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The Persistence of Indigenous Markets in Mexico's 'Supermarket Revolution'

Diana Christina Denham
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The Persistence of Indigenous Markets in Mexico's 'Supermarket Revolution'

by

Diana Christina Denham

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Urban Studies

Dissertation Committee:
Nathan McClintock, Chair
Veronica Dujon
Megan Horst
Daniel Jaffee
Jack Corbett

Portland State University
2020

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Abstract

This dissertation research investigates the paradoxical survival of Indigenous markets in the context of state-sponsored development strategies that privilege multinational retailers and rebrand Mexican cities as modern and globally competitive. I examine how Indigenous markets have survived the supermarketization (and, more precisely, Walmartization) of food retail that has taken hold in Mexico. Better known by their Nahuatl name *tianguis*, open-air Indigenous markets held in streets and public plazas predate the arrival of the first conquistadors and remain common across Mesoamerica today. My examination of tianguis in native language texts, colonial narratives, popular art, and mid-20th century newspapers demonstrates that while they once constituted the unquestioned, central source of urban food provisioning in Mexico, the state and local elites began to depict them as antithetical to the modern city in the 1970s. Over the last few decades, policy at all levels of government has marginalized the tianguis, instead enticing corporate retailers with liberalized foreign direct investment, free trade agreements, and municipal concessions. Yet, while such policy has ushered in a new era of supermarket dominance across the global South, the tianguis of Mexico have shown surprising resilience.

Complementing my archival and document analysis, I draw on three years of ethnographic research of Oaxacan tianguis (including participant observation, interviews, auto-driven photo elicitation, focus groups, and spatial analysis) to argue that tianguis endure for three main reasons. First, they reproduce local culture rooted in attachment to Indigenous foodways and a sense of food sovereignty. Second, the primary labor

arrangement on which the tianguis is based – non-wage, pooled family labor that relies on household-level self-exploitation – explains how tianguis stay competitive with heavily capitalized corporate retailers. Third, fierce vendor activism stakes out long-lasting claims to streets and plazas. I argue that this activism can be understood in two opposing ways. On one hand, it constitutes a form of insurgent spatial planning, redistributing urban space from the uses prescribed by modernist planners (leisure and traffic flow) to meet the daily material needs of subaltern groups. On the other, vendors' organizations commodify public space in ways that benefit market leaders and some public officials, and creates a hierarchy among tianguis vendors.

Broadly, the study contributes to the project of postcolonial urbanism, de-centering urban theory from its traditional basis in Euro-American experiences, and highlighting Indigenous productions of urban space. It contributes to the literature on agri-food retail restructuring by offering a perspective from the global South that nuances narratives of the effects of neoliberal globalization on food systems through deeper historicization and contextualization. It also adds a food systems perspective to the project of comparative and postcolonial urbanism while advancing existing theory on urban informality by providing detailed historical and contemporary accounts of collective vendor strategies in the face of often contradictory public policy and practice. Finally, by positioning tianguis within the framework of dispossession, racialization and resistance central to scholarship on Indigenous foodways, this study foregrounds a central feature of urban Indigenous food systems in Mexico yet to be examined under this lens.

Dedication

for Lua

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Introduction

In June 2016, alarming headlines dominated Mexican newspapers: “Food shortages in Oaxaca!” they read, accompanied by images of empty supermarket shelves and piles of fruit rotting by the highways. The state governor described a dire situation of scarcity of food supplies – a situation referred to as the “*desabasto*” – and blamed the teachers’ union. Teachers were blocking roads around the state in protest of neoliberal educational reforms, and had intensified the barricades when eight protestors were killed by police. To demand justice for victims of state-sponsored brutality and to prevent federal troops from reaching the capital city where protests were concentrated, they restricted what and who could circulate in the state. Protesters at the barricades were particular about who they let through – seemingly slowing shipments directed to chain supermarkets. In retaliation, the state government unleashed a campaign to discredit the teachers’ movement by declaring that Oaxaca was experiencing severe food shortages.

