maize flour, maize paste, and then,
if anything remains, into some small investment such as needles, cotton fabrics, animal feed, etc. During its existence as savings, money is stored in small boxes placed at the household altar, on which saint images, candles, flowers and, most of all, the cross or crosses also preside. These boxes are not always kept in sight. They also hold family valuables, among which engagement jewels are not least important. Engagement rings and necklaces are considered to be wives’ possessions and only in exceptional cases are these properties alienated or disputed, for instance, when a groom breaks off an engagement on the basis of his would-be bride’s infidelity, he might demand the return of such objects.

Men’s Calendric distress

Ixánenses always consider turmoil and confusion to appear as outcomes of mismanagement, excesses, and uneven trades. Distress, as anticipation of problems and a jumbled state of being, also arrives annually in March with PROCAMPO’s cash transfers. At that time, expectant agriculturalists begin asking ASERCA officials in Chichimilá and Valladolid about that year’s payment date. Since 2005, the PROCAMPO payment day should precede seeding days. However, the day is not fixed in the calendar and will normally take place between April and May. There have also been many regulations to avoid electoral use of distribution dates. Although agriculturalists have been receiving PROCAMPO for almost 20 years, there is no fixed scheduled day of

16 Annual PROCAMPO paydays bring many more male customers to liquor stores’ sidewalks than usual. There, agriculturalists drink mostly beer. Keeping in mind that in Mexico US$ 20 represents 11 liters of beer, and from my non-systematic observations and inquiries, I deduct that in most of cases less than a third of PROCAMPO money is converted into alcohol. The rest is deposited in the family box or transformed into food or a small investment.
payment and it depends on transfers from the federal budget to the states’ budgets. In every state of the Mexican federation PROCAMPO is paid on different dates, varying also according to differences among the ASERCA’s districts. Even though the payment has been naturalized over 20 years and people know it must take place, there is still tension and a degree of uncertainty in the days preceding payment, as if the “government” could default on its promises. In the case of PROCAMPO money, once the men receive the payment, many relieve the stress and expectancy associated with it by drinking beer at the liquor stores in Valladolid, Chichimilá and Ixán, only to start a new cycle of discontent and claims a few days later. Whenever it is paid before the seeding days, most people claim that they have bought fertilizers with PROCAMPO money. They do not realize that this is a cash transfer that should be “decoupled” from production, i.e. it is not devised to prompt productiveness or to help agriculturalists invest in their fields. Likewise, many people also say that they convert the PROCAMPO cash transfer into bags of maize flour, ready for consumption, on the same day they receive it.

After almost twenty years, PROCAMPO has become routinized. The small amount, less than half of what actual agriculturalists earn annually, around US$200, is not only considered an “insufficient support” coming from the government but also a sign of an asymmetrical engagement with Dzulo’ob, or the government class, in an age signaled by punishments and decay. Around two years ago, PROCAMPO money began to be delivered through Automatic Teller Machines. On payday one will encounter long lines in Valladolid, the location of the nearest ATM. Until the use of the ATM, bank accounts were practically nonexistent in Ixán, and people received checks and formed long lines in order to exchange them for Mexican Pesos. These instances of
contemporary monetization have not occurred without complications.

In 1999 those from Ixán who received seasonal money transfers from PROCAMPO traveled to the nearby city of Chemax to claim an alleged "commitment" on a transfer that failed to materialize. In Chemax, the state governor promised to give the total amount of the subsidy without retention of any "interest". Since the money was in the form of checks, banks and other financial institutions were authorized by the Mexican government to cash them for a percentage. According to the villagers’ narratives, there were trucks with money that arrived at the villages. After his speech, the governor left and farmers from many nearby villages received their money, in fact, only half of what had been promised. According to the diary of the "Comisario" of Ixán, when the farmers realized that the “promise” had not been completely fulfilled, they tried to lynch the functionary who was in charge of the payment (Terán and Rasmussen eds. 2004: 105-106). From this example and other issues with PROCAMPO cash transfers, it is possible to conclude that the promise of money represented by PROCAMPO is the promise of a certain amount that has always been considered insufficient to promote the desired evenness. Nevertheless, when the promised amount has been reduced aired responses have been ignited.

There are many other episodes of unfulfilled promises, including one as recently as July 2007. In all of these instances, politicians and state functionaries have been incarcerated or threatened with incarceration until the promise materialized. As in the PROCAMPO case, in which the mob tried to kill the functionary, there is at work here a logic of compensation that stipulates that transfers (or gifts’ promises) have the potential to liberate or incarcerate. Or worse. However, according to many young
Ixánenses, these practices are no longer as common. They have discovered that even when such actions do ensure that they get what they want from the promised exchange, relationships with the world outside the village become strained as a result. For instance, a federal representative candidate came to the village in 2008. He was campaigning, looking for the village’s support for the next election. The Comisario at that time was from the opposing political party and remembered a promise the candidate had made when he was the Mayor of Valladolid, the city on which the village depends in some aspects. The Comisario mobilized the village soldiers and some other people to incarcerate the candidate. However, someone alerted the candidate about the villagers’ intentions and he rapidly fled.

**Asking for evenness**

My friend who, as the village’s “comandante” at the time, incarcerated Argueda Ruiz, explained to me that he also has to give money to the poor “widows” and hungry “old people”. Today, even though he is no longer in office, people still come to his house to ask for some pesos but he has to explain to them that he is no longer working as a “politician” because another party is in power. At one point, as a representative of the government of the city of Valladolid, he received enough money to distribute but now he just receives a little contribution for his tasks of representing the opposition. When those in need come to his house, he explains that they should have supported his candidate and that he no longer has money to give.

In this case, compensatory gifts cannot be drastically differentiated from promissory ones. Nor is it desirable for the differentiation to be made. Some money
given by this person is not only intended to compensate for old age and hunger, even if only briefly, but also to promise more money and more benefits from the party he represents. Therefore the neat categories of compensation and promise (or compensatory and promissory gifts) are not pre-given but are instead defined in each gift-giving situation. Ideally both qualities, compensatory and promissory, purposeful and necessary, would be combined in different degrees, according to different situations.

Hunger, illness, and old age are eligible for monetary compensation according to the people who suffer from them. However, a promise of political community should also be exchanged and shared in order for the transaction to continue. Being in power, that is having enough money which flows from the government to the people, opens up the channels of support for the future election or event. Being in the opposition does not completely close these channels, but restricts them; the flow is not cut off, but becomes scarce. In both cases compensations and promises work better in concert. In the case of PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES, receivers consider their cash transfers to be insufficient compensations. The first works as a reminder of an unending transition towards an ideal rural market that people cannot fully envision or evaluate. Most receivers reinvest the cash transfers in their fieldplots (buying labor or fertilizers) and complain about the poor support provided by the state. OPORTUNIDADES’s promises are even stronger. They qualify the children’s future livelihoods. Although OPORTUNIDADES conditionalities indexes uneven distress in the lives of mothers, these mothers still seem eager to pay the price for their children’s conversion into successful economic agents.
However, hunger, illness and imbalances, in general, also call for compensations in the present, as well as promises in the future. In this respect, people humbly asking for food, money, or medicine, even just for sodas, should not be easily turned away. The call of evenness is, likewise, a similar one that is constantly made by those no longer human, such as owners or Yùuntsilo’ob. This call is answered by a continual concern with regulating equilibrium within the village through punishment, exchange and promises.

Promises imply terms that are fundamental to controlling local engagements. As I’ve stressed throughout this chapter, the object of the promise, or the actual delivery of the promised object, such as the village’s sacred book, is important, as is the honoring of the temporal limits set by the promise. It follows that the untimely delivery or, better yet, the indefinite procrastination of delivery, as in the case of politicians continuously making and remaking unfulfilled promises, will be violently brought to an end and sanctioned with punishments.

According to Ixánenses, evenness does not directly coincide with the economic anthropological concepts of balanced reciprocity or equivalence. While toj is a state of being, balance and equivalence can only emerge from transactions. “Evenness”, on the other hand is not only reached through exchange. It is an aesthetic or moral quality that contributes to the local ideas of beauty and justice. Exchange is only one episode of larger processes that make up the local search for evenness.

The fact that exchangers could be “even” after a transaction, for instance, does not make them equal. Masters and slaves, or better put in current terms, the owner and the owned, buyers and sellers, husbands and wives could all enjoy evenness
notwithstanding experiencing inequality, either ontologically or in terms of power. Likewise, no one ever indicated to me that “evenness” should be a predicate of an engagement (compromiso or mookthan). As far as I know, a promise or an engagement itself cannot be even, although they are performed to “even” a state of affairs.

In contrast to evenness, turbulence, or disorder, is related to inconsistency and unpredictability. Eruptions of violence and disorganization are understood to be the work of insatiate souls that animate and own things and people. Therefore, violence and turbulence could also be understood as evening punishments. Repertoires of ritual practices thus emerge as rich assets that enable Ixánenses to face the future. In the following pages I will focus on their creative and wise use of rites to create and to engage in a promissory future.
IV

Arranging wills, livelihoods, the dead, and achieving ontic gains through ritual exchange

Enacted notions of “evenness”, “support”, “burden” and “rebirth” shape uses of money, economic services and resources of the people of Ixán. In this chapter I elaborate the assumptions upon which these notions are grounded. An ancient repertoire of forceful payments and millennial expectations of rebirth, which the people from Ixán do not allow themselves to forget, serve as the main outline used to craft their future. Furthermore, I describe how Ixánenses replicate exchanges, through ritual life, for arranging, rearranging and procuring power, life and prosperity. After describing this recursive ritual pattern, I abstract two different movements that concur in these rites. One aims to liberate humans from non-humans, by paying these non-human masters with food or life, while the other entails an accumulation of their forces for humans. I call this latter objective “ontic gains”. However, most of the time ritual payments do not entail the end of the relationship between these two parties, but rather their engagement and reengagement in a timely “rebirth”. What results is a beneficial relationship in which both sides gain.

Ontic Gains

As it is well known through Yucatan ethnographies and linguistic works (see, for instance, Hanks 1990: 87), persons are generally described to be composed of óol (a sort
of animus, in the sense of will, intention; a nucleus of volition and desire), plus pixán or soul (an external spirit which covers the body and is multiple or divided into two bad and good souls), plus the mind’s awareness (sometimes referred to as íik) and the rest of the body. In addition, Hanks describes how íik, wind, souls and effluvia pervade almost everything.

The body is made up of the same elements as the rest of the material world: a person’s wínk’il “body” is his or her “lu’um”, “earth”. One’s breath and animacy are one’s íik “wind” -also related to yíik’al “force, heat of a fire, momentum”, and yíik’el “bees (of a hive), ants (swarming in the earth). Like the earth and all animated objects on it, the human body has a k’íníil “heat” on its own, evident in the opening and closing of pores, the passing of sweat, fever, anger, the coolness of relaxation, the chill of numbness, and numerous other bodily processes. This heat derives ultimately from the sun and must be held in a relatively delicate balance in order to safeguard the well-being of the individual. Through the double action of heat and the movement caused by the body’s wind, the water of one’s earth is transformed into k’íik’el “blood”. These elemental relations are not widely appreciated by non specialist Maya adults, although they are an important part of shamanic practices and descriptions. (Hanks 1990: 86-87)

In Ixán, the shamans’ conception of parallel worlds includes both humans and non-humans that influence each other. Each of these two categories consists of both material and spiritual entities. Non-human spirits are “downloaded” to empower visible and material entities, such as animals, plants, humans and houses. There are also human spiritual effluvia such as the above depicted pixán, óol, íik and yíik’al that need to be arranged and exchanged. Nobody doubts the influential nature of these ethereal worlds upon the currently tangible entities and vice-versa.

For instance, when people enact or refer to an ideology of evenness and balance they look forward to a temporal rearrangement of such forces (visible and invisible; material and more ethereal) in order to have tranquility, prosperity and peace. This works the other way around, as well. Tranquility, prosperity and peace are symptoms
of balance and evenness in the invisible, but material, airy reality. But what is clear, in Ixán, is that equilibrium does not last forever. A heated drunkard could transmit a bad wind (íik) to a baby and make her ill as easily as divergent and turbulent intentionalities of promisees could provoke social turmoil. A theory of “arrangement” of these effluvia can be drawn from the villagers’ narratives and their ritual practices.

Bullfights, as one such ritual practice, have replaced human and animal sacrifices in the Yucatec peninsula. In almost every bullfight today there is a violent killing of a bull, which occurs at the beginning of the event, as propitiation. One afternoon I was asked to take don Ramón, a ritual expert or nojoch máak (lit. big person), former comisario and then acting almost full time as maestro cantor of the village, to see a bullfight a nearby village festival. When we arrived we went directly to the church-like building to greet the jmèno’ob and nukuch máako’ob, the sponsors responsible for organizing the event. Being a nojoch máak and maestro cantor, don Ramón's duties are those of an ambassador. He should chat with the organizers and ask how things are going and if they need anything from him. Each village has many ceremonies each year and saint owners, shamans and big persons from neighboring villages frequently exchange the sacred images—such as little virgins, saints, cross-shaped idols, etc.—that are important for their execution. Given that each village has many ceremonies a year and that the sacred images such as little virgins, saints, cross-shaped-idols in crystal boxes, etc. are asked to participate in those ceremonies, there are also frequent transactions between saint owners, shamans, and big persons.

Following don Ramón’s conversation with the organizers, we buy our drinks and sit comfortably at the “tablado” to see the show. Loud music emanated from the square,
where a beer company had purchased some space to sell their beer. Everybody was dressed up for the occasion. The social climate was very quiet and neat, with the exception of some intoxicated people dancing near the beer shop. Otherwise, people behaved very politely while frequently entering and leaving their seats in the arena. We were very close to each other but people seldom made body contact. Transplanted almost in the middle of the arena was a life-tree or ceiba big branch. One of these trees is always present in Yucatan bullfights to avoid “bad winds”, don Ramón pointed out to me. Bad winds could potentially cause accidents for the toreador or even harm the people who are watching the show.

As usual in Yucatán, after an extremely short “corrida” the first bull was soon sacrificed. In the arena were the “matador” and his two helpers as well as an encroacher from the village; in Spain he would be called an “espontaneo”. Despite the visible anger of the matador, and the fact that to “torear” alongside a professional bullfighter is prohibited, no one did anything to impede the man’s drunken performance. Neither the police nor the village guards moved to intervene. The fifty-something year old man, I was told, was surely fulfilling a “promise” he had made earlier. Nevertheless, after bullfighting and making some “passes” the professional bullfighter killed the bull in the usual form. Strangely, the drunkard then approached the bull, put himself just in front of it, touched its head and with his hand painted his own face with its blood.

Almost immediately, the bullfighter's helpers tied the bull up and pulled it outside the arena where another person started to cut the animal into pieces. Some members of the audience got out of their seats and followed the bull's body. The person
butchering the bull put some pieces on a table and started to sell the meat to the gathering crowd. With the bull’s body hanging from a tree, its blood still dripping into a receptacle, people rushed to buy a piece “still hot” to cook and eat the same day. The meal they intended to prepare is called “choco-lomo”, a mixture of Maya and Spanish meaning “hot-tenderloin”.

Chocolomo is perhaps the only meal in which Yucatecan villagers ingest beef. As a regular beef-eater, my impulse was to go and buy a kilogram to later cook. However, don Ramón told me that eating chocolomo is not Catholic; it is best not to eat it. He explained that the hot meat is too strong and that it can cause some perturbations in the human body. In response to my questions about what kind of changes I might suffer by eating chocolomo, he told that I would experience an instantaneous “will of sin”, not only sexually but that I would also become aggressive, impulsive and angry.

Corresponding to the Mayan ideals of “evenness” and “tranquility”, the hotness of chocomolo was thought to provoke an imbalance in the human body-spirit-mind compound, in that order.

At that time I followed don Ramón’s advice and did not eat chocolomo. Later, on a Sunday of glory in Ixán, however, I was invited to eat it by the PROCAMPO comptroller, my landlord and friend. Actually, chocolomo is an offal soup in which, besides freshly butchered brain, heart, kidneys, liver, intestines, etc., there are also pieces of beef, chiles, sour oranges, cilantro, tomatoes and onions. I was delighted to discover that it is traditionally served as a meal to end the holy week or “Semana Santa”. While I am not drawing any conclusions, I do find it strikingly suggestive that the logic of Christ’s sacrifice entangles so well on Easter Sunday with Mesoamerican ancient cannibalism.
After my first sips of the soup I did feel hot. I started to sweat and felt more energetic. I was also so happy to eat beef again, coming back for a while to the carnivorous diet I always had.

As I can induce from some of these narratives, there is something that can be considered force, power or hotness that is provoked in the bull during the bullfight. The resulting heightened levels of bravery, heat and spirit are taken out of the bull's body by alimentary consumption. Through violence and sacrifice the bull's yíik'al “force, heat of a fire, momentum” is increased, objectified, sold, appropriated and consumed. From this entire complex set of transformations there are at least two gains: one perpetrated by the bullfight organizers and the other appropriated by chocolomo consumers. The first can be described as the transformation of a bull into money. Such a conversion requires an arena and a public. It depends on the increased hotness and power of the bull meat during the bullfight. Culminating in killing the bull, dismembering its body and selling the meat, this process ends in monetary gain for the sellers. From the consumers’ point of view, on the other hand, consumption of the chocolomo corresponds with what I refer to here as “ontic gains”. They are willing to pay a higher price for the hot meat than they would pay for a regular piece of meat because they consider its momentum, hotness and power to be something that could be embodied and accumulated into their own bodies.

On the contrary, an undesirable excess of power motivates the rite of k'ex

17 Later when I commented on the idea of provoked imbalance and force incorporated by chocolomo to Guemez Pineda, a well known bilingual maya-spanish Medical Anthropologist. He told me that he also gets “heated” when he eats chocolomo. In response to my inquiry as to the possible cause for such a change in the human body’s temperature, he told me that it could be due to the ingestion of adrenaline. I do not know if his answer can be considered a suitable medical explanation. Could a bull’s adrenaline be incorporated into the human body by eating its flesh? However, I take his statement to be a way of bridging scientific accounts with popular accounts.
"exchange". This excess indicates a dangerous unevenness and should be purged to restore equilibrium. A child with a double cowlick with two counter-rotating spirals in her hair is one such acute case. Disgraces in the family and the cowlick are proof that the child could be an *ikin* (lit. a Maya owl), an evil force. The *ikin* is sometimes figured as a spiritual “vampire” that sucks out all the effluvia from the other family members.

Another possibility, the most frequent suspicion, is that this disturbance is the work of a too powerful personal owner of the child. An excessively powerful owner could be harming the child’s health and that of her relatives by taking away part of their *animi*. The solution is to cheat the owner by changing the afflicted person's name. Most frequently this change of name is performed with a child who has broken a bone, brought disgrace to her family, or frequently suffers from illness. In the cases I was made aware of, chickens were given the child's name (in the case of a female child, a rooster should be used) and then killed. First the shaman will ask the father or the mother which new name they have chosen for their child. Then, the *j mèen*’s prayers command the owner to take care of the chicken. At the same time, he will beat the chicken against the child’s head. When the chicken dies, the *j mèen* declares that the process is complete. Names have been interchanged, and now the chicken should be cooked in a broth, eaten and made to disappear. Once eaten, the chicken’s bones should also be burned and then hidden in the ground. By consuming the chicken and burying its bones, they hope to conceal the trick from the owner by eliminating any remaining proof of the ruse. As the double cowlick stands for a broader tumultuous emanation, it is thought to be the owner’s presence. However, the later exchange and replacement of the sacrificial victim for the child, as well as the name change, signals a subtler reality.
As in the Cantares de Dzitbalche (Najera Coronado 2007: 172) k’ex or exchange, then, had clearly become the Maya mercantile term to refer to sacrificial offerings.

In Ixán, ceremonial exchange is, on one level, a determined inter-subjective experience that, by implying begging, promising, giving or “purchasing” and returning, entails a social and analogical interface. On another level of reality, kuch rites also reassure some objective categories of human understanding by imposing, for instance, a reciprocal but asymmetrical relationship with what is commonly understood as “nature”. However, cargo ceremonies are also both an exploration and an experimentation at the very different level of transcendental aesthetics. From the intersubjective social and phenomenal experience, towards establishing a particular reciprocal but asymmetrical relationship with masters of nature, sponsors look for rebirth of this worldly material world. I call these aimed for returns “ontic gains”.

An ontic interface implies aspects that cannot be fully known, understood, experienced, or even perceived in any way. Following Hartmann (2013), I understand ontics as a level of reality or being that refers to a “pre-categorical and pre-objectual connection which is best expressed in the relation to transcendent acts” (Albertazzi 2001: 299). In this sense, even shamans, with their expert knowledge, cannot fully account for these regeneration processes. Ritual exchange, ranging from social and phenomenical experiences, practices and exceeds categorical thinking, in particular reciprocity and causality, for material “rebirth”.

*The other side of ritual exchanges: Fathers, Mothers, patrons, lords, owners and masters of everything*
An ancient god called oxlahun ti ku (the thirteen god) was believed to be composed of thirteen animal-persons that could have been the sky’s constellations. In the Chumayel, this god is defeated by Bolon ti ku, the nine god. In Ixán, among the non-human persons who exchange such payments, “ki’chkelem Yuum Taata” (beautiful lord father) and “ko’olebil” (Virgin Mary, but meaning literally a female master of slaves) name the highest of the divine hierarchies. They are often addressed through their village representative, the cross-shaped-idol called “Santísima Cruz Báalam Tun, Ki’ichkelem Yùum Oxlahun ti ku”, “the Most Sacred Cross Jaguar Stone, Beautiful Lord 13th god”. The cross is frequently addressed in Spanish as “tres personas”, a clear reference to the Christian trinity. As one can see, there is some wordplay at work between the Spanish homophones “tres” (three) and “trece” (thirteen) personas and the oxlahun numeral, which literally means “three [above] ten”. The stone cross works as a hub that connects the villagers with all the powerful entities.

Lower in the divine hierarchy are the lords of rains, the four Cháako’ob. They are invoked during a special rite for rain called chaak chac. Cháako’ob are tasked with pouring water down over the fields (for a detailed description of them and their rite see Terán and Rasmussen, 2008). Even lower still are the divine Yùuntsilo’ob. According to various elders, sponsors and j mèeno’ob in Ixán, many of these Yùuntsilo’ob reside in the outer space, most of the time represented by the forest, old abandoned villages and ruins, caves, cenotes (dzonot) and rejolladas. The root yùum could be translated

18 These gods were probably related to calendars. Nine times 20 days equals 180 days, or half of a 360-day year, a yearly period called tun. A sacred year also consisted of thirteen months, or winals. Thirteen multiplied by twenty amounts to 260, the number of days comprising what the archaeologists refer to as Tzolk’in (count of days), a sacred round or sacred calendar.
depending on different uses and contexts as “father”, “master”, “lord” (père, maître, seigneur) according to Vapnarsky. The suffix -tsil is required by its absolute (and non-possessive) use and o’ob marks the plural (Vapnarsky, forthcoming: 14). The Maya term is rendered in Spanish as “dueños” or owners (when referring to specific controllers of nature) and “señores” (when used more generally). The same difference appears, for instance, when people call to them in prayers or in everyday situations. The terms can mean and be translated as “owner”, “patrón”, “father”, but this does not imply that the users of these terms use them according to how they are more widely understood. In using these terms, they are not referring to one who holds current property rights over the land according to Mexican law, hires employees and pays salaries, or is recognized through an institutionalized kinship relationship. Acts of naming these entities complicate even further their semantic fields. All the time, with the exception of prayers, it is supposed that people refer to Yùuntsilo’ob with euphemisms. The reason is simple. To name them is to call them and to do so is potentially dangerous. Yùuntsilo’ob are responsible for all illnesses and disgraces and thus are much feared. However, they are not always unlucky or evil presences; they are just powerful, too powerful for human existence. On the other hand, oral rites name these entities in a meticulously defined spatial order with the aim of “downloading” them to the altar, making them do some work and, later on, ensuring that they leave orderly.19

The shaman always establishes an exchange relationship with Yùuntsilo’ob by paying them and making nourishing offerings to them. The same relationship is also

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established by lay people who need to work in the fields (considered to be part of the forests and administrated and owned by particular Yuumsiilo’ob) or hunt in the forests. To do so, they must pay the Yuuntsilo’ob, by feeding them and asking them to work for them and to give them food. Orderly and timely performance, the right measures of offerings (quantity), proper respect and the right words are indispensable for accomplishing their objectives in these ritual interactions. Otherwise, it could be catastrophic. For these reasons, oral rites are extremely formulaic. Shamans’ knowledge is a much-appreciated resource and not easily nor casually shared.

Apprenticeship progresses over the course of years and an important part takes place in dreams. Shamans’ nights are sometimes, they say, truly battles between spiritual forces. These forces are only visible to particular shamans and, sometimes, the shamans can only hear their voices. According to some of these shamans, these spiritual guardians are sent by other shamans to kill them, to sicken them and to make them evil.

The semantic field is further complicated when people choose to refer to these owners and masters using the terms “báalamo’ob”, “nukuch máako’ob” or “itza máako’ob”. It worth noting that Franciscans chose the word yuum when translating in their catechism, and prayer terms such god, Jesus, and saints, leaving behind these other terms. This might have been an attempt to normalize names, but polysemic terms are not completely abandoned. These include báalam (jaguar, priest, spirit guardian, family last name), Itzá máako’ob (a term that not only refers to a particular Maya ethnic group and witches or spirits, but also applies to the village crosses, which are considered Itzá persons) and nukuch máako’ob (big-old persons, ancestors and ritual elders). Nukuch is
the irregular plural of nojoch, which means big and old. Máak means person. As in many places in the Americas, in Ixán it is not commonly understood that one must be human in order to be considered a person. Otherwise put, a person is an intentional entity in any form.