Though the state governor wished to have the rest of Mexico believe that Oaxacans were going hungry because of poorly stocked supermarkets caused by the blockades, local journalists and teachers’ union sympathizers initiated a counter-campaign to contest both the defamation of the movement and the invented food shortage. “It was a smear campaign,” said one sympathizer:

A government strategy to say that because of the Section 22 teachers, there was food insecurity. It was a counter-insurgency strategy so that people wouldn't organize. But there was plenty of food...We were critical. What *desabasto* [food shortage]? So we went around to different markets to take photos so that everyone could see that, yes, the markets were full...I went to the tianguis at Cinco Señores and it was full. We had to do that because the state covers up the truth.

A post in social media urged people to participate:

As we know, besides the campaign against the teachers' union and the social movement, there is a strong media campaign regarding the supposed food shortages, which is intended to produce fear and polarization. For that reason, we are starting a new campaign in independent media to set things straight. If you go to a market this weekend, we ask that you take a photo and share it on social media and with your networks with the hashtag “Síhayabasto en Oaxaca” (Yes there is food in Oaxaca).

Photos like the one below (See Figure 0.1) aiming to contest the alleged scarcity flooded social media.

Figure 0.1 Child holds sign to protest myth of the “desabasto.” Poster reads: “Food shortages? Come to [the market of] Zaachila! My parents plant squash, beans, cactus, peanuts, jicama, lettuce, radishes...Here everything is fresh, without chemicals like in [multinational supermarkets] Chedraui or Aurrera. Come, you’ll eat healthy and help me keep in school! – Carlitos.” Photo by Silvia Hernandez, June 2016.

Local newspapers likewise refuted the earlier claims with headlines like: “[The market of] Zaachila laughs at the supposed shortages,” (López Salazar 2016) and “Faced with shortages, traditional markets are the best option” (Cruz Hernández 2016). They also responded critically to the alleged *desabasto* with their own images of full markets and fertile fields. One headline read, “Abundant fields feed San Antonino” (Vélez 2016). The unsmiling, gray-haired woman pictured in the article sits with her grandson under a tree, her day’s tomatillo harvest spread before her. She is a “campesina and tomatillo producer” who sells her produce in Mercado de Abastos, and is quoted as saying, “They say that there are food shortages, but that’s not true. The only ones suffering are the transnational stores because they’re not making money.” The article opens describing the town: “Founded in 1649, this Zapotec pueblo of the Central Valleys is illuminated by its green fields sowed

with legumes, vegetables, beans and maize. That's why [residents] laugh when employees of the federal government say on TV or radio that the pueblos and Indigenous communities of Oaxaca don't have food because of the teachers' blockades." The featured *campesina* lists the Indigenous foods of the region, saying, "the pueblo doesn't suffer...We have *quintoniles*, *chepiche*, squash vines, baby squash, we have it all. We're not lacking maize or eggs. We have our hens that lay everyday...In the tianguis, the *campesinos* [peasants/small-scale farmers] go to sell by the *almud*.¹"

In addition to making clear that the supposed *desabasto* was more a government-led campaign to discredit organizers than reality, the debates that unfolded in the media reveal a little-explored but critical underlying tension in the urban food systems of Mexico: the precarious coexistence of transnational supermarkets and the Indigenous market systems they were expected to replace. It is the paradox at the heart of this dissertation.

The markets that activists position antithetically to corporate retailers are known as *tianguis*, a word from Nahuatl (*tianguiztli*), that refers to the day when producers gather to exchange products². That this Indigenous word still dominates the lexicon today attests to their historical significance; though I use "markets" and "tianguis" interchangeably in this dissertation, the Spanish word "*mercado*" in Mexico refers primarily to daily, stationary markets. Tianguis are typically held in public spaces. In fact, in Mixtec and Zapotec, the

¹ Colonial unit of measurement that translates to roughly four kilos of maize (Beals 1975)

² The word 'tianguis' is used in the singular and plural, referring either to a single market or many markets.

most widely spoken Indigenous languages of Oaxaca, the word for tianguis means both market and public plaza³. Today, “tianguis” and the Spanish word *plaza* are often used interchangeably to refer to open-air weekly markets (Linares & Bye 2016).