In Ixán, numerous such entities exist. Nukuch máako’ob, or ancestors, are supposed to be found in the deep forest by many people. Usually referred to as kalano’ob k’aax or forest guardians, dueños del bosque in Spanish—though sometimes also referred to as Me’etan k’aáxo’ob, “forest makers” or “forest-made-entities”—they are thought to be able to take the form of serpents or other animals. The Itzá máako’obor, literally, the Itzá people protect the village surroundings and especially take care of the Santisima Cruz Tun. The Yùum Báalamo’ob o báalames, in the Spanish-like plural, see after the village and the field plots or milpas. And, of course, the people in the village who keep bees must deal with Yùum Kab, the lord of bees.

Entering into the domestic living space, we find ritual offerings addressed to Wan Tul who, after receiving the loj corral offerings, watches over the corral animals. Kalan Yùum Wíniko’ob, on the other hand, is the “people’s or family’s chief guardian” (comparable to “Nucuch macob” or “nucuch uinicob” in Redfield & Rojas 1934). Me’etan lu’um are also referred to as the “dueños del solar” or “house-plot owners”. “Me’etan lu’um” literally means those “earth made” or those who “make the earth”. Among these are the Aj Kanulo’ob and the Kuch kabalo’ob who take care of the family inside the

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20 “Loj” means redemption. According to Álvarez (1997: 153-154) in the post-classic society those slaves (uncil or human-like) who sold themselves as a result of hunger, debt or any other circumstance, could bail themselves out through labor, in-kind or monetary payments. On the other hand, the war captive slaves (bac-zah) were irredeemable. The term “loj” when translated into Spanish is sometimes rendered as “bendición”. However, it always understood to mean a ritualized payment for a determined master-owner service or for freeing an entity from its spiritual masters-owners.
solar, or domestic, living space, which encompasses both inside and outside the house.

Correspondingly, every person is also protected and watched by a Santo winik, a personal guardian who protects a person from the dangers she may face in life. It is also worth noting that many of these “lords” or “guardians” are commonly referred to as dueños, or owners, which, although not to be taken too literally, does imply the existence of a sort of spiritual regime of property in almost all aspects of life.

“Everything has an owner”, one Maestro Cantor told me, “they are like custom officers, and you have to pay for everything”. Like many other deities in Ixán, they are invisible and thus compared to the wind, material yet subtle. An old man serving as a helper in the first Gremio festival described one of them as “like the wind, you cannot see him but he can see us”. In many other contexts they are also euphemistically referred as “those who see us”, or who guard us, and it is also understood that they cannot be or are not frequently seen.

In that sense, I was told by a shaman that there is also a spiritual being called “kuch kabal”. Aj Kanul and kuck kabal are both protector spirits but they have different duties. Aj Kanul is always referred to as a personal guardian but he also takes care of the solar and the immediacies of the house building. Kuch kabalo’o seems sometimes to be identified in prayers with the four me’etan lu’um (bearers of the four corners of the world and literally makers of the earth or made of earth) and with the me’etan k’aaxo’ob (lords of the forests and literally makers of and made of the forest). However, such identification could be explained as the result of transposing an office with the aim of naming a similar position of power rather than a perfect identification.

For instance, the “owner of the solar” is referred to as u baal me lu’umo’ob (the
one who belongs to the earth or is contained by the earth). They do not necessarily reside in the underworld. In rituals, they are addressed as if they come from the skies. As I have already mentioned they are “downloaded” in rituals such as the *loj lu’um* (earth redemption) and *jetz lu’um* (earth arrangement). In the latter, one has to make a table, and place upon it a drink made of maize (*sakja’o*) in nine gourds (*bolon bin*). Then, the shaman cooks big tortillas (*noj waj*) in an underground oven before he offers them on a table made for that purpose. The shaman will then ceremoniously raise each of the gourds, offering them to each *yùum ku* (father god). Later he will hang two *ch’uuyubobo’ob*, or string hangers, where calabash gourds go, with offerings, in the offering tree (*k’u’uche’*). In these, one has to put two big tortillas for *yùum Báalam* who is the owner of this world (*yook’ol kab*). In exchange for these offerings, one requests their “shadow” (*bo’oy*), which is understood metaphorically as health or protection. However, pacifying these spirits and obtaining their protection means that “they will not turn their animal against you” (mainly snakes and wild animals) “and they will not make you ill to ask for offerings”.

*Ambivalent times*

*Nahualism* comes from Nahualt, a term that designates a people, the Nahualt, as well as a type of witchcraft. In Mesoamerica *Nahualism* is a general anthropological category used to describe cases in which a person is understood to be capable of transforming into other species. The most commonly known transformation is a witch man into a jaguar. In Ixán, most stories of witchcraft refer to cases of people being accused of consuming human bones or flesh to get vital power from them. It is
commonly believed that these witches need some parts of the corpse for their craft. Although a witch could theoretically transform into an animal for a short period of time, the transformation unveils an irreducible parallelism of life experienced by everyone. The lives of the people and those of animal companions residing in the forests or animal star constellations in the nocturnal sky are autonomous but interrelated.

Philippe Descola has grouped diverse experiential worlds into four diverse ontological categorizations. According to Descola *nagualism* represents the exemplar case of the ontological mode of “analogism”. This mode, according to Descola “rests on the idea that properties, movements or structural changes of certain entities of the world exert influence upon the destiny of humans, or, that they are influenced by their behavior” (Descola 2005: 43). For him this is the least stable ontology of the four he describes. Both physics’ externalities and persons’ interiorities are dissimilar, fragmentary and composite. While the ontological modes Animism and Naturalism are preoccupied with the encompassment of the unseen by the visible, Analogism, on the contrary, establishes a dynamic of dual influence in which one could affect the other. For Animism and Naturalism, spirits and natural hidden regularities are more important for each of these ontological modes than visible realities. What is apparent in these modes is only a mask of powerful explanatory forces. In Naturalism, the intentional reality of humans ultimately depends on regular but unknown combinatorial physics. Instead, for Animism, the material world contains the only explanation for traversing spiritual intentionalities that animate things and humans at their will. On the contrary, Analogism is concerned with exchanges, correspondences
and patterns of concomitant cohabitation of the visible and the invisible.

Without entertaining themselves with the idea of an unknowable “nature” that can only be partially unveiled through acts of knowledge, Ixán ritualists hold a coherent set of ontic expectations based on a priori deductions of intentionality and a posteriori recurrences of phenomena. Rather than seeking out a regular nature that hides a general and homogeneous substance of beings hypostatized by appearances, or, based on the human categories of understanding of causality or reciprocity constituting objects of knowledge, Ixánenses consider material things and persons to be diverse masks or containers of varied intentions and personalities that, in time, materialize in regular co-occurrences. To “see” what really happened, Ixánenses can ask their shamans to analogically “read” and infer connections between pairs of events or co-occurrences.

Ixánenses think of people as, both, material containers of their thoughts and intentions. To some extent, Ixánenses identify each person and thing as a vessel of something else, ba’as, or máben, a box. As in the case of the main village idol, the cross Mabentun de la gracia or stone box of grace, sponsors and shamans have repeatedly told me that idols have “power inside them”. To protect their power from powerful winds that might strike them, Ixánenses keep crosses, saints and other representations in crystal cases. However, the invisible and subtler matters, such as power, grace, etc. are not considered substances, i.e. an eternal constituent of temporal appearances, but they do help explain recurrences, reproduction and regeneration as co-occurrences.

In this sense, also the festival purchasing interface unfolds in gifts, “presentation” or offerings to the gods and idols, promises and services in search of a
definitive answer of “rebirth”. None of these lose their fundamental ambiguity until indexical signs are read in the sky and other signatures. In other words, sponsors seek bodily rebirth despite the fact that most social scientists analyzing cargo systems suggest that their expenditures on resources are aimed to gain offices and social prestige in the community. In Ixán, instrumental action and expensive material wealth and burdensome services do not just convert into expressive and performative cargoes or offices. On the contrary, for Ixánenses represented power is concomitant of another power that inheres and composes, among other beings, idols, blood, and winds that could sometime also reemerge.

The cosmological understanding of Mesoamericans, even if it could be portrayed as a permanent search for balance and equivalence between seen and unseen realities, also comprises irreducible strangeness and discontinuity, most often expressed as ambivalence. For instance, localized into the landscape, past powerful persons (no longer humans and natural forces) make their requests apparent to the people of Ixán through imposed disgraces or illnesses. They are invisible wind entities, sometimes taking the form of animals, that ask for payments and cause troubles for those who do not pay on time. While Ixánenses usually seem reluctant to mention these entities by name so as to not invoke them, there are also periods of time or festivals in which this ambivalence and exchange between visible and invisible realms necessarily increase.

For these and other reasons, calendars have become keys for interpreting the always changing conjunction of parallel realms, in some cases between an apparent materiality and the occult intentionality. For instance, some old calendars like the Paris Codex reveal how human life would be influenced through the galactic movement of 13
constellations-animals but, at the same time, such ancient Mayan books work as ritual blueprints for keeping the universe working smoothly and even. Another set of correspondences that concern nahualism or analogism is of that of wild animals. As I pointed out earlier, forest animals, as well as constellations, live lives parallel to those of humans, and both are understood to influence, directly or indirectly, one another.

In Ixán, Wayo’ob or transforming witches (the Maya term for Nahual), are frequently found digging graves for bones while in their animal form. Bones are thought to contain a powerful substance that can empower these transformers. While in their animal form they also commit crimes. Curiously the term “way” (transformation) also means “familiar” or “phantom”, and it was applied to a month of “phantom” days called “wayeb”. In such a calendar, festival bearers of time abandon their work to humans, who must carry the burdens of time during five nameless days. The wayeb was held at the end of a 360-day year (tun). Consequently, a stone (tun) was set at the village’s entrance. According to the four commencements days on which a new year could begin (“u kuch”, according to the Chilan Balams books), rites would vary somewhat each year (for a reconstruction of wayeb rituals see Taube 1988).

Wayeb’s sponsors’ responsibility and burdens were heavier when the conclusion of a yearly cycle coincided with that of a longer cycle, for instance a 20-year cycle or katun. Supporters were expected to impersonate these unlucky days by carrying longer periods of time, between the end of a year and a new year commencement day. The five day long “month” between the old year and the new year was considered to be a very difficult passage. The passage of time was not in gods’ hands, but in those of humans, or better yet, on their backs. The Cantares de Dzitbalché called the wayeb “Disgraceful or
bad days” (loobil ki) (Nájera Coronado 2007: 82). In the time between years, cosmic renewal was entirely burdened on individuals’ responsibility.

The importance of these days for Maya mortality cannot be overstated. Nothing good could be done or expected on wayeb days. People were afraid of accidents, serpent bites and being devoured by the jaguar (Nájera Coronado 2007: 66). Nájera Coronado (2007) and Thompson (1950: 106) noted that Sánchez de Aguilar (1987: 95) refers to them as “uayeab, u tuzkin” “the falseness or dissimulation of the days”; specter days, evil of the days, according to Juan Pío Pérez (Pérez 1877: 384). If, being attributed as such, these days helped shape qualifications of “evil”, “disgrace”, and “damage” (loob), it might also be possible that they could have defined, to some extent, what good times (maloob kin) and a good life (maalob kuxtal) would entail in contrast. As far as I have observed and heard in Ixán, this festival is not held there in February or during any other month. However, wayeb is performed in some regions of Guatemala from February 15th to 20th while the Gremios festival is held in Ixán. The Catholic carnival has been identified as a continuity of the wayeb rites in many Maya regions, (on these identification see for instance the tzetzal ch’ay kin or “lost days” as equivalent of wayeb (Monod-Becquelin and Breton 2002: 557) or the Carnival and San Sebastian on Chiapas (Vogt 1976, 1990).

Gremios Festival

In Ixán ritual “tradition” includes many annual festivals. Political authorities—including the Sergeants, the commandant, or Comandante, and the Comisario—organize some of them. These are public ceremonies for the wellbeing and, of course,
entertainment of the people of Ixán. Nevertheless, on at least four calendric dates, selected individuals organize and support feastings, dances, processions and prayers with the help of some acquaintances. In Ixán the main sponsor is called *kuch* (bearer), *nojoch kuch* (major bearer), *kuch kabal* (inferior bearer), *encargado* or cargoholder, *interesado* (“the interested one”, a term used by Mexican law in formal petitions or demands) or *diputado* (deputy or representative, which is also referentially anchored in politics and current offices). A sponsor’s helper is called *its’in kuch* (lit. minor brothers of bearers) or *mejen kuch* (small bearer)21.

In Ixán, the most important *kuch* sponsored festivals take place on the following dates:

- **February 15 to February 20**, *Gremios* or Guilds Festival. The first “Agricultural Guild of Ixán” ceremonies are held on February 15 and they are sponsored by one *nojoch kuch* and his helpers. The ceremonies are repeated in the subsequent days. In 2008 guilds from Ixán, Tiosuco, Xiulub, Ixán-Valladolid and X-Kabil propitiated the first, second, third, fourth and fifth days, respectively.
- **May 3 and 4**, *Fiesta de la Santísima Cruz Tun*, The Festival of the Sacred Cross Tun is propitiated by one *nojoch kuch* and his helpers.
- **July 23 and 24**, *Cambio de traje de Santo Cristo de la Transfiguración* (on uneven years) or the *Virgen de la Asunción* (on even years), The change of the dress of “Christ of the Transfiguration” or “Virgin of Assumption” is propitiated by one *nojoch kuch* and his helpers.

21 The original meaning of *mejen* is “child of father” in opposition to “al” or “child of mother”. The composed “*almejen*” was the Yucatec term for nobility according to Roys (1957: 5).
July 31 to August 7, *Corridas* (bullfights) or *Fiesta del Pueblo*, the village festival (with a new host every day). Each day of bullfight is propitiated by one *nojoch kuch* and his helpers.

An ideology of timely payments to spiritual protectors makes ritual prestation indispensable for socially and ontically steadying the village and for transforming it into a stable place to live. These rites are vital practices for thriving, avoiding and dealing with misfortune and reaching regular means of living. Festival participants and sponsors use trading tropes to explain them. Ixánenses, for instance, say that they perform these rituals in order to “buy life and rain” for the whole village and, in particular, for the sponsor’s family, plants and animals. Although one knows in advance what to expect from such an exchange, one should also know what to offer for it.

Following my analysis of evenness as a key category for understanding and attaining order in Ixán in chapter three, in the rest of this chapter I will investigate how people intend to obtain this evenness through festival prestation with the help of ritual experts who know what to give in these exchanges.

*Kuco’ob* say that faith, responsibility and expert knowledge are required to felicitously perform these festivals. In addition to a shaman, festival sponsors need a group of different ritual experts to advise and control them. From their perspective, securing a good year in advance also entails a costly arrangement considered to be a “purchase”. Importantly, these tasks are not considered extra-economic by participants but rather fundamental to obtaining economic success in harvest, animal reproduction, surpluses of money and a healthy life according to a timely schedule and
measured offerings. However, if one considers sponsors to be timely payers, one might also wonder how this burden they offer is composed. In a quick enumeration one can find that “faith”, “endurance”, “commitment”, “work”, “rightness”, and obedience must be accompanied by money and in kind resources. For a Gremios Festival day, this can amount to up to US$2,000, in 2009. These resources will normally be augmented within one year and returned to the sponsors, but never in one quote. Instead, returns are expected to come back “little by little” and measurably.

In kind services and money prestations flow upwardly between minor and major bearers, from newer to older. It is the responsibility of the major sponsor to request food, beverages, hours of labor, money, etc. from his minor helpers and it is their job to comply. In turn, the nojoch kuch is directed by ritual experts (in singular, nojoch and in plural, nukuch, which means big but also elder) in the pooling of resources, their administration and their distribution. However, the nojoch kuch is recognized as the main human giver, given the fact that he pays for the most expensive part of the festival, which typically amounts to half of its total cost.

At the top of the ritual echelon is the cross Santísima Cruz Balam Tun, who appears as the major giver and receiver in these festivals. All the god-like-ancestors and nature’s owners (Yùuntsilo’ob lit: sacred lords), as well as superior entities such as a Mayan-Catholic gods and Mayan-Catholic Virgins, are all addressed through image-channels such as the Santísima Cruz Tun, the Santo Cristo de la Transfiguración and the Virgen de la Asunción. At the bottom of the echelon, there could be an occasional visitor who drops by the ceremonial center or the nojoch kuch’s house, the two places in which ritual activities develop. The appearance of persons in both places is not only tolerated
but also expected. When someone politely stands in front of the kuch’s house, an organizer is expected to invite her to enter, and to have some food and drinks. In the ceremonial center, where the cross resides, it is supposed that the same cross distributes food and drinks, becoming a giver too. When arriving at the ceremonial center, one expects to be welcomed with food, especially at noon and in the evening when food is distributed.

Organizers and participants of the Gremios Festival

Kuch-sponsored festivals are normally composed by:

- A Nojoch Kuch (Big supporter, also known as kuch kabal, encargado, diputado, interesado or simply kuch). He is responsible for pooling economic resources and administrating them on the festival day. He is also responsible for the year to come. Sanctions will be read in natural signs after his sponsorship. He drinks and eats at the festival. He contributes money, in-kind resources (maize, pig, drinks, etc.), and his labor. He distributes food to those in attendance.

- Itsin Kuch’ob or mejen kucho’ob (Minor supporters). They have promised the nojoch kuch to contribute in-kind, or with services, particular objects. They are also sanctioned after the sponsorships as good or bad supporters. They drink and eat at the festival. They contribute money, in-kind resources (maize, pig, drinks, etc.), and their labor. They receive orders from the nojoch kuch. They distribute food to those in attendance.

- Nojoch ku’lel (main administer and treasurer). He has performed as kuch
many times and knows all the tasks required for performing a successful sponsorship. He has promised the *nojoch kuch* to contribute advice and he receives drinks and sacred food in exchange for his services. He drinks and eats at the festival. According to don Damián, the first guild does not have *ku’lelo’ob*. However, I saw at least two elders acting as such, receiving and administering food and drink donations. In Ixán the *ku’lel* is an office for the May 3 to 4 festival of the *Santísima Cruz Tun*.

- **Chicchan Ku’lel** (small manager). He helps the big manager or *nojoch ku’lel*. He has promised the *nojoch kuch* to contribute advice and he receives drinks and sacred food in exchange for his services. He drinks and eats at the festival. According to don Damián, the first guild does not have *ku’lelo’ob*. However, I saw at least two elders acting as such, receiving and administering food and drink donations. In Ixán the *ku’lel* is an office for the May 3 to 4 festival of the *Santísima Cruz Tun*.

- **Nukuch máako’ob** (Big persons, elders). They are experienced ritual experts. There is also a hierarchy among them. Some of them are only specialists in one part of a ceremony. There are three main “*nukuch*” of Ixán that could organize every festival because they have organized them many times. Each “*nojoch*” receives liquor, food and consecrated candles and other paraphernalia in exchange for their services. Many of them are also shamans or *j mèeno’ob*. They drink and eat at the festival. They also promise to give their assistance to sponsors, to recommend people who can help them and to signal specific elders for specific tasks.
• **Priostes.** They organize the ceremonies, food offerings and prayers inside the churches. There are two groups in the village: one from the ceremonial center of the *Santísima Yuum Balam Tun Cross* and a second from the village church. They receive liquor, food and consecrated candles and other paraphernalia in exchange for their services. They drink and eat at the festival but they must also serve as guardians of the ceremonial centers.

• **Jmèeno’ob,** or shamans. There are at least 9 shamans in the village. They read the people’s fortunes, cure illnesses, practice magic to attract enemies, and know the correct ceremonies, prayers and actions to successfully cook, consecrate food and make offerings. In the *Gremios* festival they prepare the big tortillas or *noj-waj,* they bury the ovens and cook them and also break the *noj-waj* in four pieces to be offered to the four wards of the world. They receive liquor, food and consecrated candles and other paraphernalia in exchange for their services (these are very important for them to “make” their “works”; they are considered to hold power). They drink and eat at the festival.

• **Maestros cantores.** There are four groups in the village. They have promised to pray novenas and recite Latin, Spanish and Mayan prayers from memory. They receive liquor, beer and food in exchange for their services. They drink and eat at the festival. They also promise to give their assistance to sponsors.

• **Musicians.** They are hired to play sacred music, in the house of *kucho’ob,* in the processions and in the church and ceremonial center. They are paid for
their services with money. They drink and eat at the festival.

- Dancers. They have promised to dance for the pleasure of the cross or idol at the ceremonial center. They receive liquor and food in exchange for their services. They drink and eat at the festival. They also promise to give their assistance to sponsors.

- Invited idols. Their owners or guardians have promised to bring their images to the altars. They receive liquor and food in exchange for their services. They drink and eat at the festival. Sometimes they receive bottles of alcohol (one to three cases of beer or a bottle of liquor) as token of gratitude.

- Invited people. They are almost always family and friends of the sponsors. Most of them contribute in kind, with money, or services for the festivals preparation. They drink, eat and pray.

- People who drop by the kuch’s house or the ceremonial center or church. They drink and eat at the festival.

The people who take on these roles vary, given that there are five different sponsors for the five days of the Gremios Festival. Sometimes, for instance, the same musicians perform for two days. The only groups that remain consistent are those of Priostes and some ritual specialists who assist in the ceremonies on all five days. Participants in these rituals are typically relatives and friends of the sponsors. Some of them were asked to perform as “little bearers” (main sponsor helpers) or “big bearers” (main sponsor) by a family member or a friend. Ixán sponsorships last two consecutive
years. When nobody in the sponsor’s inner circle wants to support the upcoming festivals, supporters ask ritual experts or “elders” if they know of someone who might want to take on the task. In the case that no one can take on the sponsorship for the next year, the current cargoholder is obliged to support the festival for another two-year cycle.

Organizing and supporting these celebrations is considered a serious business because the short-term future for the sponsor, his family, and, in many ways of the whole village, depends on their success. In this sense, there should normally be many people who have made a “promesa” to patronize a festival. Nevertheless, the promesa fulfillment is not easy and simple. Sponsors’ responsibility, administrative skills, temperance, endurance, and faith are to be proven on that sponsorship day. As I am going to show in the next chapters, the fulfillment of promesas does not solely depend on the will of the promiser. Fulfillment is sanctioned with acceptance and grace coming from gods and “owners” of nature. The sponsor receives, based on his performance, indexes of future times that can be succinctly described as “miracles” (an expected renewal of natural forces in his person, health, power, animals, plants, family and the village) and “punishments” (a rejection of his performance translated into illnesses, droughts, hurricanes, and social and natural havoc in the village). However, the use of these categories to qualify the time to come is not strictly tied to sponsors’ performances; they are also applied independently of sponsors’ performances to the incoming times. While a successful sponsor, then, has a limited power to mitigate times of punishments he can never entirely avoid them.
Chronology of Gremios Festival

In Ixán kuch-sponsored festivals, unlike in those of the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala, offices do not rotate among all the male adults of a community. Sponsorship is not an imposed obligation; it is taken on voluntarily. Typically, sponsorships are traded among the male members of extended families. For instance, since the mid-nineties, Damián has sponsored the first Gremio, that of the Agriculturalists of Ixán, almost every year. Some years ago, the sponsorship was requested by don Marcos and performed by him for two consecutive years (the expected length of the burden of sponsorship in Ixán). However, he could not find anyone else willing to take on the responsibility and the burden returned to don Damián. In 2008 there were four other guilds, constituted by people of Tiosuco, Xuilub, by a group of sponsors who live in Valladolid and Ixán, and X-Kabil. Each guild sponsors one day. In the case of don Gustavo, the leader of the fourth guild (Ixán-Valladolid), in previous years he transferred the main responsibility of sponsoring the festival to one of his sons and a brother-in-law to ensure that it would return to him later. Ixán’s first and fourth guilds are expected to change sponsorship leaders every two years, while cargoholders of the second, third and fourth guilds take yearly turns.

The biannual tradition of taking turns in Ixán is based on the ritual calendar that addresses the Gremios Festival Ceremonies to the Santisima Cruz Yuum Balam Tun and the Santo Cristo de la Transfiguración (on odd years) and to the Santisima Cruz Tun and the Virgen de la Asunción (on even years). When seeking an explanation for this tradition of each supporter propitiating both saints, one male and one female, I was reminded, once again, of the desirability of “evenness”. However, I could not further relate if the
alleged evenness comes from the numerical pair of saints, keeping in mind that the numerical Maya system was vigesimal centuries ago, or the complementary evenness that a female-male couple could produce.

Both the Santo Cristo de la Transfiguración and the Virgen de la Asunción reside in the village church, an old building that still shows signs of damage from the Caste Wars, on the east side of the main square. There is no Catholic priest in the village so, when one is needed, he is brought in from Chichimilá. I only encountered a Catholic priest in the Gremios Festivals of 2003 and 2009, when the people of the X-Kabil brought him to give communion, once to the ceremonial center, and once to the village church. At his first opportunity to do so, the Catholic priest critiqued local traditions of trying to “oblige” god through food offerings. He depicted these traditions as “childish”. “How can an all-powerful god be obliged to come or to hear your petitions?” he asked the people in a small sermon, given in Spanish. In addition to abandoning food offerings, he also recommended that they deal with the Catholic god through the intermediacy of saints and priests.