The tianguis system predates the arrival of the first Spanish conquistadors and remains common across the country today. Early colonial native language texts and conquistador chronicles demonstrate their essential role in village and urban life across Mesoamerica, both before and after the Spanish Conquest. These sources offer rich documentation of the diversity of products traded, the markets’ regional organization, and their role in social and religious life. While available historical documentation tends to focus on the most spectacular markets located in the center of the Mexica empire, in what is today Mexico City, historians have shown that most Mesoamerican towns formed part of a system of rotational markets (Restall et al. 2005).

Economic anthropology demonstrates the centrality of the tianguis to urban life and regional food systems well into the twentieth century. In a series of studies conducted in Oaxaca between 1940 and 1976, anthropologists mapped the regional organization of the state’s tianguis, singling out Oaxaca City’s Saturday market as the most important (Malinowski & De la Fuente 1940/1982; Beals 1975; Waterbury 1976; Cook and Diskin 1976). These anthropologists highlighted the markets’ dual function for campesinos, who came both to sell their products and supplement their own household consumption.

³ *Yahui* in Mixtec (Terraciano 2001); *yaa’* in Zapotec of the Sierra Juárez (Méndez et al. 2004); *luguiaa’* in Zapotec of the Isthmus (Toledo Esteva N/D)

Although markets have constituted the primary source of urban food provisioning for many centuries, over the last few decades, policy at all levels of government has marginalized this system in favor of corporate food retailers. In response to the debt crisis of the early 1980s and the requirements of structural adjustment plans, Mexico – like many countries in the global South – began a process of major economic restructuring, which had profound effects on every aspect of the food system (McMichael 2012). The liberalization of foreign direct investment facilitated the entrance of multinational supermarkets, while the elimination of tariffs on imports through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) enabled global sourcing via distribution centers located elsewhere (Chavez 2002; Tilly 2006). State and municipal governments have also privileged corporate retailers as part of their economic development strategies, with governors appearing at ribbon-cutting ceremonies of new stores and offering speeches rife with the language of progress and modernization. In the context of economic development strategies that privilege corporate food retailers, how have Indigenous markets managed to persist? Why haven't supermarkets, with their economies of scale and massive advertising resources, managed to put them out of business? And given public officials' embrace of the supermarket as emblematic of the modern, urban cities they aim to brand, how are Indigenous markets managing to stand their ground?

Indeed, though corporate retail expansion is now a well-rehearsed phenomenon – with a thoroughly documented “supermarket revolution” (Reardon et al. 2003) accompanying neoliberalization across the global South – little is known about its effects on original food

provisioning systems. Because of their importance to groups underrepresented in policymaking, especially poor urban consumers, small-time vendors, and regional farmers (and especially women in all of these categories), the fate of these food provisioning systems is of great consequence.

Moreover, because different food retail formats compete not only for customers but also for land, the conflicts that accompany urban food system transformation also bring to light the tensions at the core of how urban space is produced. They allow us to see how space is territorialized –claimed, represented, partitioned, commodified or socialized. They clarify the mechanisms by which different groups inscribe their values on the urban landscape. The outcomes of continuously unfolding conflicts are far-reaching. They define who belongs in the city, what it looks like, what activities happen in which parts, who moves within it, and on whose terms.

I approach the question of the persistence of Indigenous markets with an ethnographic study that is attentive to both ongoing political struggles and everyday market life as they unfold in Oaxaca City, Mexico.

Situating tianguis in Oaxaca

Figure 0.2 Oaxaca City's Saturday tianguis, late 19th century. Source: Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzmán, Oaxaca City, Mexico.

As mentioned above, the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca has a deeply-rooted history of urban food provisioning via Indigenous markets. Figure 0.2 depicts the Saturday market in the *zócalo* of Oaxaca City at the turn of the nineteenth century. This tianguis, which was held in the heart of the city center for over four hundred years was the most important in a regional system of tianguis, each held on different days of the week (Malinowski and De la Fuente 1940; Cook and Diskin 1976). The same regional tianguis system described by anthropologists in the 1970s has been reproduced at an urban level. The metropolitan

population of Oaxaca City – at around 600,000 – has multiplied ten-fold since these studies were conducted. Around thirty⁴ tianguis operate in Oaxaca City (See Figure 0.3). Much of the state’s large Indigenous population continues to make their living in the tianguis, which also remain an important source of food provisioning for the urban working class.

Figure 0.3 Weekly tianguis in metropolitan Oaxaca (2016). Data provided by municipalities of Oaxaca de Juárez, Santa Lucía del Camino and Xoxocotlán, 2016. Map by G. Madrid.

⁴ This number includes tianguis registered with the municipalities. It includes tianguis operate on a weekly basis in streets or plazas selling mainly foodstuffs but also a variety of household items, furniture and clothing. It does not include the much older and better studied tianguis of the Central Valleys outside Oaxaca, such as those of Tlacolula, Zaachila, Ocotlán and Etla. It also does not include a number of smaller or more spontaneous “pop-up” tianguis inside the city center that operate as organic farmers’ markets, women’s markets or barter markets, though I reflect on these in this research.

At the same time, cities in Oaxaca have witnessed an official marginalization of these markets, with regular relocations and removals from the city center, together with a recent explosion of supermarkets. Oaxaca's metropolitan area went from having only one small national chain supermarket twenty years ago to having sixteen large supermarkets, including nine Walmart-owned stores⁵. (See Figure 0.4).

Figure 0.4 Supermarkets in metropolitan Oaxaca (2015). Data provided by municipalities of Oaxaca de Juárez, Santa Lucía del Camino and Xoxocotlán, 2016. Map by G. Madrid.

⁵ This includes two using Walmart's name, six by the name of subsidiary Bodega Aurrera, and one Sam's Club. As of 2020, Oaxaca also had three of the Mexican-owned multinational supermarket Chedraui and four supermarkets owned by the Mexican publicly traded company, Soriana. Abarrotes la Soledad and Piticó, two locally-owned chains, also operate several dozen smaller grocery stores not included in this figure.

Figure 0.5 Oaxaca's metropolitan area with locations important to study

Though I conducted fieldwork in markets across the city, my research focused primarily on the tianguis of the Calicanto neighborhood in Santa Lucia del Camino (See Figure 0.5), which has recently found itself on the frontlines of the battle for self-preservation in the face of new supermarkets. Santa Lucia del Camino is the municipality immediately east of Oaxaca de Juárez, the much larger municipality that encompasses most of Oaxaca City proper. Though a different jurisdiction, Santa Lucia operates more as a collection of working-class neighborhoods in Oaxaca City. Its population has doubled to nearly 50,000 since 1990 as its farmlands have ceded to the pressures of urbanization. Less than four kilometers from the *zócalo* [town square] in Oaxaca City's historic center, it is fully peripheral to state investments in tourism, which are concentrated in downtown Oaxaca de Juárez, an area designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987. The municipality of

Santa Lucia has five tianguis, the biggest of which is that held at Calicanto. This tianguis is spread over two long adjacent blocks, which are closed off to cars on Sundays to make way for the market. Around eighty permitted vendors set up stalls each Sunday, joined by at least that number of *ambulantes* – vendors who must secure permission from the market’s leader on a day-to-day basis.