There are, however, two groups of Priostes in the village, now older agriculturalists that take care of both ceremonial centers. Don Filomeno, for instance, is 85 years old and he remains in charge of the village church. He remembers when he was elected by the Sargentos or sergeants more than 60 years ago to fulfill this duty or cargo. In Ixán, as in similar Yucatec villages, there is a complex bureaucracy of “cargos”, and it is not uncommon for one person to hold two, three or even four of them. However, being a “kuch” of one of the four ceremonies mentioned above is better expressed as a ritual entrepreneurship aimed toward economic and ontic profit rather
than a political or religious office that would automatically translate into authority. As in other Mexican villages (Topete Lara 2005, Vogt 1969, 1976, 1990; Korsbaek 1996, Korsbaek and Cámara Barbachano 2009), sponsorships imply a huge expenditure for one or two hectares maize agriculturalists and Ixánenses are conscious of ruining themselves or achieving a miracle through sponsorship.

The so-called Mesoamerican cargo system, understood as ritualized exchange for material renewal (with spiritual beings) and for prompting a hierarchical integration of communities’ pater familiae, was soon analyzed as a token of transient resistance to capitalist development (Dow 1977), a method of forming and maintaining a conservative or reactionary Closed Corporate Peasant Communities (Wolf 1957), or in relation to the gradual disintegration of traditional societies (Cancian 1965, 1967, 1992). Although its pre-Hispanic background has been established (Pohl 1981, Carrasco 1961, 1990) and its development discussed (Chance and Taylor 1985, Chance 1990, 1994), analysts did not prognosticate an important future for cargoes and burdens. If only the pace of progress, gradual or spastic, was up for debate, the use of these traditional exchanges and agricultural surpluses countered, more or less efficiently, the advent of capitalism, development, and their respective forms of exchange. Generally categorized as “fiesta systems” (Fernández Repetto 1994 and 1995 after Smith 1977 and Chance 1990), a system in which “prestige is attained through ceremonial sponsorship in the absence of any hierarchy of positions” (Chance 1990: 40), these ritualized exchanges did not escape being conceptualized in terms of Polanyi’s (1957) redistribution (Aguirre Beltran 1979, Dow 1973, Wolf 1959) or Polanyi’s (1957) combination of redistribution and reciprocity (Monaghan 1990, 1995, 1996), at least not until James Dow coined the
terms “ritual prestations” (1996) and John Monaghan conceptualized them as “liturgical economic allocations” (2008). Nevertheless, few of the above mentioned scholars have pursued the study of cargo prestations according to ritualists’ expressed aims, i.e. their reasons for engaging in exchange with invisible beings for material renewals.

One year before the festival day

*Kuch* sponsored festivals start when someone informally asks another if he could help to perform as sponsor in the future. Later, this question is made with the formalities of the case, accompanied by tobacco and liquor. If it is affirmatively answered, then, exactly one year before the festival in question is to be performed, the potential *kuch* formally compromises himself in a ritual agreement.

On the evening of the festival, at around 10 PM, the incoming sponsor promises to take on the burden of sponsorship for the next year’s festival. This short ceremony is called “*jetz kuch*”, literally to fix or to arrange the burden, but is also subsumed, in Spanish, under the more general category of “tomar acuerdo”, “concierto” or to agree. In a dialogue similar to the one that occurred months earlier in the incoming sponsor’s house, he once again commits himself to sponsor the next year’s festival. But, in this case, the agreement is expressed solemnly.

Ideally, it takes two *nukuch máako’ob* to act as *jetz kuch* witnesses. One to represent the outgoing sponsor, the other, the incoming one. The representatives start by expressing the good will of the incoming sponsor to face the next year’s responsibilities. On a table they place a cross as a witness. Then a transfer of leftover
food, drinks, sanctified candles, and maize begins. Very politely, the outgoing sponsor's representative will say that they have the will to contribute to the next year's festival. The incoming representative or the incoming kuch will then assure them that there is no need for them to do so, given that all the resources have been secured. The outgoing representative will insist that they really want to contribute. “In that case we will accept”, the incoming kuch responds. Then the nukuch máako’ob will declare that there is a solemn agreement, and that they and the cross are the witnesses of it. After the transfer of resources is made, the nojoch máak or the incoming sponsor's representative records in a little notebook or on a piece of paper the exact amount of each item contributed by the previous sponsor.

This sort of accountability aims to produce economic prudence, provision and precaution for contingencies in the kuch's economy. These written records are jealously kept and are considered to be a sort of blueprint for the entire celebration. It is supposed that each ceremony has one of these accountability notebooks, sometimes called in Spanish “testamento”. Theoretically, the entire history of the festival could be traced in these records. However, from other experiences of seeing such notebooks, I would say that their readability is very poor, and that it is almost impossible to decipher them without the help and the memory of the nojoch who wrote them up. Once the agreement has been made, recorded and pledged, the sponsor has exactly one year to secure the needed resources.

The sponsor of the upcoming year's festival needs to secure his helpers, advisers, maestros cantores, musicians, and invited persons, in addition to food, money and help from women. He should begin by asking the nojoch máak for advice as to who
might be the right person for each function.

As with divine beings, the ceremonial order of characters and roles must be learned and practiced instead of explained. Below the *kuch kabal* there are his helpers, or *itzin kuch’ob*. They are most frequently his friends and siblings who want to contribute to his sponsorship. Frequently the *kuch* is assisted by a *nojoch ku’lel* (big sacred man) and a *chichan ku’lel* (small sacred man). They administer *kuch’ob* (*nojoch kuch* and *itzin kuch’ob*), pool resources, as well as teach them how to spend them, identify to whom he should turn in search for help, handle services such as getting, buying, processing food, as well as transporting resources and people. But there are also many people involved with the administration and production of the food to be given away.

These people are also known as *nukuch máako’ob*, or big persons. Some of them will administer drinking during the day-long preparation. They give drinks to the festival organizers (other *nukuch* such as the *ku’lel* or cargoholders or *kuch’ob*). There is also a group of *maestros cantores*, who must sing prayers and novenas to the idols. At least one shaman will also be present, who is responsible for prayers and for addressing the food offerings to the idols, saints, and gods. Musicians are hired to animate the cooking, procession and offerings. There are also invited people, who bring with them saints that are then arranged in the house altar. Then those who are invited, or anyone who wants to drop by, can enter into the *nojoch kuch’s* house. He or she must be welcome. Invited with food and drinks he or she could pray at the altar, chat with the other people or, if drunken enough, dance to the orchestra music.
One day before the festival day

After a year has passed and he has secured resources and contacts, the sponsor will wake up very early in the morning, around 3 AM, and kill the pig. It must be the kuch who raises the pig for consumption on the feasting day. While it is possible for the kuch to buy it instead, it is considered improper to do so. The whole process of feeding the pig, taking care of it and, ultimately, killing it, assures the good result of the ceremony he is propitiating. On the other hand, if the pig dies before it is sacrificed it is considered a bad omen for the sponsor. Pork is also one of the most important contributions a kuch will receive from his helpers. Minor sponsors also kill their pigs and bring them to the main sponsor’s house. During the Gremios festival, normally 2 to 4 pigs are killed each day. In the Santisima Cruz Festival that begins on May 3rd, there could be as many as 14 or 15 pigs killed for the three-day long celebrations.

When asked when Gremios or other kuch sponsored festivals begin, almost everybody will respond that it starts with the death of a pig. The first task of the sponsor is to kill the animal and let it bleed out into a receptacle. Pig “sacrifice” occurs before the sun has risen. While I have not been given any clear explanation as to why, it is not considered right to kill the pig after the sun has risen. Later, sponsors and helpers will use this blood to make blood sausages or cho’och, with bowls filled with little pieces of heart and liver. After the pig has bled out, they “clean” its body with sour oranges before salting it. After that moment, food preparations do not stop. The processes of preparing the food, receiving directions from elders and giving them to helpers, making the offerings to the cross and other sacred entities and consuming them, take the whole day. For instance, early in the morning sponsors and helpers
wash the maize, rinsing off the solution of water and calcium oxide in which it had been soaking. Also around 6 AM epithelial tissue or “chicharra” is fried. It is offered to the crosses and saints as ho’oche’ (first fruits offering) and eaten in the morning with tortillas, kabash or ibes beans, onions and sour orange juice at around 10 AM. After that, food (chichara and cho’och) is given as a polite gift to the next year’s kuch. The current kuch takes it to the house of the next year’s kuch, along with drinks. Drinks and music are fundamental for “animating” these preparations. Musicians normally arrive at around 10 to the current kuch’s house to produce the right “animation”, spiritual wellbeing, and cheerful (ki’ki’óol or ki’imak óol) moments. These conditions of the festival preparation are based on shared understandings of purposeful action as animacy and will. The music played is highly repetitive. Most of the songs are marching Jaranas and sometimes drunken guests may dance to them.

Women also begin their work very early in the morning, washing maize corn, crushing and burning chilies, toasting cacao beans, milling, mixing and preparing dough for tortillas and the broth in which pork and fowl pieces will later be cooked (box janal or relleno negro). For the most part, women remain inside the house, around the fire. After preparing tortillas they give them to the kuch. However, men are officially considered the chefs. Relleno negro is a highly appreciated food that is only prepared and eaten on special celebrations. During Gremios and other festivals it is the duty of kucho’ob to handle, carry out and supervise its preparation. Box janal or relleno negro mix is prepared by a special group of women called x-ikes, around 15 days before the festival. While the women inside the house do make the chili and maize broth in which the animal pieces will be cooked, the men are the ones who actually cook it outside the
house in ground ovens (pib).

On the cooking day, people—family members, nukuch máako'ob, maestros cantores, musicians, friends and helpers—frequently come and go. They all seem to have something to discuss with the main sponsor. In this case, the nojoch kuch is don Gustavo, also a nojoch máak, or ritual specialist. In a 10 by 30 foot room in the back of the main palm house—now called “iglesia” or church—he has arranged some images. The room contains three altars. The principal one is against the back wall, and before it stands a smaller one. Two feet from this one there is a table on which the candles have been placed. If the observer faces the altar, to her left she will see two banners leaning against the wall. On them one can read “Gremio de Agricultores”, a remembrance from the people of Ixán. Those who paid for the construction of the banners seem to have ordered the inscription of the dates of their sponsorships, 1966 and 1971, respectively. Before them there is a wooden cage holding three crosses dressed up in hipiles. The acronym “inri” is printed above each of the heads. A little below, one is tempted to say on their necks, there are three arrows pointing up. Beneath the crosses is a portrait of a bleeding Jesus Christ. From the arms of each cross hang rectangular mirrors said to reflect evil winds. The crosses are known as “tres personas”, the three persons. In the same cage there are offerings: candles made with local beeswax. These are decorated with flowers, also made from wax. There are also gourd pots containing food, one of which is covered by leaves. Cacao beverages and food are brought to the idols, and later on consumed as breakfast. Food covered with tortilla and sipilché leaves is also arranged on the altars. That morning, before midday, helpers and kucho'ob dug a hole in the earth. Later they started a fire. After some hours, in the afternoon when the rocks were
heated, big pots of *relleno negro* were buried and covered with banana leaves, cardboard and soil to be cooked overnight.

*Festival day*

According to ritual experts, the festival day starts around 6PM, after the sun has set and the previous *Gremio* has danced the pig’s head dance. At the ceremonial center *priostes* give away *x-tut* to participants, a communion of maize gruel prepared by the *kuch*. *Kuco’ob, priostes* and participants pray a novena and light some candles. At around 10 PM *noj waj* or big tortilla is unburied by the *j mèen* who is in charge. After being removed from the palm leaves, the tortilla is broken into four pieces. Each piece is then offered to one of the four cardinal points. Other *waj* is taken to the cave or *aktun*, where other powerful crosses and *yûuntsilo’ob* have resided. The whole process, especially the *waj* making, had begun hours earlier. Unlike the tortillas made by women, who are supposed to master the art of making staple food, these tortillas are thick, baked in a ground oven, and made by a shaman, meters away from the stone cross. He makes four different types. One is called “*ostía*”. It has the usual name of catholic *hostia*. It is the smallest one and it is marked with a cross on its top. This sign was made by the *j mèen*, with one of the fingers of his right hand. The others are “big” tortillas or big food. Seven of them have a cross under an arc; six of them, two dots and a cross; and five of them, just a cross. These are also made by the shaman’s finger before the tortillas are draped on palm leaves and baked underground. Here, numbers, quantities and timing form an important part of shamans’ secret knowledge and the efficacy of the offerings depend on these considerations. All of these breads are offered
to the idols, invisible lords, and gods and then later consumed by the inner circle of ritualists, kuch families and invited persons. After dinner, some drinking of liquor and continued preparations follow a novena and prayers. Then there is more ritual drinking. Some of the organizers and kuco’ob stay awake while others retire for the night.

Early in the morning, there are more novenas and prayers. Once again, more food is consecrated on the different altars. After breakfast, a beverage with chocolate and maize is served (chu’unkul) and also offered in the altars. Later men dig up the relleno negro. Maestros cantores and j mèen take the relleno negro to the crosses, at the ceremonial center in the main square church and at household altars. In both places the offering people pray novenas. The j mèen offers food to gods, Yùuntsilo’ob and to the crosses, as well as incense and copal smoke. He arranges food (mainly chicharra) in bowls, following a precise count of tortillas for each bowl. He also hangs one of these offerings from the ceiling. This aerial offering is expected to “download” heavenly lords.

At around noon, after the j mèen and some of the kuco’ob return from offering the food in 13 gourds to the Santísima Cross in the ceremonial center, we take our seats around a small table where the j mèen and some sponsors serve us relleno negro, cacao beverages, a shot of liquor and, of course, tortillas. This is not a regular meal. Our priority in the order of eating—after the crosses and before the rest of the festival participants—functions as an indicator of respect. The first people who are invited to eat are the nukuch máako’ob, the j mèeno’ob who made the offerings and maestros cantores who prayed “novenas” and chanted in front of the cross and other images. Rum or cane
alcohol has been consumed in small shots, from a single bottle that men have passed amongst themselves inside the household “church”. Outside the little building, that has taken on the name of “iglesia” for the festival, there are many people coming and going while seated musicians play the regular music of these events (“torito negro” and other old rhythmic songs) as food starts to be served or taken out in big pots.

At around 2 or 3 PM the kuch heads a procession towards the ceremonial center. In it a pig head and ramilletes go as paraphernalia along with banners, saints taken from the household church and candles to be lighted at the center. Musicians accompany sponsors, maestros cantores, the officiating shaman, and kuch’ob families. Some organizers light voladores or fireworks to let the people know that the procession is coming but also to disperse bad winds. Once the procession reaches the ceremonial center, offerings and food are rearranged on the main altar and other tables. Candles are lighted on a special table and ramilletes are hung from the center’s ceiling. Once again, the j mèeno’ob offer food to gods, Yùuntsilo’ob and the crosses, as well as incense and copal smoke. Then maestros cantores start a novena. After the novena, food and relleno negro is distributed to assistants. The sun is setting and preparations begin for dancing the pig’s head dance.

The dance takes place at around 6 PM on the following day, when the kuch has officially finished his day of sponsorship. The pig’s head dance is also considered to be a gift to the cross. Called okostah pol or k’ub pol dance, the pig’s head dance consists of 7 turns in one direction and 6 in the other, around the table where the solemn pact of sponsorship had been sealed. For the Gremios festival the dance consists of making turns in a circle of around 32 feet in diameter. In the dance these turns are said to open
“ways” and then to close them. Many anthropologists and folklorists (Loewe 1995, 2003; Hervik 1999; Villa Rojas 1987: 363) have interpreted each turn as an orderly way for proceeding. As one person told me, “one should be aware of closing what one had opened before in order to be free”.

Nancy Farriss maintains that some of the wayeb symbolism, along with “the old calendar (tzolkin), the concept of year-bearer, and New year ceremonies have all been preserved in the Cuchumatanes region of highland Guatemala” (Farriss 1984: 526). Farriss refers to particular cases she finds in La Farge and Byers (1931), Lincoln (1942) and Oakes (1951). From these highlands examples she gives us a hint as to how transformations and continuities recur in the lowlands of Yucatan,

One of the Colonial rituals, which has survived to the present, gives an especially strong hint of uayeb rite origins. At the fiesta’s end a dance was performed in which a decorated head of pig slaughtered for the feast (surely the transmogrified deer head of pre-Columbian offerings) was carried around and then presented to the person who was to be in charge of the next year’s ceremonies as the token of the “burden he was assuming. (Farriss 1984:346)

At least for the Ixán guild, however, the pig’s head dance does not work as a token of assumed responsibility, or promise of next year sponsorship. It is danced after the sponsorship has been consumed. In the case of Ixán’s sponsorships, the dance is not performed by sponsors, who are said to be too occupied to carry it out, but by their acquaintances. During the sponsorship day the kuch will ask if someone who participated in the festival has the will to dance. The deal is succinct and sealed by a gift of drink. In the other guilds the traditions vary. In some, it is the kuch who has to head the dance. Nevertheless, the dance is always retrospective, sealing the sponsorship day. The dance is the festival’s main attraction and people from the village gather at the ceremonial center to see it. The cooked head of one of the pigs,
slaughtered the day before, is decorated with a cob of corn in its mouth and displayed on a plate. Those who want to interpret the dance say that this is a prosperity sign. The outgoing sponsor, or his substitute, carries the dish with the pig’s head over his own head as a token of an already fulfilled sponsorship cycle. The circular dance starts with a male making turns with the pig’s head over his own. His helpers, jumping and dancing rhythmically, carry bottles of liquor and follow him. Sometimes they sprinkle the audience with liquor. The last character always seems to be a joker. He behaves as if he is drunk and, most of the time, he actually is. He carries a gourd full of grains of maize in one of his hands and makes loud noises, which, people say, drive the pig making turns.

After the dance, the kuch lights two candles and kneels down, saying his farewell to the stone cross. People come and go with box hanal pots, and other food, removing it from the ceremonial center to their houses. The j mèen from the next guild then performs a propitiatory loj to calm and arrange any “winds” provoked by the festival participants. The loj prepares the masters, evening their invisible forces for the next festival day. Following this rite, people can safely go to their houses and later return to the ceremonial center. At this point the new sponsors can also enter and start praying, lighting candles, preparing, consecrating and distributing food.

The sequence of events can be plotted in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More than one year before the</th>
<th>Asking and accepting the sponsorship</th>
</tr>
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214
| sponsored day |  
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| One year before the sponsored day | Formal acceptance of sponsoring the festival day. *Jetz kuch.*  
| During that year | Securing resources and contacts.  
Looking for helpers, ritual specialists, *maestros cantores*, musicians.  
| One day before the festival day | Killing and, later on, dismembering the pig. Food preparations. Preparing the *kuch’s* house and bringing beverages.  
Digging the “pib” oven. Burying the food to be cooked overnight. *Loj* rite propitiating the festival day. Prayers and food offerings.  
| Festival day. (Begins at around 6 PM when the sun is setting). | Novenas. Food distribution. Offerings and prayers (the most important takes place at midday around 12 PM in the ceremonial center and at the main sponsor’s house). Procession. More offerings and prayers. More food distribution. Pig’s head dance.  

After the festival day. (Festival day ends around 6PM when the sun is setting). 

Nojo ch máako’ob will tell the kuch how his sponsorship has developed, based on natural signs such as cloud readings, winds and his timing on festival day.

*Getting power in exchange*

During the *Gremios* Festival of 2009 don Gustavo and I stop to drink beer on our way to the ceremonial center. Born in Ixán, don Gustavo is one of the three most important elders in the village and the sponsor of the fourth Guild, from Ixán-Valladolid. His father also sponsored the *Gremios* Festival in the past and he expects that after his death his son Daniel will do so as well. On this particular day, don Gustavo is not the acting kuch. Earlier this morning I paid a visit to his house accompanied by regular gifts of liquor and food. We have been eating ritual food, drinking and praying for hours in his house, where the X-Kabil guild hosted the ceremonies. He offered me some beer and I invited him and his itsin kucho’ob. Everyone was happy, if not drunk. Even more prayers and chants commence upon our arrival at the ceremonial center. Candles were lit and food subsequently offered to the saints, crosses and owners. Many people are in attendance. In addition to the Maestros Cantores and people from other guilds, common people have gathered hoping for a bit of *relleno negro* in return for their services or for free. Many have come just to watch the pig’s head dance, which seals the transfer of the kuch sponsorship and assures the continuation of the festival for the following year.

Once the prayers end, we begin to salute the images situated at the main altar.
In the center of the altar, behind an arch constructed from “sipilché” leaves and branches, sits the axis mundi: Santísima Cruz Tun. To her left and right are virgins and crosses from the nearby villages. I recognize almost all of these images from the altar at don Gustavo’s house that morning. There are also plenty of offerings; flowers and candles, both lit and unlit, surround the images. At each image don Gustavo pauses to say some words. The altar is around six meters long and highly populated. Arriving at the “Tres Personas” we make our final stop. Usually kept in a crystal case, the Tres Personas are three crosses dressed in hipiles with mirrors hanging down around their necks. Here don Gustavo removes a flower from a floral offering and hands it to me. I thank him and, not knowing what to do with it, return it to the altar. Nodding, don Gustavo informs me that what he has given me has power, that I must keep it with me. It is like a talisman, he says, it has a “miracle within” and will not only keep my family healthy, but empower me as well. We exit the church-like building in a specific order: first the shaman, followed by don Gustavo, then me, and finally the itsin kucho’ob.

From simple participants, to invited guests, itsin kucho’ob, nojoch kuch, musicians, elders, maestros cantores and j mèen, we have a range of possible points of view from which we could choose to depict one of these kuch-sponsored ceremonies and the renewed materiality that they expect to produce. These very different narratives would each stress different events as critically important while effacing, or ignoring, others. However, all of them will seek a reflux of a vital effluvium in things. Such an ontic renewal, itself a product of a right engagement, has been systematically dismissed by the social sciences discourses which tend to render “religion” only into moral relationships, at the same time assuming “cyclical” regeneration to be part of natural
mechanisms.

Instead, for the Maya Catholicism of agriculturalists, repetitive and reproductive cycles, such as seasons, generations, and social and biological life, are deeply uncertain and ambivalent phenomena. For them, a lot of time and effort is necessary to produce renewal and disambiguation. They do not automatically or naturally occur. They require a lot of work. In particular, exchange between the actual and the virtual should be sought through interstices where fluids can transverse to even both parallel realms. Otherwise, catastrophes, desolation and chaos will occur, once and forever.

Likewise, existing social anthropological gift models fall short in their attempts to understand the attribution of power through gifts. Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact that such models reproduce the magic of our own gifts: personal communication through objects. The Maya Catholicism of Ixán agriculturalists, beyond the western obsession with personhood and thingness, frames gift giving according to other important duties. Of these duties, promising is among the most important. Through promising and promissory exchange, people redeem persons and things from powerful masters, imbue them with power and regenerate them.

Power as gift

Marcial is an j mèen who happens to live in front of an old friend of mine in Ixán. This friend introduced us during a birthday party at his house where I told Marcial of my interest in researching the village traditions. Later, I saw him at the “Center of the World” during a sponsor house ceremony. Fulfilling his role as a j mèen of the first guild, in 2009 Marcial offered food to the Santísima Cruz Tun, oversaw the feastings and
directed the preparation of sacred food such as _x-tut_ (maize gruel), _noj-waj_ (big tortilla) and _relleno negro_. On another day I decided to drop by Marcial’s house to talk. Our conversation turned towards his work and how he helps people in need. Marcial portrays his role as a _j mèen_ as dependent upon a gift of “power” from God:

> The kind of jobs we use to do you cannot learn from books. There is no way to learn it in schools. It is only the work of God. He gave us the power to save our fellows (“_cheen u obra tatadios tu ts’aaj to’on u paajalil e k-meyahtik leeti yo’olale’ pos to’one je’el e k-salvartik_”). We are with God and he is with us always, to help us to help other persons and to perform the old traditions. Our grandfathers and ancestors used to do this. This is what we continue to do and this is why we cannot allow this to be forgotten.

For Marcial and many people in the village, “power” is something attained by trading with spirits and, overall, by their main representative, the _Santisima Cruz Tun_ or “the three persons”. It is sometimes a gift, received from ancestral spirits and the Christian God that allows _j mèeno’ob_ to cure, to kill and to make offerings. Being the recipient of this _u poderiil_ or _u paajtalil_, however, is not always a desired position. In Ixán common people say that becoming a _j mèen_ involves giving something in return; it is a sad commerce. Upon receiving his power, a _j mèen_ is expected to give back the life of one of his family members to finish the deal. When the _j mèen_ represents himself as a giver, as someone able to give, he explains, first, that he has received a gift and he has given back before. To put it almost tautologically, any current gift exchange depends on the engagement of the exchangers. The more engaged the giver, the more effective the gift will be.

As a temporal sequence, engagement represents the former facts of having received, the current process of giving back and the future return the giver can expect. Thus, for the engaged exchanger, any commonly imagined distinctions between these
temporalities are blurred. They exist simultaneously. For instance, it is his engagement that allows Marcial to cure and make promissory offerings. Referred to as the capacity and power to give, engagement is expressed through a gift-giving rhetoric. “Being with god, god being with us”, “doing as our ancestors did before”, etc., imply a sort of cancellation of time. This goes beyond the limits of our own regime of historicity, in which the current present must be different from any other time, past or future. This clear-cut, unidimensional present is considered unique, unrepeated and unrepeatable. On the contrary, as Hanks (2000) has shown, the co-presence of ancestral spirits in a local multidimensional time makes it possible that the offerings will be effective. In Ixán “u poderil” or “u paajtalil” as a desired outcome, as well as a condition of possibility for those expected returns to come, occurs concomitantly. Therefore, Marcial expresses engagement as not only a question of debt and obligation to the past but as a purposeful action oriented towards a promissory future. Immediately after the words quoted above, Marcial continues,

For instance, the food [offering] for the field plot (janlil kool), the food [offering] for the house-terrains (janlil solaro’ob), the rain ceremonies (ch’a’ cháak) ... all of these we have the power to perform (yaanto’on u paajtalil k-meyahtik). We know how to do it ... like the curing work; you have to know how to do it ... there are different ways ... like in the Gremios festival we are going to have at the church in the center of the world (chúumuk lu’um). For instance this Sunday afternoon I am going to be there to make a first fruits offering (primicia) in the advantage (favor) of the harvest (gracia), in the favor of the town, and for the Gremio. We do it like this in Ixán. For the needed people, for the workers, for the field plot-workers (koohnálo’ob), for asking for maize (gracia) for the person (u tial k-k’áatik u gracia wíinik), this is why we perform the ceremony with the big tortilla (x-noj-waj). This is our custom since our ancestors.

With these words Marcial explained to me a characteristic of those exchanges that has been repeated hundreds of times by the sponsors, j mèeno’ob, helpers and common people in Ixán: they are purposeful teleological actions. These “purchases” or
“exchanges” are future oriented and produced for the wellbeing of the people. For me, it has taken years to understand the apparent paradox of this future oriented tradition. The paradox vanishes, however, if we understand that compromiso or engagement ties up these three different temporalities we use to represent our experiences. Past, present and future are only distinguished from each other if we consider the past and the future as ghostly imaginings.

In Ixán engagement is represented as a burden and through exchange. Past “punishments” and “miracles” continue to be felt by ritualists while, at the same time, incoming “punishments” and “miracles” are feared or desired. This is the common ground for understanding power as, in itself, the future. This concept of “power-as-future” emerges from fieldwork and, I hope, pervades this entire dissertation. Briefly put, people in Ixán conceive of power as an ontic enabler of the future.²²

Instead of any form of modernism that segregates god(s) and spiritual forces from this world, they do not take for granted that the future is a blank page on which they may write whatever they desire. They also do not suppose that the future will simply arrive on its own, and be inherently different from the past and the present times. For them, the future needs to be crafted, meticulously worked out. However, the future also shows signs of readability in things because it dwells in them. Rebirth occurs thanks to the power returning to things and persons.

Therefore, the regime of engagement these ritual activities produce can only be schematically described as payments to ancestral forces aimed towards “buying life”. Instead of traditionalist payers or blind keepers of tradition, sponsors can be described

²² Likewise, witchcraft also inheres in things. As elsewhere money or, more properly speaking, coins and bills are objects that one can leave on roads with spells and curses within them.
as sacred entrepreneurs who, with the help of ritual specialists, regularly seek miracles by exploiting and propitiating the promissory aspects of things.

These miracles are not extraordinary events that defy natural laws. They are, to some extent, an expression of them. Among them is “gracia”, a term appropriated from the Franciscan Catechism by Mayan speaking peasants to refer to their holy maize and, metonymically, to the harvest (which includes pumpkins, chiles, beans, etc.) as future. These sought-after gifts, if given, represent much more than proper engagement.

Ultimately, this gift is the engagement made present and not otherwise. Similarly, a negative engagement is also present in any punishment. It is said that if due duties are not attended, or when gifts and offerings are promised but not given, the slighted owners, or Yùuntsilo’ob, will “talk” to the people through punishments. In this context, in which older beings or spiritual owners reward or punish attended or unattended commitments, discipline is only a part of the ritual exchange. More is at stake in these rituals for the people of Ixán, who speak, not of discipline, but of rewards, punishments and power.

In the next chapter I expand upon and analyze the local understandings of gift exchange according to four of their alleged reasons to give.

1. Demand. The first one is the recognition of someone’s request. This reason is two sided. On the one hand there is the recognition of an event (illness, draught, etc.) as a request. And on the other hand, there is the imputation of such a request to a father or motherlike “master” or “owner”.

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2. Secondly, promising. To promise is not only to defer the delivery of the gift (or that which is promised). Making promises is, to some extent, in the nature of the gift. Otherwise put, the specific expectation carried within a gift is the most important part of the gift.

3. Thirdly, engagement. Although not all gifts are given to engage, engagement presents represent the continuity of a promissory relationship through time. They are not merely tokens that stand for obligations.

4. Remaking of the promissory. After engagement sponsors have ontic consequences in which they seek the continuity of their fates.
Making and remaking of the promissory: The Meeting of promises from development and ritual transactions

In the last chapter I described instances that complement and nuance the three famous Maussian gift-giving obligations: to give, to receive and to give back (Mauss 1925). In the present chapter, I show how this philosophy and practice of transaction has folded in the cash transfers of PROCAMPO. I argue that the Maya Catholic religious and ritual exchange repertoire replenishes OPORTUNIDADES and PROCAMPO moneys with repetitive expectancies for ontic rebirths.

To review briefly: Through asking, promising and engaging, Ixán ritualists seek an increased return from nature’s masters. Sequentially, Ixánenses

- request masters’ favors and gifts of life and rain
- by promising to give
- by giving to engage
- by engaging to receive
- and, by receiving,
- they thankfully return or, in the event that they do not receive a positive outcome, they request again.

God’s and masters’ returns take the discrete form of punishments or miracles. Life deterioration or the infusion of vital effluvia will come directly to the supporter’s
body, to his family or his possessions. It can also come indirectly through material gifts, as with the flower don Gustavo, the nojoch máak, gave to me at the Cross temple. In this sense, Ixánenses believe that idols and their paraphernalia, such as dresses, flowers, candles, etc. as well as the consecrated food carefully distributed, hold power in them. Invisible lords and madams imbue some of their “power” in that which is offered to them. Therefore, by eating consecrated food, drinking consecrated local beer called balché or receiving some already lighted candles, one is said to receive the power inherent in them. For instance, after I arrived in 2003 a prioste told me that the maize gruel used as an opening gift for those who drop by the chumuk lu’um ceremonial center and during a Maya communion, when a sponsorship begins at the temple, communicates life-regenerating forces to those who consume it. This is also the case for the more sophisticated relleno negro or hanal box eaten at the sponsor’s house or in other particular homes. Likewise, shamans expect used candles as retribution for their services at the ceremonial center. Later they will use these to make their “works”. As a jmèen from a Quintana Roo village told me in 2007 as we stood outside the chumuk lu’um, the used candles contain “power inside them” and shamans utilize them to kill or to cure. Congruently, attacks of magic are most often carried out by dropping bunches—frequently containing sipilché leaves, organic remains and the aforementioned candles—at the target’s front door. In this sense, money is also a vessel of power. For instance, when a shaman looks to destroy an enemy, he could just as easily choose to drop bills, or even a single coin, in a road crossing or near his foe’s house. Unlike the food and sipilche leaves used in other spells, one knowledgeable individual assured me, money “is something that anyone wants to pick up from the floor”. Using cash, rather
than a magic bunch, will thus assure the shaman’s anonymity and, more importantly, the bodily contact of the victim with the “evil”.

The local belief that intentionality and power dwell in objects also explains why people will not trust village foreigners with the business of maize production. This form of power, which I refer to as ontic power, however, is not an immediate phenomenon. As intentions and power emanate from people and things, becoming visible or tangible in the process, time ultimately uncovers ontic power’s functioning. Otherwise put, Ixánenses regard people and things as mysterious unless their intentions are settled through exchange or revealed through the passage of time.

The performance of human, maize and nature renewals through ritual transactions entails an aesthetic realization of how power returns. This aesthetic realization of exchange with spiritual lords works as a model for the later redeployment of cash transfers and labor migration earnings into the local agricultural system. This money that was meant to prompt economic and social change is instead, thanks to Ixán’s ritual ontology, reinvested in village agricultural production, through a series of steps set by the ritual cycle. In a context of increasing commodity prices, both unfulfilled promises and “uneven” exchanges are believed to provoke disastrous consequences, including crime, lack of self-control and “turbulent” lives for the people who travel and live outside the village. Agriculturalists, in response, aim to stabilize livelihoods through their ritualized work.

Therefore, people consider that cash transfer money, instead of intending to transmit a moral imperative of individual expectancies for economic development, reiterate some of the common ritualized phases of the exchange, even with foreign
masters. As I pointed out at the start of this chapter, there are more phases and stages of gift-giving at work in Ixán than the three well known Maussian obligations (to give, to receive and to return). In particular, the notions of “promises” and “engagements” allow the people of Ixán to, among other things, reframe development cash-transfer intentions in more precise terms for asking for more money from the state and that the state reevaluate the scope of these payments in the national political arena. By abstracting the six instances of local ritual exchange (requesting, promising, giving, engaging, receiving and returning or requesting again), in this chapter I further explain how they contribute to the reframing of cash transfers in a larger and more complex conceptual set. I abstract these instances, not only to better describe them, but to also show the feedback loops that connect returns (punishments and rebirths) to requests to reinitiate the regenerative logic of exchange again and again, working from the local diagnosis that cash transfers are insufficient tokens of engagement given to agriculturalists from the Mexican state.

*Working like an indian for living like a white*

The following case shows how the many elements of monetary life are brought together in a livelihood context where hardships and disgraces are expected. Mario (55 years old in 2008) took a place in the Gremios ritual sponsorships. He has promised to provide don Damián, the nojoch kuch, with some food and a ramillete (a large, colorful maize flower made from paper that is used for the procession and later hung from the temple ceiling as an offering and for dancing). For cultivation, Mario can only count on the ejido land. In a good harvest year, he says, he could get 500kg of maize for a very
well labored hectare, 50 to 100kg of beans, around the same quantity of edible tubercles called makal (*xanthosoma sagitiifolium*), plus chilies. In 2008 he only harvested six bags of maize: enough for reseeding and some tubercles. Thus, in bad harvests or “punishment years”, like it was 2008, he relies more than ever on the money he earns by working on stone fences or clearing rocks from other allotments. To afford the three bags of maize a month he and his family consume, he sells his labor in the village for MXN $50 a day (aprox. USD $4,40 in 2008). The rapid change in local wages is one indicator of the economic instability people try to mitigate by securing their harvest by any means. His older son, on the other hand, travels to “Playa” to work as a waiter and as a cook, earning approximately USD $70-100 a week, respectively, in March 2008. Nevertheless, only around 30% of this amount remains after taking into account the costs of transportation, food, and rent outside the village, all of which fluctuate in amount. Echoing an observation shared by many Ixánenses of his age, Mario sees the next generation of males sporadically abandoning the countryside. According to Mario, who has never worked outside the village, “our children just do not like working at the milpa and they go outside looking for other jobs”.

In this sense, lives in the village have radically changed in the last 20 years. Cash transfers and the money now coming in, mainly from temporary labor in Valladolid, Playa del Carmen and Cancún, have multiplied the number of stores in the village that sell food and alcohol. However, there are very few cases of Ixánenses traveling far north to the USA to work as temporary laborers. As of 2009, I could only register five

23 In Mexican pesos, the price of a labor day doubled in the village between February 2008 and May 2010, when it cost MXN $100 (aprox. USD $7.70 in May 2010), perhaps following the hike in the tortilla price in most urban centers. In 2008, A kilogram went from MXN $8 in 2008 up to MXN $14.
people who had crossed the border, two of whom were brothers. As I worked with their father, an older shaman, I got to know their history. In 2009 they were back in the village permanently, working fulltime as carpenters. They hired men to labor in their field plots so that they remained productive and also performed some minor work in them. The two brothers live and work in the house compound that they share with their father. The compound consists of three families living in three separate houses erected on a shared plot. As carpenters they labor with wood, building various products—ranging from stools to doors—which they sometimes sell in the village and other times to resellers in Valladolid. According to their narratives, they invested their labor earnings they saved from the USA in electric tools, some of which they brought to the village from the USA. After spending approximately two years working in the USA they each saved from US$ 3000 to US$ 4000. Working in the USA was a life changing episode for the two brothers, however their most important life crisis occurred earlier, when both of them converted to Pentecostalism.

People frequently labor outside the village with the intention of saving enough money so that they too can eventually set up their own shops in the village. Once the shop has been set up, however, they need customers. Although the core basic diet of beans and maize has not changed, people also buy candies, beer, snacks and sodas for themselves and their children at nearby family-run shops. Consumption expectations have also expanded. Stereos, bicycles, sewing machines and, to a lesser extent, television sets, can be found in almost every home. Increasingly, motorcycles, computers, and cars have become desired objects for the younger Ixánenses. There are considerable, and telling, differences between consumption patterns in Ixán five or ten
years ago and those of today. But changes in consumption patterns are not the only radical changes in the economic life of the village in recent years. Laboring outside the village, which is now considered if not desirable at least normal by young people, has modified the streams of money and its uses. Reinforced by cash transfer discourse, a representative of the younger generation that works outside the village maintains that his generation’s children deserve a “better life than their parents and grandparents had”. Echoing the discourse surrounding OPORTUNIDADES money, he regards his children as the final depositories of the money he earns outside the village. In this sense, people spend most of the money brought from outside the village on outside consumers’ goods for their children (for instance, the younger generations buy outside clothing for their children and for themselves, visibly differentiating themselves from older generations, as the majority of people in Ixán sew their own garments or pay a seamstress to make them). Most of the returning laborers also improve their housing themselves or hire masons to construct brick and cement rooms behind their palm-roofed houses.

When I asked an Ixán friend of mine who works in Valladolid, commuting daily from the village, how he was doing he synthetically put it in Spanish, “[h]ere I am, working like an indian for living like a white”. The racist reference “working like a nigger”, or its variant used in this case, “working like an indian”, takes an ambivalent turn when uttered by a Latin-American black or indigenous person. First, it represents the master recognition of a totally different hard-working class. Ambivalence also comes from the white masters who initially coined the adage. Inconsistently, these white masters repeatedly admonished black and indigenous populations for their
supposed natural laziness while they also, at the same time, extracted their labor. Secondly, my friend’s use of the phrase reflects his own bitter realization that the future promise of “living like a white” will never be realized. Even if he works as hard as “an indian”, he will never be able to live “like a white”. The phrase is clearly teleological and it presents a subject doing one activity to reach another, working for living, but it says nothing about the appropriateness of “working like an indian” to reach the objective of “living like a white”. Moreover, my friend seemed to feel understandably trapped by the demands of hard work in the pursuit of a way of life that implies working in the city, having a car, buying clothes and commodities that cannot be purchased in the village’s shops, such as toys, cell phones, cosmetics, etc.

“Living like a white” is to live the good life promoted by advertisements and “human development” programs like OPORTUNIDADES and incarnated by Valladolid’s dzulo’ob²⁴. To work ten to twelve hours a day outside his village with a permanently receding horizon of this good life is also to live in a “ruse”.

Besides the common anthropological homogenization of Yucatan villages as peasant communities (for instance Redfield’s Chan Kom, 1934 and 1964: 67), villagers also set in kind differences among themselves. For instance, when I asked this friend of mine about the homonymous relationship between his last name and that of another villager, he responded half-jokingly, half-annoyed, that this other person had nothing to do with him. This person, he explained to me, “belongs to another caste”. In all Yucatan Mayan speaking villages, the Spanish word “casta” is most often used to

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²⁴ Dzul was an ancient Mactun-Itzá noble house. Today it is simply a surname, and, more generally, a term that designates foreigners. It is also employed for naming Mexicans, the ethnically white, or the rich, the “owners” and the ruling class, in particular is a synonym of “patrón”.

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designate a class of people with extended family ties and who differentiate themselves. The word “leaders” is frequently used to euphemistically designate political male representatives of a prestigious “family” or “house”, the latter is a term that “represents residency and membership in the community” (Re Cruz 1996: 95). Therefore, castas (castes or lineages), houses or simply family surnames inside a village like Ixán help make clear-cut classifications among villagers and, among other purposes, facilitate some people’s entrance into the traditional cargo system ritual politics to prove to themselves and others their commitment. Therefore, escalation through different strata that compound the in kind differences (commoners, leaders, outside whites or masewalo’ob, and dzulo’ob) is a highly desirable task that many individuals interpret as a personal challenge.

While people consider exchange to be necessary for evening flows of power, the resulting balance is not necessarily equivalent for all involved. Nor is it based on an egalitarian philosophy. In the compulsion for precise and accountable ritual exchanges, ancestral lords, masters and owners are situated at the top of a hierarchical order articulated by mutually beneficial deals. Ixán “leaders” challenge some of the terms used in cash transfers and, using their own concepts of the temporality of promises, unfulfilled promises, mutual engagements, insufficient support, and renewed requests, they restate their relationship with state functionaries, identifying the latter as outside givers. In doing so, Ixán leaders are projecting a laden structure of hierarchy built upon mutually beneficial exchanges to the cash transfer system. Momentarily setting aside their deep suspicions of some aspects of the philosophy of the future embedded in development (Viola 2000: 47), euphemistically called by Engle (2010) the “elusive
promise of indigenous development” and including, for instance, the horizonless future and the demand of long-term self-transformation, the village leaders renegotiate cash transfers and request more monetary support from the Mexican state by stressing mutual gains.

1. Requesting.

Natalio’s case illustrates the livelihood dynamics of one who still derives a substantial proportion of their livelihood from the land. Natalio takes care of honeycombs and some cattle in his land. Nowadays honey is the most important commodity some villagers sell outside the village. I have known Natalio since 2005 when he was working as Francisco’s secretario. At that time Francisco was the Comisario Municipal and Natalio took care of the village library as well as the Municipal businesses when Francisco was working outside the village. In 2009, Natalio (then 28 years old) was also the village bibliotecario. He was not only proud of the fact that he did not have to leave the village to find a cheap job but he also had sense of pride in serving his community as both librarian and one of the village “leaders”. I met Natalio’s uncle, Romeo (67), during the 2009 Gremios Festival, outside the Cross temple. He revealed himself to be knowledgeable regarding my research on the interrelation of ritual and development prestations. As one of the most affluent people in Ixán, Romeo holds his own property land or “rancho” of around 60 hectares. This means that he does not need to cultivate the ejido, or communal land. He told me that around 30 years ago he used to market maize outside the village and made enough money to “live well”. Nowadays the maize only “reaches to sustain” his family until the middle of the year.
Every year Romeo seeds around 20 mecates25 of maize, beans, and pumpkins. He also has honeycombs and he raises cattle. However, he says that “before” he cultivated at least 20 hectares. When I asked him when that was, he replied, “during the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s, we harvested and sold maize outside the village”. He dates the decay of agriculture, due to the major climate change and the decrease in rain forest size after hurricane Gilberto (1988), considered to be the greatest “castigo” or punishment the village suffered in recent decades. Until then, Romeo converted his maize into money, and the money he got, also according to his perception of 40 years ago, was enough to live well. The price of local maize, and the market for it have since changed for the worse. People like Romeo were once maize producers who started selling their maize to the state on the guaranteed price scheme of the ‘80s, thought to be an entryway for the smallholders into the national maize market. However, the disarticulation of maize markets, once the guaranteed price schemes were dismantled by the Mexican state, transformed many maize producers into maize consumers.

Nowadays, Romeo considers PROCAMPO and the other cash transfers programs he receives, or wants to receive, negatively. He explicitly points out that he did not need such “apoyos” some years ago. Nowadays, however, he has no other option but to complete all the paperwork required for a new cash transfer program, “70 y Más”, launched by the government of Felipe Calderon in 2007 (later, OPORTUNIDADES covered people over the age of 70 who were not reached by the “70 y Más program” with cash transfers). With the help of a state representative from the PRI, Romeo is now

25 “Mecate” is a loan from Nauhatl, used in Mexican Spanish to means “cord” and “measure”, measuring 20 meters per 20 square in agriculture. 20 mecates equals 400 m2. In Maya the same measure it is named “k’aan”. 
asking the government to incorporate him into such a program. He says that some years ago the program covered people over the age of 60, and that he is trying to be exceptionally incorporated three years before turning 70. He especially complains about the discrentional distribution of cash transfers. When I asked if he does not receive PROCAMPO, he diminished the amount he receives for 3 hectares as “insufficient support” even for buying fertilizers.

PROCAMPO money, he says, “does not help me at all. $1300 each hectare is not enough for anything. I could not even buy fertilizer this year”, Romeo adds. Producers like him, later, became beneficiaries of the “insufficient” “government help” or “government support” for around 2 or 3 hectares of PROCAMPO “for doing nothing”, as Romeo and other agriculturalists put it. Moreover, they deduce that PROCAMPO and other cash transfers are tokens of the government corruption. In Romeo’s own words, the state “supports deviate”, that is, are syphoned off somehow, “on the way to the village”,

They do not arrive to us intact. Supports remain on the way to here... they make announcements in the newspapers but in Mérida and in Valladolid supports deviate for other things... This is what happened with last year’s help for the drought... this is what is happening with OPORTUNIDADES... people should get MXN $650 but they are just receiving in the village MXN $330, just half. As a village authority, I am writing letters to the government for getting the support in entirety.

Another person who makes requests to the dzulo’ob outside authorities is don Filomeno. He was 80 years old when I interviewed him for the first time in 2009. I dropped by his home with my research assistant Honorio. Built after the infamous Hurricane Isodore of 2002, Filomeno’s house was a cement building of the type usually constructed by the state after the passing of destructive hurricanes. His house, and
many others like it, lacked painted walls, cement floors, and all of the comforts I
normally imagine when I think of a home. With the exception of a tiny altar, consisting
of a one-foot long wooden cross, two wooden stools and some bags of dried corn on the
cob on the earth floor, it was completely bare. There was nothing else in sight.

Assuming Filomeno is in the same position he was in when I last saw him in
2011, in 2012 he would have gotten 3 hectares of PROCAMPO cash transfer a year (MXN
$1300 per hectare equals MXN $3600) plus a bi-monthly Sedesol allowance “Programa
70 y Más” (MXN $6,000 a year), for people over 70. This very well connected man in
Ixán’s total yearly income from the state was MXN $9,600 a year, around USD $750.
Without adding the monetary help his daughters and son could offer him, help that he
dismisses as “almost nothing”, we can calculate that Filomeno has barely more than
$62 US dollars a month to pay someone to work for him in his field plot, buy food,
medicines, and to pay miscellaneous bills. Receiving only around USD $2.05 a day,
Filomeno is considered neither extremely poor (less than a dollar a day) nor poor (less
than two dollars a day) by development agencies or by the Mexican state.

I visited him with Honorio, my research assistant, to ask some questions about
the initiation of PROCAMPO in 1993. Filomeno served as Comisario Ejidal when the
program began and he also held other “cargos” at that time. When he was seventeen
years old he made a day of communal duties or “fajina” at the Palacio municipal and
the sergeants approached him to inform him that he was “going to be the main square
church ‘prioste’”. He recalls, “Sergeants were not children like they are nowadays”.
Since that date, more than 60 years ago, he has worked at the church, assisting with the
ceremonial arrangements that take place there. It is very tiresome work and “nobody
wants to take it nowadays because you have to stay nights and days during the village
festival days and prayer days”.

When asked about PROCAMPO’s beginnings, Filomeno explained to us that it
was don Antonio who made “the list”. At that time he was the PROCAMPO “comité”, a
cargo now referred to as “Controlador de Procampo” by the Mexican state bureaucracy.
Belonging to the then-governing PRI party was very helpful but not a sufficient
condition for inclusion in the list of beneficiaries. Filomeno suggests that politicians
and bureaucrats from outside the village set the number of program beneficiaries as
well as the quantity of hectares a person they could inscribe each at the village. In
addition to the problem of secrecy initially surrounding PROCAMPO, two more factors
appear to have contributed to the fact that less than half of the actual agriculturalists
are registered as beneficiaries. The first comes from outside the village and is
manifestly related to the inner politics of the Mérida ASERCA headquarters and its
Chichimilá office. At that time, these bureaucratic echelons predetermined the
quantity of people who were going to be inscribed in the program at Ixán. Filomeno
tells us that his own son, even when he was Comisario Ejidal, “did not receive the
PROCAMPO”. He also says that in other villages there are more beneficiaries with more
than two hectares per person than in Ixán. A person from Chikindzonot, for instance,
informed Filomeno that “they receive at least 8 hectares per person”, a quantity not at
all commensurate with the 2 ha a beneficiary held in Ixán.

He recalls that at the beginning of PROCAMPO many people became angry with
the “comité” and started “to bother him” to be included in the program. Even after
taking down their names and sending requests to Chichimilá nothing has happened
since. Thus, he considers these arrangements divisive. The people got angry with their local authorities and “from then on they have denounced them many times”. As it is, he considers PROCAMPO to be a source of discontent and incertitude in a context of increasing commoditization of maize and the constant increases of its price.

Speaking in 2009, he points out, “last year everyone bought maize at the CONASUPO shops”. Even when The National Company of Popular Subsistence (CONASUPO) disappeared in 1999, for marginal populations like Ixán it has created DICONSA, an “enterprise” in which its major partner is the Mexican state, to which Filomeno refers. He also mentions that during the previous year (2008) a kilogram was sold at $3.5 but in April 21, 2009 it was being sold at $7 per kilogram. “There is no help in the PROCAMPO, then,” he concludes. Nowadays “nobody knows how one is going to cope with his own life”. When speaking of himself, he says that he is “old” and now, more than ever, he “needs the money”. He had been working cutting weeds at the side of a road for some money per day but he says he cannot work anymore. He explains to me that at his age he can no longer cut wood to sell it. Instead of rejecting the program, however, Filomeno asks “for more PROCAMPO”.