Just two blocks away, a shopping mall opened in 2014 with a Walmart Supercenter as its anchor store (See Figure 0.5, above); the Calicanto tianguis, founded in 1979 was allowed to remain only after vendors staged a sit-in on the land acquired to build the shopping center (described in Chapter 5). The opening of this mall was a feather in the hat of then governor Gabino Cué Monteagudo. He gave a speech about the 660 millions of pesos invested, the many jobs it would create. Newspapers reporting on the event commended him for facilitating the opening of new businesses, attracting millions of pesos in private investment, including foreign direct investment “three times that of his predecessor” (“Oaxaca se consolida,” 2014). Attracting foreign direct investment is almost an end in and of itself – evaluated on its own terms rather than what change it will bring about. The governor is quoted as saying that, “In Oaxaca, positive things happen too. The teachers’ conflict isn’t the only thing that happens here” (ibid.).

A few weeks after its opening, the teachers’ union that the governor referred to had occupied the shopping mall, asked its workers to go home, and blocked the entrance—temporarily shutting it down, along with several other stores around the state. The shutdown wasn’t directed at Walmart or its store policies; instead the union treated it as a

symbol of neoliberalism⁶ representative of the state agenda. They used the occupation of Walmart stores to protest national education reforms and demand justice for victims of state-sponsored brutality (Jiménez 2014).

The teachers' union is, in fact, the strongest and the most oppositional in the state. It stages annual strikes and sit-ins that involve tens of thousands of teachers occupying the zocalo and downtown streets. Often, their protests involve much broader sectors of society. In 2006, a state police attack on a teachers' encampment in the zocalo sparked a state-wide movement that effectively shut down the government for several months. But it is not just teachers in Oaxaca who stage protests. Multi-week sit-ins, road blockades, and massive marches are all commonplace in the city. Roads are blocked by all kinds of organizations – from public health workers to taxi drivers' unions to students to neighborhood groups – as often as a few times a week, causing bottlenecks that temporarily paralyze the city. State workers, coalitions of women's rights groups, and Indigenous community members regularly fill the streets to publicize grievances. Demands of the state are broad-ranging, including improving salaries and working conditions, addressing the impunity of perpetrators of femicides, resolving rural land conflicts, or fixing neighborhood water infrastructure.

⁶ I borrow David Harvey's definition of neoliberalism as a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2005, p. 2). Starting in the 1980s, the Mexican government embraced neoliberalism by privatizing state enterprises, liberalizing foreign direct investment and trade, and passing laws to privatize communal and ejidal lands.

At the heart of many of these protests is a critique of the precarity engendered by the state development model – one that presently embraces neoliberalism, and is generally focused on attracting foreign investment and privatizing and extracting community resources. With left-leaning Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador now president, Mexico’s entrepreneurial class is not always getting the free pass it has grown accustomed to, but Oaxaca state generally continues with business as usual. Small-time producers have generally received little serious investment since economic liberalization and IMF-mandated restructuring began in the 1980s. While all cash crop producers were affected, Oaxacan farmers were particularly hurt by the termination of the Instituto Mexicano de Café (INMECAFE), which supported coffee production with subsidies for transportation, credit, insurance and technical support (Greenberg 2012). Instead, large-scale energy projects, mining, and export-focused production continue to be pursued in the countryside. Despite an increasingly dominant discourse of “neoliberal multiculturalism” (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010), Indigenous peoples’ lands and communities bear the brunt of such initiatives in the name of development (Simpson 2013; Dunlap 2017; Tinajero Berrueta 2018; Macedo 2018).

Oaxaca has the highest number of Indigenous people in Mexico, with over sixty-five percent of the population identifying as Indigenous and one-third of the state’s total population speaking an Indigenous language (DIGEPO 2018). They own much of the land on which they live and farm, and self-govern according to *usos y costumbres*—diverse

forms of local customary rule (Kraemer Bayer 2004) often based on consensus-driven assemblies that assign responsibilities, service obligations and communal labor to undertake the spatial planning of their territories. There is enormous diversity among the Indigenous people of Oaxaca who comprise sixteen distinct groups spread over a biologically diverse landscape. Most of these communities are in the rural Oaxaca, and limited opportunities propel many members to migrate to cities and to the U.S. According to the Instituto Oaxaqueño de Atención al Migrante, some two million Oaxacans live in the United States – amounting to half the population living in the state – and roughly 150,000 emigrate each year (Cruz 2018). A study by the California Institute of Rural Studies estimates that between 100,000 and 150,000 Indigenous Oaxacans live in California alone (Kresge 2007).