Filomeno asks me to talk with the state governor about his situation on his behalf. Specifically, he asks me to write a petition addressed to the president or to the governor requesting more help. Having not mastered Spanish and lacking sufficient writing skills, he could not write the letter himself or even go in person to talk to dzulo’ob or authorities. He explains to me that even when he did try to ask the government “dzulo’ob” for more support, they spoke so rapidly than he could not understand. Speaking to me, Filomeno repeatedly asks, “can you write a letter for me
and ask the governor or the president if they can give me something... more support, more Procampo?” His request is twofold. The first requirement is directed at me. He is asking me help to write a petition letter, executing a traditional literary genre of letters to governors, dating back to colonial times when the Mayan scribes mastered the Roman alphabet scripture, in which Mayas remind them of their poverty, their need of alimentary sustenance or “sustento” and the Spanish burdensome tributary system (for examples see Solis and Peniche 1996: 106-120). One of their main objectives of these leaders´requests is to describe people’s poverty (óotsilil) and to provoke compassion (ch’a’ óotsilil) in the authorities. But Filomeno was also requesting that I go in person to tell the communal Valladolid president and the Yucatan state governor about his request for monetary help. The second requirement of his question is a polite request to dzulóob for more “support”, “help”, “money”, “Procampo” or “something”. He clearly thinks that an intermediary such as myself would be more influential in ensuring the achievement of his demands.

A few years earlier Filomeno did receive more PROCAMPO through these same methods of respectful requesting, which implies stating his poverty, the insufficient resources he receives from the government and from the field plot and his offices. Basing his demands on his dutiful service as prioste, his advanced age, the fact that he lived alone, that his son migrated far away from the village, and that his two daughters could provide only a little help, he achieved what many people still request in Ixán: one more hectare of PROCAMPO cash transfer. He had been receiving a two hectares subsidy and, thanks to his persistent requests, he got three when the program was already running. He alleged to the village PROCAMPO comptroller that his cargo at the
main church was time consuming and, after years of requesting, he got what he asked.

The case of Filomeno is similar to that of Francisco, who got one hectare of PROCAMPO cash transfer more than six years after the program was executed in the village, mainly because he worked as Ixán’s Comisario Municipal. In this case, my friend was also well connected with the PROCAMPO comptroller despite the fact that the two men belonged to different national parties (the former to the PRI, the latter, at that time, to the PRD). The two men were, however, related through kinship ties as Francisco was married to the PROCAMPO comptroller’s niece. They also worked together as village “authorities”.

The procedure for transferring PROCAMPO from one person to another requires administrative control of the village PROCAMPO list. Inheritors, normally a widow, daughter or son, inherit PROCAMPO when they inherit the right to work in the portion of the Ejidal land to which PROCAMPO is attached. Another way of transferring PROCAMPO from one person to another, given that the hectares, not persons, are the subsidy’s recipients, is to purchase a subsidized hectare. However, there is one more way to transfer subsidized hectares. If one declares that he will no longer be working a percentage of land at the Ejido or communal land and if this percentage coincides with one, two or some hectares subsidized by the PROCAMPO program, then in the same act of returning his rights to the land, he is also forfeiting the PROCAMPO subsidy to the Ejido authorities. Resigning communal property rights is not a common event. However, in the event that it does occur, the village Ejidal authorities de facto consider it best that the PROCAMPO subsidized hectares be transferred to another person to avoid forfeiting the subsidy.
In 2008, according to the official documents (Procampo 2008b) 192 persons received PROCAMPO cash transfers, in these ratios: one hectare, 11 persons; two hectares, 144 persons; three hectares 27 persons; 4 hectares, 7 persons and 5 hectares, 3 persons. Even if the comptroller cannot acquire new eligible hectares to be subsidized from the Federal State, ensuring that that number remain quite stable, there is a possibility of changing beneficiaries. One needs vacated subsidized hectares to carry out such a switch. For instance, if a beneficiary dies and leaves no heirs, the comptroller could reassign the annual cash transfer to another person, alluding that the subsidized hectares are now in the possession of this other person. As the right to receive the subsidy is based on the possession of the land, not its agricultural exploitation, and communal land or “ejido” is not physically allocated, the Comisario Ejidal and the Comptroller could manage to justify that the proportion of land which received the PROCAMPO is now possessed by a new possessor.

With the exception of Comisarios Municipales who receive very small monthly amounts as “travel allowances” from the main municipality (in this case Valladolid), no one receives money, as a salary or otherwise, for holding religious cargoes and political offices. As the responsibilities taken with cargoes are not reciprocated monetarily, people holding such responsibilities are expected to request recognition in other ways. Stepping into any village religious or political office implies, first, a perennial exemption from communal duties called “servicio” or “fajina”. While “autoridades” or authorities should serve in their duties for a determined period of time (three years for a Comisario) they are no longer supposed to comply with the rotational schedule of communal work. For instance, they are waived from “guardias” service, or guarding the
village at the Palacio municipal where the comandancia stays. In some cases an office might imply the control of small amounts of money, for instance “taxes” imposed on peddling (received by the commandant), alms and charity donations received by the priests in person or deposited in money boxes located at both ceremonial centers. Therefore officeholders also use their positions to ask for returns as well. For both Filomeno and my ex-Comisario friend Francisco, PROCAMPO money is indirectly linked to concrete requests and offices.

As village authorities, Filomeno, Francisco and Romeo requested more PROCAMPO and more cash transfers from the village PROCAMPO comptroller and Comisario Ejidal but also from outside authorities. In the village, thanks to loopholes and peculiar interpretations of the law, they have some room for maneuvering with PROCAMPO, specifically for redirecting some hectares with subsidies to authorized requesters. Nevertheless, requests to outside authorities such as the National representatives and the Mexican President, are expressly connoted by claims of “corruption”, unevenness and unequivalence while not, as I am going to show further, in language of quid pro quo transactions of favors between politicians who need popular votes and village brokers who need outside recognition and more cash transfers.

_Interpreting poverty and disgrace as a master’s request_

The recognition of someone’s request makes gift-giving two sided. On the one hand there is the recognition of something as a demand. Typically, Ixánenses will recognize a disgrace as a demand. On the other hand, it is the recognition of something as someone asking. In our terms, it is the attribution of agency, specifically that of a
requesting agency, to an invisible yûuntsil or báalam, lord or master spirit.

“Warnings” signaling “unpaid debts” and more importantly, “compromisos”, refer to both numinous acts of requesting as well as unfulfilled promises. When Ixánenses assume the request has come from a “master” or “owner” they almost automatically presuppose that a person suffering a disgrace has made a promise that has not yet been fulfilled. Otherwise put, people consider any accident, disaster, illness or calamity to be caused by a master who is taking some vital force from its victim. In 2008, Seventy-year-old Ana explained to me that the masters of her house plot take the lives of some of her chickens when they are hungry. To avoid such a loss, she prepares food for the Aj Kanul master once a year, or even more frequently if the situation calls for it. Another person, this time a 55 year old man who participates in the Gremios festival every year, euphemistically named “kalan yûum wíin-kuj” (lit. guardian master person-god) as the spirit responsible for taking care of the family and animals in the house plot. He guards everyone in the sooral (house plot) and he is identified with it, to the extent that it is the house-plot, terreno or sooral that “speaks” and “requests” a loj rite to “calm itself”. Paucity, the dead, sick people or dying animals, for instance, signal these requests. Invisible like the wind, masters require food for pacification. The loj rites imply the preparation of maize dough with pumpkin seeds (called x-tut), in a ground oven. There a shaman cooks the x-tut and chicken or turkey broth. He places these food offerings on a table and, before the prayers, the shaman hangs from a tree a special offering for the master of terrain (in the case of the loj sorral). Upon completion of the rite, the house owner pays the shaman with a chicken for his work.

While spirit owners and yûuntsilo’ob should be pacified, fed, taken care of,
requested, and promised, they also take, require, punish, return and make miracles. A common human being, unless he is a shaman, cannot compromise these beings by forcing them to do whatever he wants. Common people can only feed them, pacify them, and tenderly ask them to feel some compassion for their poverty, disgrace and hunger. Agriculturalists seasonally offer forest masters *sakab*, a watery maize gruel ritual beverage, before starting each of the different tasks (cutting the wood, weeding, burning, seeding, and harvesting). They always count on their fatherly and motherly pledge of love and care. The people invoke and objectify their forces through a scheme of asymmetrical promises. A promise, first, responds to the master’s request. However a promise also, and later on, stands as a way of improving one’s condition by ameliorating his or her relationship with masters.

Unfulfilled promises as well as “uneven” exchanges provoke disastrous consequences. In any case, the accumulation of unfulfilled promises and unattended requests drive univocally towards “uneven” states of “turbulence”, which are sometimes referred to as the “age of slavery”. According to the oral remembrances of such historical periods, high-class foreigners (*dzulo’ob*) enslaved and exploited agriculturalists (*masewalo’ob*) through a burdensome system of exchange. While people often apply this narrative to the Nineteenth century hacienda system and the uprising waged during the Caste Wars (1857-1910) against “hacendados” and urban whites, they also recall many older institutions. These recollections of heavy taxation, based on the old indigenous system of slavery and the extenuation of crops and agriculturalists’ bodies, are some of the main factors that compromise life at large. Ixánenses consider these cases to be connected with other “punishments” such as droughts, hurricanes,
pests, wars and social catastrophes. In a very old past, which they now project on the invisible nature of things, they relate coping with “foreigners” demands with pacifying “masters”. However, not all masters are equated with foreigners. The invisible masters I described above, for instance, are present in everyday life. Masters control things, including everyday objects. Their force and intentionality reside inside them previous to any presupposition of causality or relationship. In this prudent approach to unknown ontic power, Ixánenses consider it savvy to propitiate masters’ favors thought a tactful commerce that implies promising.

2. Promising to give. Ritual Servitude for a Sustainable World.

Ritualists aim for an agreement made through concurrent promises. This agreement is understood less as a definitive pact than as an ongoing and developing series of assurances of support. In Ixán the series of oaths and promises the people make can only be measured by numbering the celebrations, festivals and rituals of the year. Ixánenses regard their intense promissory activity as a means of soothing and straightening the moral, political, economic and, overall, the ontic landscapes, evening them out.

Ritual specialists told me that they consider the village’s crosses and the invisible guardians who surround the chumak lu’um ceremonial center and the village to be “Itzá saints” and Itzá “masters”. So I looked for answers among these mysterious Itzá people who were stranger rulers of this area a long time ago and who are now believed to still inhabit the forests surrounding Ixán. The Itzá were famous for their prophetic and ritual migrations, described in the Chilam Balam, but also for being the
last reign to be Christianized by the Spaniards, as late as 1697 in the island of Tayasal, Guatemala. The Itzá were a highly mobile people of armed traders and sorcerer-priests who, after becoming the rulers of Chichen Itzá (around 31 miles from Ixán, from CE 525 to CE 1194), were a very important part of the ruler elite in the confederacy of Mayapan (987 – 1440). In the post-classic period the Itzá people controlled the trade of the most expensive commodities, i.e. slaves, cacao, honey, salt and wax. They established trade nets by the sea, from Honduras to the Gulf of Mexico, with two important metropolises, one in the Cozumel Island, another in the Gulf of Mexico, what is today the Campeche State. This metropolis was visited in 1526 by Cortes, and later by Alonso Avila in 1530 (Scholes and Roys 1948) for a brief period. Its inhabitants referred to this west region as “Mactun” in Maya Chontal and “Acalan” in Nahua (Peniche 1993: 132). The Itzá did not remain in Yucatan after the Spaniards’ arrival. According to the Chumayel the “heathen” Itzá did “not wish to join the foreigners”, they did not “desire Christianity” and they did “not wish to pay tribute” so they left the country (Roys 1933: 82). The author of this section of the Chumayel also claims that many “supporters went with them” to “feed” the Itzá (Roys 1933: 82). The author further explains, “thirteen measures of corn per head was their quota, and nine measures and three handfuls of grain” (Roys 1933: 83).

As Taube has put it, [i]n Late Postclassic Yucatec society, distinction in class did not necessarily coincide with differences in professions. One of the primary sources of revenues for commoners and noble alike was commerce” (Taube 1988: 35-36). Backing up this statement Taube immediately quotes Bishop de Landa, who in his sixteenth century ecclesiastical report says about the Maya Yucatec that “[t]he occupation to
which they had the greatest inclination was trade, carrying salt and slaves to the land
of Ulua and Tabasco, exchanging all they had for cacao and stone beads, which were
their money” (Landa in Tozzer 1941: 94-5)”.

Before the Spanish Christianization and the imposition of the tributary system
of “encomienda”, based on the prestation of labor and goods, and of the 17th century’s
“repartimento” system, commerce and ritual reflected each other. Becoming not only a
lingua franca between indigenous commoners and Mesoamerican lords but also a
kernel of intelligibility, exchange became the way of dealing with other human beings
(masters and servants). More importantly, in some cases it also became a way of dealing
with the wills of the no-longer-human people thought to control the natural realm. In
short, people ascribed agency and intentionality to all sorts of beings and, gaining
intelligibility of the world, seem to have followed the rules of such an interface into
which “exchange” (k’eeex) denominates from sacrifice, blood offerings from monetary
trade, bypassing what we understand as everyday gifts.

Many symptoms, although scattered, of what might have been a former system
of slavery through forced commerce help the people of Ixán understand their
engagements with the powerful dzulo’ob. Chilam Balam books describe the Itzá
exploitation by portraying these rulers as “those who drink the blood of their vassals”,
“extorters who collect tribute” and “men eaters” (Peniche 1993: 133). Despite the fact
that they had lived in Mayapan and Chichen for years, they were always considered
“foreigners”. This designation could be attributed to the fact that they had arrived
“three times” to the peninsula, a reference to the group’s ritual migrations and that
they also speak Yucatec with a strong accent. Also quoting the Chilam Balam
prophecies, Peniche mentions that “snake”, “jaguar” (balam), “honeybear” (cabcoh) and “opossum”, were used as names of Itzá “army” divisions and, by extension, these terms designate their respective members (Peniche 1993: 133).

Nowadays people in Ixán reenact forced trade requests, linked to the disappeared Mesoamerican slavery system, through ritual politics. They also tell stories of their masters’ constraining power. I heard one such account from many people in Ixán. As the story overlays Mesoamerican and Spanish names, cosmological institutions and conceptions, I cannot discriminate the different layers of cosmologies and historical events conflated in it. For the same reasons, I am also unable to date the compound of events to which they refer. However, the story’s pre-Hispanic ideology of promissory deals could stretch as far back as the Itzá domination of the region and perhaps even earlier.

According to Ixán’s cosmogony, “the eternal God father” (dios padre eternoi) performed a loj ceremony for “this world redemption” (“loj yook’ol u kaabi”) in the ceremonial center known as “chumuuk lu’um” (center of the world). Along with the village’s cross and the village book calendar, through rites, the father god not only spatially organized the world (vertically with a center, a surface, heavens and undergrounds and horizontally with the four cardinal earth bearers) but also provided the people with a regular means of reading the time to come through the now lost village book. Today Ixánenses believe that the navel of this “above” world or yook’ol u kaabi is signaled by the enduring presence of the “Santísima Cruz Balam Tun, Ki’ichkelem Yum Oxlahun ti ku”.

While explaining a loj (redemption) rite to me in March of 2009, Marcial, a
shaman who performed two days of Gremios celebrations that year, clarified that
permanent ritual practice is necessary to make life bearable and to get support. He
went on to refer to illo tempore incidents to illustrate the permanent anxiety, difficulties
and “requests” a person has to face in everyday life. Explaining the captures of people
and accidents as demands of “hungry” masters, he stressed the necessity of evening
invisible and visible landscapes through exchange. He says that,

[a] long time ago our grandparents said that the earth had no bones, that it was
something like jelly. Then, it ate people. The loj lu’um (literally the “redemption
of the earth” rite) had not yet been performed. Then, the time came and, in the
month of April, god was killed. His blood was poured on the earth. He let the
Jews kill him for the goodness (lit. “refreshment”) of the kids (lit. angels). These
kids, long ago before [this act], were eaten by animals. Then he had to pacify
them. He had to make loj (redemption rite). God the eternal father had to stand
up to make the loj lu’um. Then, on Holy Thursday and Holy Friday, there, it starts
the count. Then, the Holy Thursday... one has to count 7 Holy Thursdays and
Christ makes “rogación” (the oral rite of rogation) and he ascended and he left
the table for the offerings, like la gracia (corn) to báalamo’ob, because of that, the
bones of the earth came to be. How did the earth get its bones? He made a soup
(chok’ob) with 13 white turkeys to raise the first fruits offering (primicia or
jo’olbesaj-nalo’ob ritual). With the 13 [turkey] breasts he made the soup,
crumbling the meat into the soup for offering it. Once he delivered it, he took
the breasts’ bones and he put them below the table, burying them all. With
these acts he defeated the earth. And these stones are the bones he buried that
then transformed into rocks. Because of that, if you step on them, nothing
happens, you don’t sink because they are the earth’s bones. It is like our bones.
Although you push it, you do not sink. That was how the earth got its bones.
Then, with the loj lu’um, he put its bones.

In this narrative Marcial gives an account of how “the eternal God father”
performed a loj ceremony for “this world redemption”. The earth was too demanding
and after paying a burdensome toll with lives, the ancient people “defeated” this
animated entity, pacified its animals and ordered the spacetime continuum through a
precise counting of things offered and a repetition of events. This did not result in the
demise of exchanges between masters and servants. The spoken defeat was meant to
frame the incommensurable demands of lives requested by the earth and its animals into precise quantities. According to this account, before the precise measurement of sacrifices and offerings was carried out, the earth “ate people”, animals ate children, and people sank into the jelly-like earth. To produce an even stability, in both space and time, the father god made loj lu’um by pouring the blood of his son, who was killed in April, on the earth. Following this ritual process, nowadays, shamans replicate loj by repeating god’s sequence. On Holy Thursday and Holy Friday they start the count. Shamans count 7 holy Thursdays and make “rogación” (the oral rite of rogation). As Christ ascends and leaves the altar, shamans perform offerings for the balamo’ob, who they consider to be spiritual forest-guardians who could have become feral animals.

However, shamans do not only perform loj rites after the catholic holy week or only to “redeem” people from the “earth” or lu’um. Loj rites initiate the Gremios Festival as well. After cooking big tortillas in a ground oven, the shaman takes one of these, and by breaking one x-noj-waj in four, he delivers a piece to each of the Yuntsilo’ob masters who support each corner of the world. He also prepares hanging offerings, jol ché, by making crosses in the liquid maize gruel with his finger, adding leaves from the crosses and superposing levels of the different consecrated food. Shamans consider these to be propitiatory feedings of masters, as payments made for the wellbeing of the festival development, its participants and the whole village. The commercial trope Ixánenses use to express the festival’s aims, “buying the life, buying

26 It is worth noting that the word “balam”, which has the old meaning of “jaguar”, in Ixán, designates the “Santísima Cruz Balam Tun, Ki’ichkelem Yum Oxlahun ti ku”, but nowadays it is also a surname. Likewise, people in Ixán consider the crosses, towards which they pray and offer, to have personalities and they name them balamo’ob or yùuntsilo’ob. People in Ixán do not imagine today a “balam” as a jaguar. The word refers instead to a spiritual person who inhabits the forest.
the rain”, refers to a sort of sacred payment vernacular used to pacify in advance the Itzá and, perhaps, other stranger rulers who preceded and followed them. Today in Yucatan, sacrificial exchange follows a commonsensical knowledge that comes from the everyday practices of commerce and vice versa. “Payments” are addressed to appease “angry” and “hungry” owners retrospectively or to “buy” in advance tranquility, life and rain.

The harmony and prosperity, or “life and rain”, of the entire village is at stake in major village festivals. In such festivals, including the Gremios, the nojoch kuch or main sponsor represents not only his own extended family and friends (including minor sponsors and their households), but also the whole village in an anticipatory commerce. Based on the calendrical rhythm of annual celebrations, the knowledge shared by shamans and old sponsors elders is fundamental for coping with the demands of timing and the appropriateness of these offerings and fiestas. However the main kuch is the one responsible for the overall success or failure of the whole compound of ceremonies. The trustworthiness of his will and commitment is also at stake. On behalf of the entire village, the sponsor’s anticipation and his own rightful intention, materialized through his promising words, will finally be sanctioned by natural signs, poverty or prosperity.

2.2 Promising or the value of words

This whole process of anticipatory payments to masters works on the basis of a philosophy that my friend Francisco described as the “value of words among the Mayas”, i.e. making pacts through promising. Before being appointed as Comisario,
Francisco worked as a promoter at the Commission for the Development of Indigenous People (CDI) in the route to Valladolid. In 2010 he was 33 years old and had been hired for three-month contracts since 2005. He held an office at the village library, which he helped build, and held offices such as “sacristan” and “tesorero” at the main church.

Today the regular strategy for evening flows in Ixán involves anticipating demands first and then appeasing them through promises and, later, actual exchange. However, when an exchange occurs without having been anticipated or requested, its intentions become highly suspicious until their true effects are made apparent. In particular, a transaction such as PROCAMPO or OPORTUNIDADES, neither of which were requested by Ixánenses nor previously promised by State authorities, becomes dubious until they can incorporate them in their regular routine of transactions. In other words, the local phases of exchange (requesting, promising, giving, engaging, receiving and returns) assure them a logically constructed series aimed towards harmonic “evenness”.

In this sense, when I asked Francisco why so few people were inscribed in the PROCAMPO program in 1993, he explained to me that the peasants were not eager to compromise themselves with PROCAMPO Promoters before knowing what PROCAMPO promised,

Many people when the Procampo initiated, older people tell me, they were afraid to get in because they thought they will take away their lands, that it was a form of slavery... as the peasantry has been brought under the yoke of the wealthy people, then, they thought it was a ruse. Because of that many people said, “I only have one hectare; I only have two” while they were making (i.e. working) 6, 8 hectares. Very late they realized that it is a support that the government sends. This is for you to see that the given information was not at all precise.

According to many PROCAMPO promoters and ASERCA functionaries I
interviewed in Chichimilá, Valladolid and Mérida, SAGARPA promoters were purposely taught not to give information about the aim of their data gathering. This distrust, at that time, seems to have provoked discomfort and raised old fears of systematic ruses and exploitation among the peasants. In short, foreigner promoters came to the village to get and not to offer information. In 1993, they did not promise anything regarding PROCAMPO because PROCAMPO did not exist until its first payment was announced in 1994. However, and according to the narrative of many peasants, they distrusted promoters asking for information.

Victor Manuel Cervera Pacheco (PRI), a self denominated “peasants protector” was first a student leader, national representative, Mérida Mayor, senator, Secretary of the National Peasant Confederation (1980-1984), interim and designated Yucatan governor by the Mexican President (1984-1988), Secretary of Agrarian Reform for President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1995), and finally elected as Yucatan governor in 1995 (1995-2001). According to Baños Ramirez he “governed in the name of the peasants, but in favor of other groups” (Baños Ramirez 2002: 146). Francisco remembers Cervera, the then PRI candidate for governor and Secretary of Agrarian Reform, making the PROCAMPO payments into a sort of festival-cum-market event,

They were enormous acts [he uses the terms “eventos criminales” mainly to stress the magnitude of the events and not so much to accuse the commission of any crime]... they brought COMETRA, I believe this is the name of a private system or security enterprise... They built like a bank... tellers, boxes, machines, [musical] groups and they, indiscriminately, they brought with them the selling of agrochemicals... a person is paying you [Procampo] and the agrochemical enterprises sell you... “cheap we sell you”... they did not do it in every community. They concentrate the people in a center, for instance Chichimilá, for instance Valladolid, Chemax... and sometimes they rent the space... one month and an half or two before they fenced the space, one mecate or two, and they sell lots, one month after they paid [for the lots]. And even the same party, the PRI, came... and they arrived with their little notebooks and pencils, and
they were delivering... as there were a lot of peasants, they were delivering propaganda.

Everybody remembers the first payments as superlative events in which the government handed out resources. People could also buy a variety of goods, ranging from fertilizers and tools to beer and food. Along with entertainment, of course, there were political speeches. Programs like PRONASOL, PROCAMPO and PROGRESA were devised to palliate strong popular discontent produced by structural adjustment policies but are also used to sway electoral results. It is no coincidence that the event date coincided with the Governor electoral campaigns of 1994, as Cervera was one of the functionaries responsible for implementing PROCAMPO as the Secretary of Agrarian Reform. Once Cervera was elected as Governor, the dates continued to coincide with other Municipal elections and elections for national representatives. Othón Baños Ramirez writes that during these electoral rallies commanded by Cervera, “Procampo and Progresa were multiplied and counted with more resources and they became true fairs [“verbenas”]” (Baños Ramirez 2002: 152). In proselytizing, Cervera did not make any distinctions among electoral promising, ritual promising and government promises. In fact, he seemed to purposely conflate them. Cervera and the PRI representatives explicitly use religious terms; “promesas” and “compromisos” were at stake in such events. In particular, gifts and programs such as PROCAMPO and PROGRESA were “given” in exchange for the popular “voting engagement” or “compromiso del voto” (even the metropolitan press recorded and denounced the particular uses of these terms, see for instance, Por eso 1998, Proceso 1999).

In such cases, opening gifts worked as a promise for more gifts, only if a contra-prestation, in this case the popular vote, was actually performed. During these events
the politicians presented electoral promises in the form of gifts with the clear aim of “engaging” voters with their political party. While Francisco suggests that such events stopped when Vicente Fox assumed the presidency, today Yucatán politics still thrive from the use of the moving language of “promesas” and “compromisos” to invoke shared affects of attachment in the community.

Instead of a Maussian language of “obligations”, Maya-Catholic villagers and Mexican-Catholic urbanites look for “engaged” politicians who fulfill their “promises” and for “promises” that “engage voters”. In brief, everyone acknowledges that “engagement” is a consequential but open-ended relationship. Some politicians have experienced the potential ramifications of using themes of promesas and compromisos, as well. This was the case for Vallodolid city Mayor I name him here “Roger” in 2001 when he traveled to the village for a meeting. At that time a Comisario Municipal in Ixán intended to jail Roger for not fulfilling a promise, more precisely an electoral promise. Francisco told me that that the Comisario who was in office before him, and who is a jmeen or shaman, “stopped the vehicle” when Roger came to the village. When I asked why he would do that, he continues,

For a promise that... suppose you are [Valladolid] Mayor [Presidente Municipal]. You engage yourself to this [tú te comprometiste a esto]... but you do not only care about Ixán... you take care of a lot of Comisarias. There are like 42 Comisarias in Valladolid, and an engagement you make here, if nobody reminds you of it, how the hell would you remember it? No? Besides, if something is not put it writing... then as the Comisario is Panista [from the Party of National Action] he never went to say to this mister ‘listen, do you remember that you engaged yourself to do this? Why did you not fulfill it?’ [por qué no lo cumples?]. ... Then, this is what they want to do it again... he never went to talk to him... as he is from another party.

Reflecting on the old temporality of promises and “compromisos” (mookthan) Francisco continues,
No, when he was coming back ... He engaged himself long ago... Then, we are going to catch him now. Thus, it is an old strategy that nowadays does not work (no sirve), it does not work [no funciona]... even if it works [si sirviera], even if it works [si sirviera], Andrés, one strategy of this kind is not worth it... because, ‘ah... it is that you engage yourself to give a mill (molino) to the village and you did not give it away’. You catch him and you put him in jail. They send you the mill, they make you the house... but up to that... it is over. Nothing more. The village goes only to there.

The progressive temporality that Francisco favors does not keep with the stricto sensu of “mookthan”, the engagement as a pact that cannot be broken nor postponed. When he was Comisario, Francisco says, he taught the sergeants to expect open-ended relationships with urban politicians and to develop ongoing processes instead of mere agreements with them. The mutuality of promises, the possibility of making the promisers accountable and the contractual force of words are at stake in these two modes of engagements, one old fashioned Maya, the other Mexican-Catholic. One engagement irremissibly produces consequences in the present. For good (miracle) or for bad (punishment) the present tense of this symptomatic engagement (stricto sensu) can be, however, renewed (for more miracles) or redeemed (from suffering to renewal) in a very short term future (no more than a year) by the ritual punctuation. On the contrary, the present continuous that politics and Mexican Catholicism favors incorporates a very long term future as a horizon of human action. Ongoing “engagements” (lato sensu) could unfold intended or unintended consequences regardless of punctual acts by favoring long term trends, fact series and self sustained tendencies.

Before further explaining promising and engaging in stricto and lato sensu, I will describe one episode that conflated both and is not as far away in the past as Francisco would like. It happened in 2006. After the Cervera Pacheco cases were denounced, other
trials in the Transparency Secretary and in the justice were opened and PROCAMPO become synonymous with arbitrary electoral distributions. The groundbreaking PAN electoral triumph infused cash transfers, and especially PROCAMPO, with an ideology of transparency that identified corruption with the past PRI administrations. In public advertisement campaigns functionaries denounced any electoral use of public funds. Nevertheless, as Fox and Haight point out, Mexico’s largest farm financial support programs like PROCAMPO and other ASERCA subsidies, nowadays, only “appear to be quite transparent, but, in practice they lack both transparency and accountability” (Fox and Haight 2010:7 and Haight and Fox 2010:128).

In 2006 in Ixán, “widows and poor people” demanded and received very small amounts of money also called “apoyos”, after the implementation of cash transfer programs such as PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES. As comandante, Manuel funded these “apoyos” with the cash collected from fines, small taxes, and from his political contacts in Valladolid and Mérida. The person serving as PROCAMPO comptroller at the time accused Manuel of keeping the PROCAMPO checks and administrating them according to his own political convenience. These accusations echo the widely publicized charges against Cervera Pacheco, who was accused of transforming PROCAMPO money into gifts of bicycles, sewing machines, etc. The situation in Ixán became unbearable for comandante Manuel, however, when the PROCAMPO comptroller gathered a crowd of angry people at the Palacio Municipal of Ixán. When recalling the event to me, Manuel, now a PROCAMPO Comptroller, spoke in the voices of the other protagonists. I prefer to transliterate his words in lines of dialogue, although the following is all his words.
- Andrés, I am a cabrón... I was comandante as Francisco says... why do you believe Francisco does not abandon me... “don Manuel is my comandante”... but I endure (“soporto”) everything... the last time... look... but Francisco does not abandon me... One day... I arrive to the Palacio and it was plenty of people... they are going to fuck me... I go in.

- What is happening compañeros? What?
- Checks... you have kept them...
- Compañeros, justice is justice, I am the comandante. What do you want?
- Mister, the support (“el apoyo”)! The comptroller (“contraloría social”) says that the support is for us...
- No, compañera! The support (“el apoyo”) is for you.
- The mister says that you have... no...
- I am comandante, compañera! I am going to pay...
- But for paying it was full...
- Who say that word? No... that one is useless... I am the authority in the Palacio...
- Do not worry... The support is going to reach everybody... With love [cariño] Andrés! Francisco also was here. No tricks... for everyone there are supports. Because Liborio supports me (“me apoya”), because this... Chacon, who was [Municipal] president [of Valladolid] supports me (“me apoya”)... I told you, I am a politician... you know that Francisco is Priista [from the PRI], and I am Peredista [from the PRD], but it occurs that my president is Peredista... but it occurs that I am killed by some shits... but I talk, I send a message to my president, who is Peredista, “the people are angry”.
- Tell them that there are supports! Fuck them [“chinga su madre”]. Do not be afraid of the people.

Because it was me... they were going to jail me... for a detail, for an asshole... who is from the contraloría social del Procampo... I tell everyone who arrives... to everyone who is a peasant, you are going to have support! This idiot has nothing! Ahh... to the hole (“barranca”)... fuck him... send him to the shit! (“chinga su madre... que mande al carajo!”) Thus, no one can bear this (“soportar esto”). I am the party’s representative...

Francisco also said,
- Everyone has her support... my word is my word!
- Noooo. We have to see...
- No. He is the comandante. That guy is a screamer
(... ) Shit! The people supported me (“Puta, la gente me apoyaba”)... even when I went out... (from the Palacio Municipal) Francisco was there!

Anxiety for his personal integrity in the short term and for his political career in the village, in the longer term, arises in this narrative. Nevertheless, the anger against Manuel transformed into support for his person. As a “leader” his capacity for
supporting, in both the sense of bearing the burden and giving away “apoyos”, mingle in Manuel’s personal narrative. In Manuel’s narrative, the allegations of illegitimate gifting of monetary supports (apoyos) are transformed into the political and personal support of Valladolid and Ixán leaders. The first appears by sending him more money to fulfill the urgent promise of giving away support to everybody, without “tricks”. In Ixán, Francisco’s support for Manuel also appeared to resolve the near lynching situation. Francisco, compromising his word, by stricto sensu promising, made Manuel’s release possible. Soon after, money arrived from the city and Manuel’s distribution seemed to have been deemed appropriate. As a result, Manuel’s accuser lost his office as PROCAMPO comptroller when his term ended. When the position became vacant, Manuel filled it. Manuel’s authority and his intentions were challenged by the PROCAMPO comptroller’s accusations that he was apparently diverting the village’s PROCAMPO funds for his own political aims. The PROCAMPO comptroller’s turbulent requests were then taken on by a crowd of people who feared that the PROCAMPO payments were not going to be performed, again, timely and in the right amount. PROCAMPO’s promises have been broken since its inception and the people of Ixán foresaw that this could happen again. As comandante, but also a political leader, Manuel was suspected of corruption and nearly jailed and punished for keeping the PROCAMPO support. Nevertheless, he was able to alleviate the situation by requesting support from his political bosses, in Valladolid and Mérida, and most importantly, by the remaking of a promise, in this case solemnly performed by his in-law nephew, Francisco. By stricto sensu promising, Francisco, then Comisario Municipal, became a carrier and guarantor of Manuel’s responsibility, answering the requests of unhappy
PROCAMPO beneficiaries. At stake were two antagonistic supportive structures, Manuel’s and that of the former PROCAMPO comptroller, intending to engage the whole community under either a hegemonic household or a hegemonic partisan representation (PRI).

*Promising-giving-engaging: Stricto sensu*

In the case of the already mentioned ritualized *jetz kuch*, fixing the burden or “support arrangement”, once the sponsor formulates the promise he compromises himself, not only with his predecessor but also with the cross and elders, as he will be working for them. The cross, the elders and invisible masters are, thus, witnesses of this solemn promise, which represents the sponsor’s will to be as straight, focused and purposeful as possible. The sponsor explicitly promises to obey them, especially during the sponsorship day. In promising and engaging oneself to patronize rituals, sponsors produce a sort of inner narrative in which their pledge transforms itself into expected sanctions and returns. In the *kuch* self the promise “ties” the sponsor to a new object, his duty, that now follows a temporal succession. To do so, there must be recognition, continuity and agreement of each óol intentionality in a directional agreement between humans and no-longer-humans, between his will, his performance as sponsor and as giver and nature’s consequences. Good or bad agreements can be felt because they have ontic consequences. These agreements soothe, prompt or complicate the world and, later on, human lives.

Promising *strictu sensu* imply words that tie, fix, and make stable and supportive connections. “Trust”, *jetz óolal* and peace and harmonic stability, or “*jetz a’an óolal*”,

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convey concepts of supportive and rightful arrangement (jetz) of the invisible effluvia (óol). Among other things, these effluvia contain and transmit intentionality and will.

Maya words restrain but they also return harmony to the world, as in the case of Francisco’s mookthan or oral support of Manuel. Promesas directly develop into compromisos. One can say that mookthan-compromisos are consequential promises (for the good or the bad of the promisee). These compromisos make themselves felt. Once paid, with the promise fulfilled and the promised object or service given, compromisos must “even” everybody’s wills and produce a sensible harmonic stability in the invisible nature of persons and things. However, “evenness” does not necessarily imply commensuration in a quantitative sense or the performance of equivalent exchanges. Different wills could be “contented” and “evened” by different quantities in non-equivalent exchanges. This happens, for instance, when offerings are given to lords and masters. While people feed them with the “essence” of food they receive in return life and rain, which, for the master, is quite easy to give away. Both parts of this propitiatory commerce are unequal but both still depend on the good will and the “favors” of the other.

Promising is such a momentous business that prior to formal promising, ritual sponsorship begins when a person makes up his mind to be a sponsor. Such a decision requires many months, perhaps years, of prior reflection. The active intention of pledging oneself to sponsor a festival is a serious matter and can only be partially understood as a social obligation, a product of a casual encounter or a familiar compromise. Even when it could be represented as such, it implies an intense purpose that transects individuals. One must find the timely moment to sponsor a festival.
Personal and family finances are important factors in the decision to do so. Sometimes, the would-be sponsor has secured the financial means by working as a kitchen aide, builder or bartender in Cancún or Playa del Carmen. Once he has decided to be a sponsor, he knows that elders will serve as witnesses and advisors, reminding him of what he needs to do, how, and in what order. These advices and practices cultivate a sense of duty, responsiveness and interdependence. The return will also emerge, first as expectancy. A sponsor does not immediately experience the benefits of ritual prestations. The sponsor’s expenditures will be paid back, and then some, but in a measured way, “little by little”. Through his sponsorship, a sponsor seeks the even development of his economy and the vital aspects of the life and health of his family members, animals and crops. Ritualists always express sponsorship according to the logic of promissory exchange. The giver desires something, on behalf of himself but by means of taking up the burden of his “house” and of his whole community, in exchange for which he pledges his sponsorship at a concrete moment in his life. Ixánenses always speak of returns of “life” and later “rain”, as a condition of possibility for the first.

People also understand promises, however, as potential means of the enslavement or redemption of the promiser. The intentionality behind sponsorship points towards a particular end in the life of the sponsor. It is embedded in a life history. In 2003 Florencio explained to me that after his chickens died, his son got a fever and he went to the doctor because of a “strange illness” he realized he was responsible for these punishments. He went to the shaman, who, after consulting the quartz stone used for divination, informed him “you have here an unfulfilled promise”. After telling him the promise he had made, the shaman prescribed the fulfillment of
the promise plus a number of catholic prayers grouped in “novenas”. Florencio, then, recognized that the promise he may have made was a desire to sponsor some prayers to a saint. “I said to myself”, Florencio explains, “that I wanted to make a rezo, I thought I will make it”.

In many other cases, the pledge arises, first, as a personal promise for something else. For instance, if the sponsor wants his son cured of some ailment, or his means of living increased so that he can support his family more comfortably, then he will pledge himself as the supporter of a festival. In doing so, the sponsor objectifies a possible life-path for himself. He prefigures his future, giving himself up to it, in an intimate way. In many senses, a promise is a tool for stabilizing the future. By first promising to himself, the kuch makes up his mind to make a decisive move that will later engage him with other promisers.

Engagement also takes place in the field of nature. In tying himself to the cross through his promise, the sponsor is contracting with the brokers of life regeneration, the masters or owners. In fact, Ixánenses believe the cross-shaped idol is a living being and treat it as such. People make requests to her, feed her, sing to her, dress her and dance to her, among other things, to please her. In this sense, committing oneself to support, for instance, the Gremios festival or the festival of the Santísima Cruz Tun, imply regarding her as both the witness and beneficiary of the promise. In his prayers and in his oaths the sponsor identifies the Santísima Cross Ki‘ichkelem Balam Tun as someone with whom he may deal and negotiate for whatever he wants, which can range from money to life renewal. Likewise, the rite of loj, made before each festival day, is also meant to unravel and propitiate the animi of nature lords and owners. The objective of
the entire festival is to enhance and advance trustful promises into fruitful and mutually supportive engagements.

*Promising-giving-engaging: Lato sensu*

“Engagement” has such a pervasive use in Ixán that one could mistakenly interpret it as a given from an ex-post, outside village perspective. This concept is not only a result of previous activities or only justified as a pre-condition of an intended agreement. A detailed step-wise analysis, like this one pretends to be, must show that the relative position of the exchange parties shift across the links in the chain of interactions, each one acquiring its own valence, in terms of lower and higher status, while the parties simultaneously seek their own ends in promising, giving and engaging. In other words, engaging does not always entail compromising and binding oneself into a pre-contractual agreement but also entering into a far more complex exchange. In the following lines I will offer an exterior and ex-post account of engagement, produced by a Catholic priest, which I will contrast with an inner and ex-ante perspective on engagement that does not consider it to be merely instrumental.

The first time I attended the Gremios festival in 2003, the fifth gremio, that year from X-Kabil, brought the Catholic priest from Chichimilá to Ixán to give mass. Catholic mass is a rare occurrence in Ixán and many catholic Ixánenses consider it a very special moment. Almost every ritualist from the five guilds attended the mass, held near the chumuk lu’um ceremonial center where the people of X-Kabil were temporarily residing and the Gremios festival was taking place. Ixánenses considered the priest to be friendly but they never took him to the ceremonial center and when he gave mass
he did so at the main square church. Asked about his presence, some Ixánenses told me later that it was the tradition of X-Kabil people and that they respect it. The priest spoke in Spanish. To my surprise he started his sermon by reading Genesis IV, the paragraph discussing God’s rejection of Cain’s agricultural offerings. Later in the sermon he openly critiqued the local tradition of food offerings. According to the priest, “God did not accept Cain’s offerings and punished him”. He then tells those in attendance that he knows that “you come here to make offerings” but God’s word stands against this practice because “you are not as important and big as you believe you are and you cannot deal directly with him.” Then he deceptively mentions the offerings and asks, “do you think God needs food, do you think God needs this? No, my friends. You cannot engage God (comprometer a dios) with these offerings. Imagine what God could ask of you. Not food…” and he continued to stress the necessity of intermediaries like himself, the ecclesiastic hierarchy, saints, and the virgin Mary for the attainment of salvation. When he offered the communion I was the only one in the large audience who did not take it. After communion the priest left and shamans arranged the food offerings on the tables and at the main altar and hung the ramilletes offerings from the ceiling.

In our interviews, ritualists and agriculturalists never gave me the impression or suggested that they wanted to oblige or forcefully compromise nature’s master or the catholic God. On the contrary, they always highlighted their inferior position in these exchanges. If they meant to oblige or compromise anyone, it was themselves. Once they have promised, then they compromise themselves to give and, later on, they humbly expect. Even when deals are made among equals the temporality of the promises, the
gifts and the engagements demarcates one party as temporarily inferior and the other as temporarily superior.

In terms of political engagement, the PROCAMPO distribution of cash and the other cash transfer programs that followed it have intentionally produced an overarching feeling of a new paucity. At this time, a monetary paucity that, for many, is reflected in the insufficient monetary support the government provides. Therefore, PROCAMPO has made possible the idea that, based on certain circumstances, people could ask for money from the state. With this, it has also introduced the notion that the state should distribute more money. Nevertheless, for this to happen, people believe that village leaders must necessarily become more engaged. Thus, cash transfers have not erased “engagements” between the people, their local leaders and metropolitan leaders. Instead, they have, in fact, renewed them.

For instance, old engagements between Manuel and Liborio have been reinforced. Manuel considers himself a life-long Liborio follower. When Liborio (PRI), a member of one of the most powerful families of Valladolid, decided to run for the office of Valladolid mayor, the local PRI leaders seemed to embrace his candidacy. Despite Liborio’s popularity among Valladolid voters, however, Cervera Pacheco decided to withdraw his support for Liborio and instead back Roger as his successor. Impersonating the protagonists involved in this maneuver, Manuel describes the situation to me by narrating an interaction between Roger and Cervera Pacheco. He first speaks as Roger, “why are you going to give Liborio [the candidacy]... and not to me? To Liborio you are not going to give... Here I have this at your feet...”

Manuel continues describing the situation,
Liborio is at Merida, awaiting the decision of who is the president but someone tells him that it is Roger [who] has given a lot of money to Cervera...

Once again Manuel acts out the moment in which Roger supposedly bought the governor candidacy,

- “do not give it to him, I pay, take this...”
- “And suddenly someone tells him [Liborio] that he is not going to be the Presidente Municipal and who is going to be is Roger ... Hijo, fuck... Then he [Liborio] is pieced up and changed party, changed all his people, immediately, he contacted us telling us,”

Manuel now impersonates Liborio, who according to him, says,

You know what? I am no longer Priista, I am Perredista. With Lopez Obrador, already.

Since that day Manuel is also Peredista. Personal loyalty to his leader has transformed him into the village PRD representative. Expressing the events in the language of exchange, Manuel explained to me how Roger “bought” the candidacy that Liborio naturally deserved. When Liborio returned to the PRI, Manuel was faced with the choice to follow him or to remains as PRD village leader. He negotiated by continuing to follow Liborio’s directions while, at the same time, also continuing his dealings with other PRD leaders in Valladolid and Merida. His personal loyalty to Liborio also requires something in exchange. As recently as May 2011, as Ixán’s PROCAMPO comptroller, Manuel handed a note to Liborio, at that time a PRI national representative. Along with photocopies of land titles, he delivered a petition to Liborio’s secretaries in Mérida signed by 56 Ixánenses peasants. The letter asked Liborio to incorporate its petitioners into the PROCAMPO program. Considering the fact that the program has around 192 beneficiaries in Ixán, and the total number of ejidatarios is around 400 persons, these 56 petitioners indicate that current interest in receiving

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PROCAMPO benefits is still high, almost twenty years after the program’s inception. For the 56 petitioners, filling out the paperwork required to properly certify the pretenses of this request was no easy task. In fact, the difficulty of this requirement has prohibited many others from submitting their own petitions for inclusion in the program. In delivering the people’s petition to Liborio, Manuel reveals enduring connections between the people, local leaders, and national representatives. The ongoing relationship between the local leaders and their national representative is still characterized by respectful requests, promises, and engagements. In this particular case, the people, with the help of a local leader, request more “PROCAMPO” and more “support”.

As I have not returned to the village since those days in 2011, I have no idea how Liborio responded to this particular petition. Nevertheless, as I have shown above, requesting and, later, promising to give are considered necessary phases in any ritual or political “engagement”. Inversely, in transactional processes in Ixán, negative forms of engagement or plain disengagement should be “fixed” in a new deal or arrangement (jetz) by the remaking of the promise and its quick fulfillment. For instance, after a difficult situation has compromised a mutually beneficial outcome, losses are normally taken into account for later compensation by remaking promises and the promisoriness of the relationship.

4. Remaking the promissory.

After engagement, ritual sponsors experience ontic consequences. While it could be argued that the cross personhood is ideological and ownership of objects and
subjects are ontological projections of past master and servant relationships, and that both represent, by condensation, many people dealing among themselves in different times, Ixánenses experience it differently. The way they express feelings of punishment and grace involves a compound of the present, historicity and futurity that is very different from mine. They perceive punishments or miracles as actual sensations. When something goes wrong people immediately believe they are being punished for failing to fulfill their promises to a saint or a master or for any other misdeeds that might have bothered a master in the forest, in the fieldplot or a saint in the village. Ixánenses also impute miracles to non-human reactions to human actions. People most commonly blame tragic events on negligence in exchange with masters and saints. On the other hand, fortunate events are attributed to accountable activity in these exchanges. These ambiances are non-human responses to human deeds as well as signs of the time to come. In this sense, grace and punishment are also qualities of time. They not only depend on the morals of the people, but on their aesthetics as well. So it follows that they are neither subjective, nor inter-subjective, phenomena. The objectivity of these categories exceeds any skeptical social scientist point of view because they depend on modes of apperception of the real. A person could be a perfectly responsible promisor, he could be accountable for all of his promises and he could dutifully fulfill them all, but he could still be punished. A human being is incapable of compromising masters and saints, he can only humbly ask for their favors. In short, masters are tricky, but their accountability is also considered to exceed that of humans.

After a completed sponsorship, a shaman interprets natural signs, such as birds, winds, and clouds, to inform the sponsor whether or not his performance has been
successful. Elders may read natural signs as the cross’, and other lords’, sanctions on the sponsor’s “engagement”. Even when schematic and succinct, elders’ interpretations give the supporter an idea of his personal acceptance, not only in the social realm of elders, peers, and authorities, but in a broader and plural environment of what we have called “nature”. In other words, elders and sponsors do not consider the nature of the self to be heterogeneous from the nature of nature. Natural indices sanction his performance as sponsor, but he also begins to now consider himself to be part of a dialogue of sorts with a natural landscape inhabited by non human persons after shamans and elders interpret these signs. To this end, to renew his engagement with “masters” and “owners”, upon whom life regeneration depend, the sponsor must now behave more appropriately in the forest, in the field plot and in the solar or yard, i.e. “steady”, “even” and “without tumult”. In sponsoring the festival, the sponsor’s responsibility to the owners does not fully culminate in the festival’s end. The transactions have created an enduring relationship of engagement between sponsor and lords that permeates the rest of his life.

In the Gremios festival, “miracles” are expected in less than a one year-long term. If the miracle does not occur within one year and instead a “castigo” “comes down” and strikes the village, then all they can do is hope that the punishment will not be harsh. ForIxán, 2008 was one such year of castigo. Due to drought, maize plants only reproduced enough for reseeding in 2009. However, Marcial, a j mèen who made the first fruit offering or primicia for the first guild in 2009, maintains that, unlike in other places, castigos in Ixán are mild: “here, castigos pass through without striking us too much because we perform our traditions”. Therefore, ritual practice can ameliorate
harsh or unavoidable punishments, such as the end of the world. In the following paragraphs I will describe how a ritually cultivated anxiety of living in an unstable and unpredictable world is addressed through ritual. The threat of the end of the world looms over daily life in Ixán. People believe it is entirely possible for one to sink into the ground, be abducted by no-longer human persons, eaten or killed by animals or spirits, or that the sun might never rise again. As a result, feelings of deep anxiety over the very short term also dominate economic life, imbuing each economic decision, for instance when to seed, with capital importance. Therefore I will now describe these expectations, built upon radical uncertainty, to later elaborate how people ritually struggle for their entire lifetime to get support, and then to transform support into regular means of rebirth and enjoyable evenness.

Corrective Punishments in Apocalyptic Times

Hurricanes, illnesses, famines, and other personal misfortunes indicate “punishments”. Nevertheless, in Ixán, as in other Yucatec communities, people contextualize punishments and unfortunate events into larger eschatological narratives (Sullivan 1990). The end of any life cycle is a reminder that “this world”, too, “will end soon”.

The political version of this eschatology asserts that masewalo’ob or commoners will overturn and defeat the oppression dzulo’ob or high-class governors have infringed upon them. As the story goes, there will be a final war and the king of peasants will finally take power. The rest of the world will dry up and the only place with water and life will be Ixán. In Maya and Spanish, people stress the importance of “rebirth” as a
recurrent but highly desired phenomenon that must be actively sought. All my friends’ narratives in Ixán have directed me towards such a concept of “renaissance”, a concept that they explicitly mention when they speak of themselves as a people. However, don Damián, Ixán’s 2008 Gremios festival sponsor, explained to me that cosmological rebirth, i.e. a return to the good old times of abundance, is very difficult and may never happen. Based on his own life experience, he explains that his father, also a Gremios festival sponsor, made very good harvests. For don Damián, however, the times have changed for the worse. Nowadays the sun dries everything up, bringing drought to the fields. “Every year there is more punishment”, he says. He explains, for instance, that a long time ago they used to expect hurricanes during a one-month period, between August 16th and September 16th. He saw just one hurricane when he was a child. Now, however, hurricanes come at any moment throughout the year and they come “every year”.