Migrants arriving to work or settle in Mexican cities rely heavily on informal housing and employment. Despite serving as a hub for regional commerce, services, and tourism, Oaxaca City has never generated sufficient formal sector employment to absorb the steady flow of migrants arriving since the 1970s. In a process witnessed across the global South, dubbed ‘urban involution’ by Mike Davis (2006), migrants to Oaxaca City have instead been compelled to find livelihoods in a vast and increasingly competitive informal sector. Statewide, over eighty percent of Oaxaca’s four million people experience “labor informality,” which the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) defines as lacking formal labor protections due to occupation in any unregistered business (including self-employment and agriculture) (INEGI 2020). Excluding agriculture, the Institute

identifies an informal sector of thirty-eight percent of Oaxaca's adult population (ibid.). As of 2019, Oaxaca has the highest levels of informal labor in the country (Zavala 2019).

Informal labor statistics are only one aspect of a general context of informality. Both making a living and a place to live are largely informal endeavors, negotiated outside formal channels of government. Just beyond the World Heritage Site that is the colonial center, the city is largely self-built. A few planned neighborhoods near the center are surrounded by many more that were informally and incrementally settled. Urbanization was fueled by people acquiring plots of agricultural lands outside the city, sometimes by squatting with social organizations or through illegal purchases, given that the predominantly ejidal⁷ and communal lands could not be privately sold (Madrid Vázquez 2013). Despite originally insecure tenure, families began to build their homes at the urban periphery, one room at a time, or with makeshift materials that they later intended to replace with a sturdier structure (ibid.). These self-built homes dominate the urban landscape of Oaxaca. From the vantage point of downtown, however, one would never know it.

Pre-dating the neoliberal era by a decade or two, state and municipal governments in conjunction with a local business class, began working to create a city that would attend to the tastes of foreign tourists, whose perceived interests often take precedent over local

⁷ Ejidal lands, or simply *ejidos*, refer to cooperative landholdings where members hold usufruct rights over land, with ultimate ownership vested in the state. *Ejidos* constituted the most common form of land redistribution following the Mexican Revolution. A 1992 amendment to Article 27 of the Constitution allowed for the privatization ejidos; however most ejidos chose not to privatize. For more on land tenure regimes in Mexico, see Assies (2008, 9).

needs. Moreover, the businesses of much of the historic center charge prices affordable mainly to people with access to foreign currencies, effectively excluding most residents. Rents have steadily risen in turn, with locals pushed from the center to the periphery as tourists or longer-term foreign residents occupy the city center. Tourism also profits from packaging and commodifying the regions' cultural diversity in the form of crafts, tours, fairs, and festival (Jones 2010; Hellier-Tinoco 2011, 2014; Affourtit 2019). While money from the tourist industry circulates locally and some 'trickles down' to provide employment for lower classes and the Indigenous communities on which the industry depends, tourist money particularly enriches the already better-off owners of hotels, restaurants and related businesses.

The kinds of urban exclusion that manifest in contemporary Oaxaca, however, have a much longer history than that of tourism or neoliberalism. In 1521, when conquistador Francisco de Orozco drew a grid of what was to be the Spanish city of Antequera (Oaxaca City's colonial name) on top of a Mexica garrison in the middle of a valley occupied mainly by Zapotecs and Mixtecs, Indigenous people were intended to remain outside of the city in satellite towns or rural villages. At the same time, the Spanish city depended on their labor for everything: building its homes, churches and government offices; supplying its food; and, generally, providing the goods and services needed for its day-to-day operation. The new city was slow to take off, but by the mid-1700s, a growing number of Spaniards were able to amass great wealth as merchants of cochineal, the cactus-fed insect used to make a red dye coveted in Europe, which was produced by Indigenous peasants on their own communally-held lands (Baskes 2000, 2012). At that time, racial segregation in Oaxaca