In our interview, he refers to “hurricane” using the old term “i’ik” which has strong connotations. Frequent hurricanes are signs of a declining time. For him, as for many other older people, “the wind” or hurricane is the worst of punishments. Don Damián also mentions prophesies of the end of the world. He says that the time of the end of the world has arrived. It is on “2000 and something”, but “we do not know exactly when the end will be, how many is this ‘something’”. His grandfathers were told that signs would show the proximity of the end. The signs will be apparent. There will be seven years without human and animal offspring. In the final days, he says, the earth will be on fire. If you insert a “7 varas” (around 19 feet) wooden stick deep in the ground then it will burn. Finally the soil will turn white and become a desert. Therefore, rebirth obtained through ritual sponsorship, specifically in the case of field
plots, is reserved for those of faith who sponsor the festivals rightly. For the others the current era is strictly a time of punishment. As time worsens “little by little” the only return that sponsors can get annually is similarly “little”. When I asked him again about the cosmic rebirth after the end of the world, don Damián revealed, “we don’t know if there will be persons” there “or something different”.

Other Kucho'ob have also told me that the renewal they look for in their bodies, plants, animals, and families should be considered as “rebirth”. Rebirth is not automatic but the result of correct engagement. In a context in which life is considered extremely fragile, and threats to it are considered indices of divine “punishments”, sponsors recurrently enact practical knowledge in order to regenerate, and appear as regenerators of, their families, plants, animals, friends and field plots. Cargoholders, by giving and taking, interpret and prospectively engage themselves with the past, their peers and the environment for the miracle of renewal. They are, in their own words, “doing the same their ancestors did before” but they lead by indexing a continuity of the past in the future, as a straight intentionality.

Successful sponsors tend to describe sponsoring from inside, as a work in progress or as ongoing processes. Don Damián, who patronizes the first Gremio of agriculturalists of Ixán, has sponsored the festival for decades, with only some biennial breaks here and there. He represents himself as exemplar. This is not to say that he believes he does everything right. However, he does indicate to his sons and helpers that he serves as “an example”, not of a successful model but of a moral case of “permanent endurance”. What he seeks is a measured rebirth in this world of decay and hardship.
Some of the people I spoke to characterize themselves as episodic sponsors. Prior to facing sponsorship, they remember being “curious” about the whole sponsorship process. They spoke of themselves as players of a dangerous game that could be explained more by the virtual of the promissory than the actuality of their account books. Even when Manuel and his brother spent a lot in producing a festival for the Asuncion Virgen (August 15) only to receive nothing but bad signs sanctioning their bad performance in return, he is still happy to have tried. Contrary to what I expected, he did not complain bitterly. Although his sponsorship was an economic and social failure he appeared to have overcome his punishments appropriately by making himself more “straight”. After a few years, he recovered economically and he assumed two important cargos in the village. Therefore, in some way, he now believes that the ritual enterprise he assumed made him capable of later getting and exerting power. Although he did not intend to sponsor any future festivals, he still values the experience of his sponsorship as a positive one. Despite failing, he is very proud of having tried. Despite the bad signs read by elders and shamans after his sponsor performance, he now thinks of himself as “straightened out” by both the burden he assumed and the punishment he received.

Struggling for renewals

As I have already mentioned, there were enormous gaps between my own perceptions of reality and those of my interviewees. The following experience serves to highlight such differences. In May of 2009, one evening, Manuel, the above-mentioned punished sponsor, ex-Comandante, PROCAMPO comptroller and my landlord, brought
his guitar to the house I was living in. He wanted me to make a recording of his songs for him. I opened a bottle of wine and turned the recorder on. After 50 minutes and some songs, he started to cry. I asked what was happening and he responded to me,

- I cry because I die...
- Stop... do not cry...
- Life, Andrés... You know why I cry?
- Why?
- I already leave
- Are you already dead?
- No, not dead... But I remember Dead. But life, Andrés... (he makes a sign with his hand to indicate life rapidly passing by). Sometimes when I sing, I feel that I am with you guys... I feel that all my friends are surrounding me. I do not know what happens to me, Andrés. We are friends. Leave it... these are things that happens to me in my vice [of drinking]?... When I play my guitar I feel that I cry... but you know why? (he knocks his guitar three times) She is like... she is like my owner. But I cannot endure (soportar) my life... when I play my guitar like this, Andrés (he plays some chords)... she sounds by herself...

The melancholic attribution of agency to the dead, alcohol and guitars are surely common tropes in many song lyrics everywhere. However, in this case, there was more than just a song logic infiltrating the singer through the work of fascination (Gell 1998). The Mexican intimacy and familiarity with death (Lomnitz 2005) and, in particular, Maya dealings with the dead (Ruz 2003, 2007), exist with the purposeful aim of resuming into euphoric “rebirths” taken in this world through rituals. Most of the open ritual life in the village includes this explicit aim of renewal. With the exception of the use of witchcraft and its signs in dead bodies (Dapuez 2010) and ritual prognosis, ritualists expect renaissance to be the ritual outcome, even when it comes

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27 Forecasting the agricultural year through “cabañuelas” or “xokin”, or reading of the year’s rains has been described by Villarojas (1987), Terán and Rasmussen (1994). Manuel makes xokin in a simplified form. At midnight on December 31 he make three rows of 4 little salt mounds outside his house. The first corresponds to January, the second to February, and so on. He leaves this rain calendar overnight and when the sun rises, on January the first, he reads the salt piles that have accumulated water as rainy months. He confirms his interpretation by repeating this practice at dawn on January 13, according to
after some punishments.

In May 2010, when I was having a conversation with Manuel about the last two harvest failures (2009 and 2008) and the inadequacy of his respective xokin prognosis, he remembered that although rain was announced for 2010 in his xokin forecast, the main square ceiba tree, yaaxché, did not bloom. Ceiba flowers are so highly regarded as an important sign of rebirth that they are used in Christmas rites. Immediately after mentioning his preoccupation about the lack of yaaxché flowers this year, he started to describe the Christmas ceremonial dance. People “make bark necklaces from the yaaxché tree and they sell them to the masked peoples, those who sell ‘viejo’ or old stuff”. Once again an exchange represents renewal, in this case for the Jesus “boy birth”, around which all these “dances” and “traditions” are performed to please him. In those moments, according to Manuel, people ask for world renewal, that the world “be born again because the boy is coming”. People ask for “corazón”, “for heart, for our selves, for living more, for [they] give us the harvest”. In those beautiful moments of renewal, he sustains, “one feels as if one is never going to die. Like the world is born again”. Dying in these ritual contexts is always related to the possibility or impossibility of rebirth. Therefore, dying is either purposeful or not.

Examples of ritual life and its language explain how ritualists experience renewal in their economic lives, or its temporal impossibility. Thus, even if the failure
of any of these three phases (request, promise, gift) dooms the whole “engagement”
process to disappointment, sponsors always look to redress the whole transaction from
its beginnings, first requesting again, then later remaking the promise, a second time.
According to the expert knowledge of shamans and ritual experts, a non human
master’s request (an illness, for instance, when interpreted as an owner or master’s
demand) should be answered by a human promise. This promise must be carefully
materialized in an exchange that entails both gifts and offerings of food and drink to
humans and non humans. When the master’s demand is not recognized as such, when
the promise has not been made, or has been made and broken through an insufficient
exchange or an unfaithful performance of giving, i.e. when there is no human
engagement with the saint or idol or its representation (one or many masters), the
promise should be remade and, then, almost immediately, fulfilled. Ritual experts and
shamans “see” in natural signs, or in their divining quartz stones and dreams and
decide if sponsors have failed and they have to readdress their promises and
offerings.
It is worth recalling that masters’ favors depend on their compassioned generosity and
grandeur. In this sense, when recalling his service as a nojoch kuch or main sponsor (lit.
big bearer) of the village festival popularly named “corridas”, Filomeno contrasts the
insufficient amount of money for survival currently provided by state cash transfers
with the good times when his requests were satisfied,

When I supported the festival it was different... it gives you... yes, yes... even I
have not expend it everything and it gives you more... there were... and even
when I was going to seed, I had not already spent everything. You already spent
yourasto (ritual expenditure) and you are seeding and you still have the
remains for the other year... but nowadays it is not like that. With current
punishments there is only the sun, drought.
Even though Filomeno seems to ask for them constantly, when asked about cash transfers, he interprets them as signs of decay. The money is not enough for surviving and represents “almost nothing”. For him, and most Ixánenses, PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES are insufficient returns they receive from the Mexican state. They consider cash transfers to be “peasant’s support” received from the “government”, i.e. a monetary help for slashing and burning, seeding and cultivating their fields. This understanding has been reinforced by the change in the PROCAMPO payment schedule. Payments have been synchronized for distribution before the seeding season, i.e. always before June. This reschedule occurred many years ago, in the early 2000s, as a result of major changes in PROCAMPO such as PROCAMPO CAPITALIZA. However, the exact dates of PROCAMPO money delivery remain uncertain and fluctuate between the start of April to the end of May. Ixán agriculturalists highlight this uncertainty, along with comparisons concerning the inadequacy of the payment, mentioning, for instance, that 2 ha of PROCAMPO payment will only buy two bags of fertilizer or a few days of labor for slashing trees and weeds. As a result, they refer to the money as a token of good will but also a decaying and insufficient engagement of the government with its peasants. Although “evenness” and its opposed terms refer to exchange partners’ wills, invisible conditions and qualities of states of affairs, while “insufficient”, “few” or the discreet “there is not” (mina) refer to actual commensurations, real comparisons, most of the time, ultimately determine if a buyer or seller, giver or receiver, has an even intention or not.

However, when I ask Filomeno if he expects that the countryside will be abandoned in the near or long term future because of these and other state agricultural
policies he responded negatively. By learning to accept “miracles” and “punishments” and by identifying them with “raining sufficiently” or “droughts”, he says that “strong lords” will persist in seeding and working in the fields despite bad results and the insufficient support given by the state.

The normalcy of “insufficient support”, as Filomeno and many other Ixán agriculturalists refer to cash transfer money, should not be underestimated. Ritual life teaches Ixánenses how to cope with uncertainty, swift catastrophic changes, and the uneven landscape into which one can literally sink or be spiritually abducted by masters. Nevertheless, it also serves to deal with the uneven and insufficient support coming from the Mexican state and international organizations. Though the youngest generation of adults commutes back and forth to urban centers to sell their labor, most of them reinvest their gains into their maize field plots. The qualities of maize sustenance are frequently highlighted in the village festival and ritual events as well as in the everyday diet and work to contrast the unstable and turbulent relationships the outside world offers them. For this younger generation, too, ritual and development transactions mark different aspects of the promissory while they announce expected or improvable renewal.

The work of promise

Nowadays many young men from Ixán stand in the middle of the two transactions. They travel once a week to tourist centers such as Cancún or Playa del Carmen for regular jobs. They say that fewer and fewer people dedicate themselves only to the field plot. For them, cash is almost ubiquitous. Most of them do not receive
PROCAMPO. In some cases their wives receive OPORTUNIDADES, the feminized moneys that they spend on their children and their needs. These men return to the village for the weekends and festivals. For them, the village can sometimes be a haven that provides them with “even” tranquility, other times an expulsive place from which they need to escape to look for money. Temporary jobs entice them to travel while their wives, children and family require their return. OPORTUNIDADES seems to help their wives and children stabilize their livelihoods, in their absence, by providing a new generation with a different sort of normal life that contrasts with the highly uncertain scheme of their grandparents’. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if the generation that is helped fed, schooled and health checked by PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers will reengage their grandfathers’ radical scheme of incertitude or if they will embrace a more progressive and gradual futurity for their expectancies.

Nowadays cash flows from the nearby cities (Valladolid and Mérida) and from the new tourism centers (Cancun and Playa del Carmen), as before the inception of PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES in 1994 and 1997, not only to the village but also sometimes towards the ritual prestation system. In May 3, 2011, four young males between 23 and 26 years old, relieved their uncle (79) of his sponsorship duties, having been at their time advised by another intermediate uncle (40) in the sponsorship. Their ritual enterprise shows more than resistance; it suggests that the reinvestment of money into the religious cargo system should be better understood as a push forward for prosperity.

The four young men cited the failure of the previous year’s sponsorship in 2010, supported by their elderly uncle, to be their main reason for "entering" into supporting
the festival. None of these four young persons receive PROCAMPO, as their above-mentioned uncles do. Two of the young men, in their late twenties, work as waiters and cooks in the Riviera Maya hotels. They told me that living and producing enough food to survive in the village as their fathers do is a “miracle”. They conceive of maize self-sufficiency and the quiet life of the village to be goals for their lives. However, they also recognize that their children need things that only money can buy.

Alejandro, the son of the main Gremios’ sponsor, considers it a “miracle” that his father and the generation of his father, those who sponsor the festivals, only need to work in the fields. Alejandro goes back and forth from the village to Cancún and Playa del Carmen, where he cooks Greek fast food 12 hours a day. I met him in Ixán at the Gremios festival of 2009. In those days, his father was sponsoring the Gremios festival, as his grandfather did before him. In 2009, when I first talked to Alejandro he was 25 years old and his father, 63. He says that, “with god’s miracle they are working just in the field plots”. “God’s miracle” identifies more than the unexpected, a category upon which the miracle takes place. What puzzles Alejandro more is not the supernatural character of maize reproduction but how the festival helps natural cycles resume in regular patterns. God’s miracle is not the unexpected in itself, i.e. something out of gravity laws, for instance, but normalcy. For Alejandro, and many people in Ixán, the unexpected is taken for granted and regularity is miraculous. Chatting with him, outside his house in Ixán, when the celebration of a nightlong dance was about to take place immediately after the Gremios Festival, Alejandro also praises the miracle of organizing such sponsorships. Referring to the duties of sponsors he says,

You have to be very attentive to the things [you are doing]. You have to do this, and this and this... see... it is very complicated what they do. See, it takes your
money. But see, with god’s miracle, see they are working only in their field plots. With god’s miracle… it dawns. You know what… god says, “take this”… you can serve so many people. Come in… This is impressive… unexpected. How can I say it? You can do all sort of work… you know what… [Addressing now to the people who could visit the sponsor’s house] come, pass, eat, this is god’s work. This is the work of god because how can one know how much food [visitors would eat]… come, eat and all of these… this is it… [they only say] take $50 sometimes $100, is a help but… it is impressive.

Sponsors derive a philosophy of endurance and continuity, projecting the promise in nature. When they have finished their expenditures, if accepted, their ritual prestation will be transformed into life, money, health, wealth, and any other form of prosperity for them, their children, their wives, animals, kin and field plot. The promise has, then, left the sponsor’s mind as a highly intentional idea and, through words, found its precise expression in the jetz kuch and other formal oral instances, in order to resume the world. In a circular trajectory, the sponsor finally finds a dawning aspect of the world. Although there are punishments and death, there is also a promissory world to which one must to engage. Punishments can be endured and later on remade into miracles if they can be timely identified. According to oft-repeated temporal series in Ixán, punishments precede miracles. In the orderly instances of requesting, promising, engaging and the remaking of the promissory, punishment can always be overcome by miracles and rebirth. Beyond largesse and extension of personhood through gifts, Ixán ritual donors construct themselves not only as givers but also as supplicants, promisers, engaged people, and, later on, as grateful receivers. In this sense, grace and gratitude are also products of these donors. Gracia, as timely expectation of a miraculous return, such as the miracle of maize plants rising from the earth or the sun dawning on the sponsorship day, are not considered products of causality, but as after-death rebirths. While “milagro” and “gracia” have been the terms imposed by, and
loaned from, the Franciscan catechism to refer to the harvest production and, in particular, to the phenomena of maize reproduction, i.e. through the work of “providence” or the economic intervention of the Catholic god into this world affairs, it is clear that Ixánenses use them to refer to resurfacing intentionalities. They believe that the maize grows not only due to the peasant’s work but also thanks to the intense care and work non human master provide for the fields.

PROCAMPO and, subsequently, OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers, on the other hand, were meant to signal the long term futurities of free trade, open markets and the ampler specter of choice for full-fledged persons with human capital. Instead, they have collapsed into shorter-term cycles. Having been transformed from proof of insufficient support to indexes of insufficient engagement of outside village politicians with village leaders, cash transfers provoked an almost immediate result: people asking the state for more money than the provided by meager cash transfers. However, the process of demanding more cash transfers does not involve a direct citizen-state dialogue. Rather than asking for money from the SAGARPA representative individually, people rely on local leaders to make demands. This “chain of demands” has strengthened local leaders’ ties and “engagements” with national political representatives. The distant giver state and the atomized cash-transfer beneficiary seem to appear only at the international organizations literature, the national press and the national transparency campaigns.

Thanks to the ritual philosophy and practice of endurance and responsibility,

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28 In 2012 when the kilogram of maize flour has a price of MXN $8, with an hectare of PROCAMPO, i.e. MXN$ 1300, one could buy 162.5 kgrs of maize ready made maize flour. Given that a tortilla could weight around 40grs, and a person could eats around 10 tortillas a day, such a person could consume 146 kgrs of maize flour a year.
many Ixán agriculturalists reinvest their meager cash transfer incomes directly or indirectly, through ritual expenditures, into agriculture. Almost no one considers working outside the village incompatible with having a milpa for growing maize. The village maize has a different religious quality; it is necessary for the festivals. As it is of a much better taste and less expensive than imported maize, Ixán people continue to cultivate it.

To return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, through asking, promising and engaging, the village leaders seek an increased return from government cash transfers. This is no minor task for them. While the state aims to disengage peasants through cash transfers that serve as substitutes for social prestations, Ixán’s leaders instead reinitiate a reengagement process. The long-term (20 year), yet unique, cash transfer transaction is aimed to transform peasants into entrepreneurial subjects capable of fending for themselves in post NAFTA labor markets. Ixán’s leaders, quite differently, interpret the given money as continuing an ongoing political relationship of exchange of mutual favors, punctuated by promises and elections. However Ixán’s leaders orderly approach these exchanges according to their ritual repertoire, humbly requesting, promising to give, giving to engage, engaging to receive and, by receiving, they thankfully return. Or, in the event that they do not receive a positive outcome, they could warn authorities that the people they represent could punish them, for starting again and again their petitions and requests.
Conclusions

The PROCAMPO (1993) and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES (1997) cash transfer programs propose intergenerational renewal and the breaking of the poverty reproduction cycle for peasants. Initiated to incorporate agriculturalists to the free trade of rural commodities following NAFTA, the first program’s main objective was to adjust current agriculturalists to new potential markets. Such an adjustment was originally expected to take 15 years, from 1993 to 2008. With the full incorporation of Mexico to maize and beans tariff-free trade in 2008, however, the program was extended for 5 additional years. The objective of OPORTUNIDADES was the economic conversion of these agriculturalists’ children into new economic subjects. To this end, cash transfers provide impoverished parents with an incentive to fulfill explicit education and health requirements for their children. The IADB and the Mexican government will evaluate both PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES in 2013.

These two the programs were orchestrated as a once in a life compound of unilateral transactions that, after around 20 years, would definitively incorporate beneficiaries into a very long term and open-ended regime of futurity, imagined by its development givers as full of opportunities for economic ventures. Development policy makers considered the economic support provided by the cash transfers essential for multiplying possible livelihood strategies, and, in particular, expanding economic choices for developing new subjectivities relative to a broadened concept of “markets” to include labor markets in the region. With the cycle of maize reproduction and its
ritual representation in mind, development policy makers intended to emancipate the poor peasants from agricultural and ritual cycles, to bypass local leaderships especially at the village-level—in part for political rather than economic reasons—canalizing “support” from individuals to the National State. By establishing a direct relationship with cash transfer beneficiaries, national authorities intended to diminish village leaders’ power and restructure an economically active population in more diverse economic sectors. In consonance with macro economic changes in the Mexican rural sector, for instance by dismantling small markets of maize and promoting maize imports from the USA, the NAFTA architects and development policy makers promised a shift from labor in the fields towards the service sector. These promises were always, from the outset, too long-term in scope for the people themselves to control the possibility and the timing of their fulfillment: in the lifetimes of present-day adults or for their children in the future. Today the temporal horizons and promises of development tend to postpone their potential realization even further.

In this sense, labor migration and the monetization of poverty through cash transfers can be understood differently, and in a more controlled manner, if the people invest their newly acquired money in their fields, thus stimulating the local maize economy itself. Today one third of the Mexican rural population has migrated to U.S. and Mexican urban centers. However, despite this high migration rate, and being targeted for a gradual “conversion” away from agriculture, a significant number of Mexicans remain working in the fields in accordance with the maize reproduction cycle. The booming growth of the tourism sector in Yucatan has not deterred the majority of Ixán’s male population from considering growing maize for consumption to
be one of their most important tasks. Returning to work in the fields on important maize cycle dates or, alternatively, hiring someone in the village to do so in one’s absence, occurs in the context of the renewal of expectancies. These dates are not only marked by the biological rhythm of maize, i.e. cleaning the fields, burning, seeding, rain season and harvesting, but also by the festival cycle that promises life regeneration in times of decay. Contrary to the development horizons of undefined incremental growth and multiple opportunities for economic ventures outside the village, the ritual activity and religious narratives of Ixán represent ritual thriving as a requirement for life renewal, framed by old, and re-affirmed, eschatological perspectives of an approaching end of the world.

In consonance with a cosmic ending and the annual postponement of catastrophes, ritual is represented as exchange with demanding spiritual masters for life and rain. In pervasive ritual activity, the act of promising is considered vital to thrive, to organize festivals, and to soothe spirits’ requests on time. Just as festival making depends on solemn and informal promises, the village depends on successfully sponsored festivals. However, ritual promises are never open-ended like the development and political promises of the Mexican state and international organizations. As jural, enforceable and sacred propositions, promises of contributions and sponsorship are made in the very precise rite of “jetz kuch” (fixing the burden or agreement on the cargo). In consonance with other rites and ceremonies, promissory agreements aim to “even” or balance spirit and human intentionalities to secure regularity in a cycle of life reproduction while the aims of actual ritual exchange are ontic gains. Such gains occur, according to sponsors, when things are imbued with
“life” by spiritual “owners” or “masters”, i.e. when things become propitious. Although relationships with “masters” are maintained through ritual, the propitious or unpropitious intention of things always remains an empirical mystery for humans.

In her research on Oaxaca’s indigenous masters of territory, Alicia Barabás (2003, 2006 and 2008) stresses an overarching “gift ethics” (ética del don) which she defines as “the set of conceptions, values, and stipulations that rule the relations of balanced reciprocity between persons, families, neighbors, authorities and communities in all the social life fields: work, life cycle, festivals, politics and the sacred” (Barabás 2003). Despite her valuable depiction of both, “gift ethics” and the territorialization of owners and master forces through exchange, her analysis focuses on ideational norms, leaving aside any empirical quality of beings in which renewal are sought. On the other hand, following Farriss (1984, 1987), I consider Mesoamerican “collective anxiety” (Farriss 1987: 575) and its corresponding indigenous “gift ethics” to be results of an indigenous transcendental aesthetics that states the rapid caducity of things. Without an orderly and regular “cosmos” in mind, or a “divinely ordained plan”, humans must infuse, mainly through sacrificial exchange, “the source of energy that kept the whole system going” (Farriss 1987: 575), purchasing it from spiritual “masters”. As ritual actions are carried out in Ixán, according to a tight ritual schedule to avoid “turbulences” and disgraces and to promote renewal inside material objects, promises and intentions develop in yearly and biannual cycles of exchanges. Although both social and ontic reproductions are closely controlled in these ritual cycles of renewal, the main objective of rites is the latter, not the former. Gift-giving ethics and gift-giving manners for getting masters’ favors are the only means of regenerating life
into pre-objectual and pre-categorical things. Therefore rites of renewal are not only “collective purchase[s] of survival” (Farriss 1984: 30-43) but ontic purchases, as well, aimed to renew the decaying thinghood of persons and things from their true “owners” and “masters”.

Cash transfers as disengaging gifts

I have analytically approached cash transfers as gifts because the people themselves interpret them in a corresponding light, according to a Maya eschatology that continues to shape their pragmatic choices in their productive lives. If development authorities refuse to acknowledge cash transfers as gifts, we can apply the critical perspective developed within anthropology and philosophy to focus specific attention within my ethnography. Their denial of cash transfers as gifts could be attributed to a few reasons. The main one is that economists are unwilling to be clear about what sort of “obligations” and “engagements” they hope to create through the distribution of money. They see cash as something essentially to be allocated by choice while they also endorse cash as a choice-bearer instrument. The promissory aspect of this strategy of development is intensified by the fact that the given object (money) is supposed to lack ontic qualities. The amount given represents an indeterminate series of potential conversions into different commodities, with the added quality of being considered an “investment” towards a different future. The long foreseen period of cash transfers’ delivery (PROCAMPO 1993-2013; PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES, theoretically lasting one generation) accentuates the possibilism cash communicates to the so-called “poor” and their children. Moreover, cash transfer ideologues profess a
sort of denial of ontological, social and legal binding, comparable to the “pure gift ideology” depicted by Parry (1986) or an ideal example of the impossible gift sketched by Derrida (1992) that states that a true gift should not even be recognized as “gift”.

From their vantage points in Washington DC and Mexico City, development officials regard cash transfers as unilateral emancipatory transactions rather than objects materializing social entanglements between givers and receivers. Although OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers stipulate co-responsibilities, obligations and, in general, conditionalities between the state and the mother of the child-receiver, the transaction aims to liberate the child from poverty rather than engage the child with the state. Development officials stress the normalcy of the open-ended set of expectancies of an ideal marketplace towards which they “incentivize” cash transfer receivers to move, also pointing out the “multiplier effect” these transfers could produce.

In the following paragraphs I will analyze the anthropological reception of an impossible object, the Derridean gift, and the conditions of possibility for the existence of such a non-object, first, in a typical bifurcated ideology and, secondly, “in the late capitalism of which this bifurcated ideology is typical”. (Cannell 2006: 21-22).

The now frequent application of Derrida’s concept of the “impossible gift” to anthropological objects (Bornstein 2012, Venkatesan 2011) is due to Laidlaw’s account of dan among Jains (2000). According to Laidlaw, the “almost” pure gift of dan does not create obligations or “personal connections”. The dan in question is the giving of alms to Shevetamber Jain renouncers. Before eating lunch, lay Jain offer food to random renouncers collecting alms. Renouncers do not beg and “what they receive is, in theory
at least, a gift offered spontaneously” (Laidlaw 2000: 619). Dan gift-giving theory is primarily concerned with controlling, as far as possible, the transmission of karma accumulated over many lives. Therefore, renouncers do not want to kill, harvest, cook, or prepare food themselves. Engaging in these activities, according to them, will create a polluting violence that they will eventually incorporate into themselves. To maximize their possibilities of salvation (moksha) as well as to survive, they need to receive alimentary gifts and dedicate themselves to the practice of gocart, or grazing.

In the impossibility of making photosynthesis, they need others to survive. Therefore they establish a very limited and specific relationship with lay people who cook and give away some of their rice to them, calling it dan. In the ideology of naming it dan they seem to produce a paradoxical gift that, more than engagement, seeks detachment and disengagement as teleological ends. Although both lays and renouncers live in spatiotemporal proximity, their experiences are different. They ideally avoid each other as much as possible. It is well established that they do not share the same logic of dan. If dan works it is based on the different participants’ (lay-givers and renouncers-receivers) understandings of it (Copeman 2011, Laidlaw 1995, Osella and Osella 1996). But ontologically and ideologically they pertain to the same community. However, even when the dan gift is the only contact they have, both of them profit from the exchange.

After comparing dan with Derridean “pure and impossible” gifts Laidlaw has to recognize that,

However, although donors receive nothing back from the renouncers, or indeed from anyone else on their behalf, it is generally held that they will benefit from being the giver of the gift. This is where the alms-giving differs from Derrida’s impossible pure gift. The recipient is spared the obligations that arise from
receiving, but the gifts have still given. Making a dan is still meritorious, an act of punya or good karma. As such, it is expected, by an entirely impersonal process over which no one has any influence, to bring its own reward; although one cannot know when or in what manner the resulting good fortune will come. It may be in a future life, and indeed in Jain religious stories, this is typically the case (Balbir 1982). (Laidlaw 2000: 624)

Even when dan prompts impersonal relationships based on the transfer of cooked rice, they are still relationships. Dan is still acknowledging some sort of return. In the ontological sense, of one reciprocally affecting others, dan allows lays to help renouncers attain cosmic disengagement and renouncers to help lays obtain or maintain prosperity. Even when Laidlaw seems to deny any form of immediate reciprocity, the dan gift objectifies good fortune in the long term and that is the most important incentive to give. Renouncers eat and disengage themselves from this worldly existence and lays receive good fortune in exchange. It is in the temporality of dan, considered by Laidlaw a typical case of an impossible and “free” gift, where its tricky nature resides. The very long-term regime of futurity of the return, which occurs, for both, in their next lives, makes dan meaningful and deserves some explanation.

According to Jenkins (1998) Derrida’s dismissal of the empirical allows him to construct a very limited notion of the economy and the economic. Derrida’s economy is constructed as being a reference, something that should be overcome in what I might call an uber-economy of impossible gifts, but that Jenkins relates to Bataille’s notion of a general economy (referring back to Bataille’s restricted economy). In one of the most accurate critiques of Derrida’s gifts, Jenkins explains that Derrida “ties the economic to a certain notion of time: ‘whenever time as a circle is predominant... [Derrida writes], the gift is impossible”[Derrida 1992: 9]. There could
only be a gift, he continues, on the condition that circulation has been interrupted. Moreover, this instant of interruption must not be part of time, if time is the regular ordering of successive instants; it has a logical rather than a chronological status, it concerns time but does not belong to it. A gift, he concludes, is not thinkable as a temporal present, a moment in time, but only as the paradoxical instant where time tears apart [Derrida 1992: 9]. The gift is notable for its disruptive properties [Derrida 1992: 3], its impossibility, and paradoxical relation to time: it seems to dissolve certainties of an economic order” (Jenkins 1998: 84).

Laidlaw’s use of the Derridean gift notion has been used to portray a gift that disengages in the very long term. In other words, the impossible gift conceived by Derrida is nothing more than a word referring to an impossibility. The impossibility of grasping the empirical (the given), through a perfect noumenon (i.e. a sign without reference), becomes in his later book on the gift (Derrida 1999) a direct identification of the gift with death, and the gift of death as the final ideal of disengagement.

Cash transfers as bifurcating gifts

Parry (1986) and Bloch and Parry (1989) have signaled the moral dimension in which exchange makes sense. In particular, he explores the moral perils of exchange based on the “pure gift ideology”. It is due to the stringency of the gift or dana (Indian version of the Hindi dan) ideology of pureness that gifts taint givers and receivers with a greater or lesser “bio-moral” filth. In other words, in a well-known context that has idealized purity as an aim, sin arises in contrast. Parry, who also does not care too much for the “bio” and ontic dimensions of exchange, instead focuses his analysis on morals.
However, he did have the prevision to contextualize the moral dimension of gift-giving in a larger and powerful ideology that makes it meaningful. Parry’s discovery is that the people renouncing gift-giving, heredity and dana are “going in for trade” (1989:71).

Unlike the Jain renouncers depicted by Laidlaw, Parry’s Banaras priests have renounced to “burn” the filth they received through gifts. They are condemned to accumulate it. For the priests analyzed by Parry, it is no longer feasible to give away more dana than they receive, i.e. to fulfill the ethics of pure gift through gift-giving, so they have to embody it. In doing so, however, they allow for a reciprocally inverse “innocent” exchange sphere, one of commerce. Therefore one can morally and religiously pursue money in the realm of market exchange. Even though traders are differentiated from priests, who receive and accumulate contaminating dana, the Indian religious ontology allows them to practice commerce religiously.

While Parry depicts priests receiving dana and contaminating themselves with polluting gifts, he also restores a certain ontological reciprocity between traders and priests. Parry outlines how dana works in contrast to other forms of exchange. The Indian religious ontology and ideology, Parry always reminds us, allow one party in exchange to profit from religion, while the other practices commerce religiously. Instead of becoming ascetics and world-renouncers, the same ideology of total disinterest and of pure gifts allows, according to Parry, a landscape on which controlled interest and commercial exchange thrive in moral neutrality.

What most interests me about Parry’s description of the Hindu “innocence of commerce” is how the native ethics, ideology and ontology of pure gifts, and the condemnation that they imply, secure a sanctuary for trade. Parry, therefore, reminds
us that the marketplace trade/religious gift divide hinges on particular moral and cultural values, which I also take to be ontological, that postpone certain actions and consequences (and not others) to somewhere else. Filth is, thus, transferred from traders to priests, as well as from this life to the next. Hence the importance, in my own case, of analyzing Maya ritual practice as well as, and alongside, the development ideologies of transfers, where their meanings rely on their wider futurity regimes.

Following Parry, Fenella Cannell describes this object of study as a bifurcated ideology,

Parry proposes that there is a link between the contrast between altruism and business and the introduction of an economy of salvation. (His 1994 work on Hinduism makes it clear that this is not confined to Christianity, but also readable in other “world religions.”) The idea of salvation is correlated with a realm of exchange that is superior to (and transcendent of) ordinary, earthly exchange, and whose distinguishing feature is that it is premised on unidirectional transactions, in which gifts pass out of the worldly frame and into the beyond. Such gifts are therefore not in any ordinary sense reciprocated, although the believer may hope that the reward for altruism will be salvation in the next life; that his gift will, as it were, be converted from one economy to the other on the condition that he acts in the spirit of the heavenly economy while still on earth. But Parry (1986) suggests that, like the mutually dependent gift and commodity identified by Mauss, such an unearthly economy can exist only in opposition to a still-acknowledged worldly economy in which ordinary reciprocation and sociality play a much greater part. Parry’s punctilious style of argument enables us to isolate what in many other works is somewhat blurred over –that is, the complexity of the suggested connections between Christianity and the late capitalism of which this bifurcated ideology is typical. (Cannell 2006: 21-22)

Parry’s (oppositional) articulation between the “heavenly economy while still on earth “ or “the conversion from one economy to the other”, according to Cannell, reveals economic and ritual transactions replacing each other in a permanently remade interface. Guyer has defined an interface as a meeting point “where difference was maintained albeit on changing bases and with changing terms (1993: 8)”. In this case,
the interface is within a single ideological community.

**Interfaces: beyond bifurcation**

The possibility for greater complexities beyond “bifurcations” between ritual practices and worldly market trades arises when the ideological fields contain discontinuities and power vectors. This is the case, for instance for the interfaces between International organizations, the Mexican government and this Maya community. In this case, the difference includes a negative judgment as well: the Maya ritual cycle is considered “backwards” by the developers, not simply coexisting. While developers and politicians inspired by developmental ideology set a “transition” for leaving behind the “self-sufficient” peasantry, a growing intellectual industry, constituting a discipline sarcastically called “transitology” (Gledhill 1988), thrived. In this discipline, two ideal and universal notions, “the democratic state” (for peasants becoming full fledged citizens, see Gledhill 2005) and the “free market” were, once again, reestablished as goals to be achieved. It was posited that after a period of transition, one state of being, with a full-fledged national democratic state and a free market, would completely supplant another, different one. In such a transition clientelistic exchange would be abandoned for perfectly equivalent free market trade.

Rather than totally replacing one mode of exchange for another, since long ago, Ixánenses have analogically compared different fields of exchange. They have constructed an interface in which they draw partial parallelisms between ritual offerings for renewal and the marketplace. This indigenous philosophy and practice of exchange consider both ritual offerings for “life and rain purchases” and commercial
trade to be mutual “payments” that must prompt “evenness” in return. Just as we
partially contrast common religious notions of “offering” to the economic sense of
“offer”, Ixánenses interchangeably use “ts’aa”, as “giving” and offering” for enacting
purchases in advance. For instance, they “give” (ts’aa) food as an advance “payment”
(bo’ol) for masters’ work (yûuntsilo’ob meyaj) in their field plots. The gift they pay in
advance, thus, is very different from any “impossible gift” or “free gift” for which any
return is unthinkable.

In this sense, Ixán’s trading interface is also being used to analogically
contextualize development cash transfers and ritual exchange into a series of requests,
promises, gifts, engagements, receptions, returns and sanctions. It is through this
temporal arc that Ixánenses first analyze cash transfer reception. When cash transfers
were first implemented, as they were considered unrequested, cash transfers were
hardly promissory for Ixánenses. Cash transfer promises, along with other
development promises, are intentionally vague and avoid precise formulation in the
language of promise. As a result they do not offer Ixán’s agriculturalists any strict time
frames, instead almost indefinitely postponing any actual return. The very long term
promissory frame of cash transfers simply render any of their promises unthinkable as
a promise.

Ixán agriculturalists conceive of cash transfers not as farewell gifts to the
peasants (or meager replacements for social prestations), then but as cases of
“insufficient support” in a distant and burden-structured engagement process. This
process needs to be permanently reworked in order to remain functional. Ixán’s leaders
readdress the ill-purposive exchanges that the state functionaries propose to them,
especially cash transfers, by applying to them the same phases of regenerative ritual exchange they control most: mainly through the human practice of promising and engaging. In this sense, local political leaders intend to re-engage state representatives by addressing them through new requests and promises for more cash transfers.

While cash transfer givers intend to push agriculturalists into the labor market and disengage them from the Mexican state, Ixánenses cash transfer receivers consider these moneys as insufficient tokens of engagement and support. Intending to reengage their givers for more cash, Ixán’s ritual expertise allows them to reframe PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES cash transfers in shorter terms than the future of NAFTA free trade or the lives of their children. In reframing the cash transfers in this way, they do not objectify development as a Salvationist ideology that works as an economic metalinguage, prompting normalcy in the very long term. Instead, they take concrete cash transfers to be insufficient government support that could be increased, as long as they properly beg, require and, sometimes, violently demand it.

At this point, it might be useful to recall that, even today, the explicit aims of cash transfers (increasing agriculturalists’ incomes in a political economic transition and breaking the poverty reproductive cycle in the poor’s children) are poorly understood by their receivers, who sometimes consider the given money to be a “ruse”. However, while the people of Ixán describe development cash transfers as “insufficient support”, based on their own concepts of promise, exchange, support or engagement and temporality, they only sporadically confront, punish or make forceful or violent requests of state functionaries for the exchange ruse they may have incurred. More frequently, Ixánenses face state functionaries and their transfers, not by considering
them as ruses or strategically recognizing state functionaries as “seductive” promisers (Felman 2003). On the contrary, they take them seriously.

Building upon Austin’s studies of performative speech acts (Austin 1976), Felman explains how Don Juan’s linguistic and erotic “felicity” depends on his “perversion of promising” by always postponing his matrimonial engagements. His “speaking body” produces a copulative chain from an unending series of broken promises and sexual acts. Felman points out the performativity and materiality of promises or, in Austin’s (1976: 13-14) terms, those many things that go “right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action”. In short, Felman analyzes the “felicity doctrine” of seductive promising and how Don Juan infinitely postpones his engagement and continues without marrying. Nevertheless, there is yet another way to understand promises, as Cavell suggests in his introduction to Felman’s book. While Austin describes the acts of promising, engaging and even marrying as “to say a few words” (Austin 1976: 7), just two pages later, Cavell notes that Austin also declares that “[s]urely the words must be spoken ‘seriously’ and so as to be taken ‘seriously’” (Austin 1976: 9 and Felman 2003: xviii). It is with this same sense of “seriousness”, which is complementary to Austin’s “felicity doctrine”, that Ixánenses recontextualize promises in their ritual frame.

Mid-long-term apocalyptic narratives (always less than 20 years long), and very short term commitments for rites of renewal (always less than a year), modelized on human promises for maize regeneration, help the people focus on the imminence of miraculous harvests, satiation of immediate needs and the enjoyment of their livelihood by contrasting them to the always close perils of illnesses, death and famine.
However, for Ixánenses, both seriousness and performances of felicitous promises unfold in the short term. While the futurity regime proposed by development transfers include a single, 20 year long transition towards a very long term open future, labor migration and regimes of futurity involved in ritual maize regeneration articulate people’s livelihoods in short and very short terms. Thanks to these shorter terms temporal schemata and the aesthetically ritualized attachments to the concreteness of objects, such as maize and water, cash transfer receivers continue to redirect most of these cash transfers to agricultural practices as they negotiate with political leaders for promises of more cash support, in exchange for their own promises of electoral support in the next election.

Final remarks

Over the last two decades, Mexico’s PROCAMPO and PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES cash transfer systems have distributed great quantities of money, primarily to the rural poor, to monetize poverty and, consequently, to induce the creation of new markets. In line with the ampler agenda of “Neoliberalism—or the belief in the sufficiency of markets to secure human welfare” (Mirowski 2013: 18), Monetarist economists implemented these programs as a means of opening up new markets through the distribution of around US$ 6 billion of cash per year. The anticipated conversion of small agricultural producers into petty consumers, they expected, would radically increase both the labor force supply and the demand for staple food products.

The complete effects of these programs have not yet been comprehensively
studied. In particular, evidence is needed from these and similar programs to compare:

a) to what extent cash transfers have produced a swift conversion of small agriculturalists into unemployed, petty consumers?

a1) according to which theory of universality were cash transfers conceived of as instruments to produce a new subject—a new monetized poor?

a2) in the same vein, how successful were cash transfers, in comparison with other development programs, in inculcating a human re-conversion through a naïve, market-oriented pedagogy of money allocation?

b) to what extent has this conversion implied massive migrations from rural settings to urban environments?

c) which economic sectors have profited from the creation of this new labor force?

d) how have the prices of commodities, those now being purchased by these new consumers, responded to the aggregated demand?

The originary conception that the poor could overcome the deprivation of their “capabilities” through the use of cash, in a model apprenticeship scene of free market resource allocation, diverted attention away from the intrinsic political ends of cash transfers. Despite the repetitive Neoliberal and Monetarist assertions that markets are “marvelous information processors” (Mirowski 2013: 26), loci of opportunistic freedom building and devices for freeing people by teaching them to choose, the imagined conversion of the poor into non-poor through cash transfers has failed in Mexico.

Initially implemented to alleviate new forms of poverty and concomitant social
discontent produced by structural adjustments, cash transfers implied adamant political intentions. In exchange for monetary transfers, receivers were not only expected to demonstrate increases in schooling indices and decreases in malnutrition indices, but also develop new attitudes of support for the federal government. The aforementioned increases in school enrollment and improvements in early malnutrition among the recipients of PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES are well-studied phenomena and, not surprisingly, ones that advocates for the program cite to defend its efficacy. However, the development of attitudes of support for the federal government has not been thoughtfully investigated or, at best, have only been insipidly objectified through election results.

As the programs may have been aimed to bypass critical local leaderships in favor of asymmetrical relationships of “direct support” (PROCAMPO) between receivers and Mexican state representatives, the reconfiguration of Ejidos’ and villages’ autonomies might also have weakened throughout 20 years of cash transfer systems. In the case of Ixán, political anxieties over the control of cash transfers have at times erupted in violent episodes in which accusations of breaking promises were locally sanctioned or threatened with sanctions. In this sense, people in Ixán resist development as an anti-politics machine (Ferguson 1990), the universalization of the developee subject and distancing her from her village representatives, by framing developmental transactions according to the power of their ritual and religious practices. The political effects of cash transfers have also been minimized. Village leaders and local representatives use the ritual and religious repertoire of gifts and promises to maintain their power as representatives and, in turn, constantly evaluate
the state-provided support to the village as “insufficient” if not deceptive. Coinciding with other political negotiations, promissory language has been used to objectify fair, purposeful or fraudulent transactions between state and local office holders and the people.

As I have shown in the Ixán case, cash transfers are objectified according to highly aesthetic gift giving practices of markedly separated requests, promises and regeneration (or corrective punishments). This local gift theory and practices, namely of “purchasing” life, creates an interface of Western clear-cut oppositions between altruistic free giving and maximizing economic transactions. Ixan’s people rethink this assumed dichotomy through these interfaces. Generosity and interest are both overdetermined through particular cases of promising, in which the promisor must risk herself not only in the fulfillment of her promise but, more importantly, she must also adjust herself to the agency of more powerful givers—nature’s masters—within a determined period of time. Ixánenses consider ontic renewals or catastrophic punishments to be clear signs of a theory of intentional causality that underpins all gift giving in Ixán. Such an intentional theory of causality differs from the counterfactual linear theory of causation development economists choose to objectify cash transfers’ effects. While transactions purport an unmasking of intentions that, in due time, will be objectified in the actual world, economic counter-factuality aims to objectify cash transfer causality as a virtual difference between two perfectly comparable mechanistic states of being. Economists investigating, for instance, which has been the “multiplier effect” of cash transfers, pretend to describe how a deterministic system would be with or without a meaningful isolatable cause: cash infusion into people’s lives. In such a
linear, idealistic and deterministic system, intentionality and redundant causality are ruled out of the context. In Ixán, however, where repetitive action meant to free things, persons, animals, and territories from oppressive enslavement and exploitation by powerful masters, including food offerings, gifts, redemption rites and “life purchases”, in calendric festivals or in ad hoc rites, the people reincorporate intentionality in everyday life. These religious and ritual practices are a resource that makes Ixán’s people more attentive to their natural environment, for instance returning from the tourist center where they work to seed corn in their fields, looking for its inherent goodness. Such practices also teach them how to transact politically, not only with a natural context populated by invisible masters, but with other ritualists, local authorities and federal state functionaries as well, objectifying intentionalities and evaluating promises of a better future.

Although the promissory is uniquely understood in the development industry as an open ended set of possibilities, synthetically described as freedom of “choice”, for those outside the development ideology it manifests itself, dwells and depends differently. In Ixán, the links between enforceable promises and the obligations they bring forth are not only grounded in moral or jural actions such as ritualized pledge acts. Promises are responses to requests made by nature owners, and therefore they should be considered ontically grounded, the result of a particular aesthetic perception that cannot be translated and questioned according to other scientific, moral or legal terms. Moreover, ontic gains prompted by the spiritual regime of property reassure the people of Ixán that the promissory not only depends on humans but also inheres in things as “rebirth”.

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For instance, requesting from lords of nature depends on a particular regime of historicity that localizes the past in the landscape and in revelatory dreams. All over the American continent indigenous groups have recognized natural phenomena as indexes of powerful agency. Ritual requesting practices, such as rogation prayers, constitute human sensibility, perception and agency based on inherent lack, poverty and needs. Contrary to the apology of autonomous selves that must be overcome and emancipated from poverty, powerful individuals in such communities are those supposed to have learned to ask.

Requests define an important task—demanding—that has been obliterated by the western gift ideology. In this sense, beggars, poor people who are normally represented as requesters, have been segregated from both western economic cycles, commodity exchange and gift economies. They are situated outside the production, circulation, exchange, and consumption of commodities because they are presupposed as subjects that cannot return anything back to any of these cycles. As they have no money they are not part of the economic demand. They are also considered outsiders of gift economies because they cannot, by definition, return anything in exchange for the gifts received.

As I have tried to show in chapters IV and V, in addition to cultivating sensibilities for identifying requests, Ixán’s ritual activities also teach people how to demand and how to promise. Promises are responsible responses to human and non-humans demands. These two almost unexplored instances of gift-giving—requesting and promising—shed light on the whole gift process. In other words, what we have taken for granted, i.e. the contractual relationship, is composed by many minor but
perhaps more important interactions aimed and necessary to perform the deal. As any contract fulfillment does not simply emerge from causality, but rather from the meeting of mutual intentionalities, this process of evening will flows is composed by exchanges that mirror further exchanges. The explicit expression of return expectations, i.e. the promise, is not independent, or unrelated to the gift given. Otherwise put, in Ixán gifts are promissory because they cannot be fully singled out from a sequence of requesting, promising, giving, receiving and giving back that constitute gifts as tokens of engagement. It is in promises and in their qualities, the promissory, that I have found the interface in which both economics and ritual help the people of Ixán remake their lives. Since maize cultivation and the milpa are the essential grounds and idioms for these offerings, their preservation is considered essential, and cash transfers are invested in all the productive and ritual stages that realize this condition of life and this hope in the future, Complementarily, ritual practice guarantees a re-engagement of economic activities while economic activities prompt Ixánenses to ritually seek out ontic gains.

Finally, I concur with Graeber's general point that “a debt is just a perversion of a promise” (2011: 391). While the language of debt could only retrospectively rule relations, making people believe that they owe because something has already occurred, the language of promises and prospective engagements serve to express exchanges by showing, in advance, the possibility of an open ended series of transactions. However, to ensure that they continue through time, promises and engagements need to be particularly and timely fulfilled. Just as gifts can sometimes work as instruments for producing engagement, gifts also realize a vow in an object.
with the aim of promising an even larger or meaningful object. After the movement of a minor gift that realizes the vow in an object, engagement is actualized. In these cases, the given gift does not close any reciprocity circuit (in its negative-balanced-positive valences) but the given object refers to a promise already made, becoming a promissory gift. Therefore, promissory exchange has no end in contractual terms and it should be kept going continuously. When something goes wrong, when rain does not fall or when development does not materialize, promises, engagements and exchanges should be seriously transformed, paradoxically, in felicitous terms, by reconsidering the requests, renewing the promises, looking for new engagement, by giving more and more carefully.
Glossary of Terms

ASERCA. Apoyos y Servicios a la Comercialización Agropecuaria. Agricultural Marketing Support and Services.

Báalam. Jaguar. Priest. Invisible master, owner or guardian. Also a surname.

IMSS. Instituto Mexicano de la Seguridad Social. Mexican Institute of Social Security.

INI. Instituto Nacional Indigenista, the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (INI), under President Fox’s administration became the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo del los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI) or National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples.

Kanul. Aj kanul. Invisible guardian. Canul is also a surname.

Ko’olebil. Master, mother, madam, owner.

Dzul. Foreigner, rich, highclass. Dzul is also a surname and was an old noble Itzá house.

J mèen. Lit. doer. Medicine man, seer and shaman

MXN. Mexican Peso.

NAFTA. North American Free Trade Agreement.


Santísima Cruz Tun. Also known as Ki’ichkelem Yùum Oxlahun ti ku or “beautiful
master 13\textsuperscript{th} god”. Also known as “Santísima Cruz Tun 3 personas Mabentun de la Gracia Oxlantiku, Cichelen Yùum”. The most sacred stone cross, three persons, stone cross of grace, beautiful master.


SEDESOL. Secretaría de Desarrollo Social. Secretary of Social Development.

Yùum. Master, father, lord, owner.

Yùuntsilo’ob. Masters, fathers, gods, owners.
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