remained starker than anywhere else in New Spain (ibid.). At the end of the 18th century, close to half of all Spaniards in Oaxaca lived in Antequera and nearly ninety percent of the state was categorized as Indigenous (ibid.). While some Spaniards left after Mexico's independence in 1821, North American and other European immigrants arrived to create a new class of elites during the rule of Porfirio Diaz (1876-1911) (Overmyer-Velázquez 2006). The Oaxacan-born dictator believed that the “civilizing” effects of the foreigners and their capital, who came to own and operate the region's mines, would be good for Oaxaca (ibid.). Yet in both periods, racial categories were somewhat fluid. The racial category of ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Indian’ created by colonial rule to justify dispossession and spatial domination (Nemser 2015) endured unevenly in the merchants' city, with some people able to change their Indigenous or other non-Spanish race status through upward class mobility (Chance 1978). By accumulating wealth, usually through commercial endeavors, and, subsequently shedding an Indigenous identity for a mestizo one, some Indigenous people could join the middle or upper ranks of urban society (Chance 1978; Murphy and Stepick 1991).

Post-revolutionary Oaxaca saw the departure of some foreign elites, but even into the late-20th century, some fifty families determined Oaxaca's development trajectory, many with ties to these earlier ruling classes (Basañez et al. 1987). While the national economy grew as a result of expanding industry starting the 1940s, Oaxaca remained a largely rural, agricultural state with little investment in industry and much lower growth rates than the national averages; a commercial sector came to dominate state and urban politics (ibid.). The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) governed the state from its creation in the

1930s until 2010⁸. For many decades, though elections were held, a PRI candidate was often the only party with a candidate (Durazo Hermann 2010). PRI governors effectively controlled rural municipalities by creating a clientelistic system of rule that reinforced existing local leaders, offering them material and symbolic goods in exchange for full political support (Martinez Vásquez 2004; Dalton 2004). Dissent was expressed through popular movements rather than alternative political parties (Basañez 1987; Durazo Hermann 2010). The foundation of Oaxaca's first university in 1955, the involvement of teachers as intermediaries between the state and the rural communities where they taught, inspiration from communist and peasant movements elsewhere, and growing awareness of and disenchantment with party corruption all contributed to the fervor of dissent that took hold of Oaxaca in the 1970s (ibid.). Against this current, the class of business elites consolidated its relationship with the state.

I offer this cursory historical overview as a backdrop to the seemingly quotidian struggle of the tianguis to exist in the contemporary city. It is a context in which an elite class aims to construct and impose a unified will, but where popular responses frequently subvert or overrule this imposition. Given the inability of state-led development to provide for the well-being of most people, it is also a context in which people struggle to live and to make a living amidst an array of informal institutions and forms of popular resistance. Race,

⁸ Gabino Cué Monteagudo, running on the ticket of a coalition including the Convergencia, PAN and PRD, governed from 2010-2016, after which the PRI returned to power with governor Alejandro Murat Hinojosa.

class, gender, and ideological divisions find symbolic expression in conflicts that ensue over contemporary urban foodways.

Methodology

This ethnographic research combines participant observation, focus groups, auto-visual photo elicitation, visual analysis, archival research, discourse analysis, and in-depth, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. Together, these methods clarify the interplay of customer preferences, vendors' individual and collective action, and municipal policy and practice, and situate the tianguis in historical context. I carried out fieldwork between 2014 and 2020, and most intensively between 2017 and 2018. During this period, I spent Sundays at the Calicanto tianguis, where I joined vendors in their stalls, observing the market from their vantage point. At the market, and often between sales, I conducted more than thirty interviews, many of which extended several hours and included multiple family members. I also had a meal or a drink, bought some groceries, and chatted informally with vendors and customers. Aside from Calicanto, I gained a comparative perspective from visiting tianguis across the city, especially the Iglesia de los Pobres (Reforma), El Llano (later moved to el Polideportivo/Calle de Derechos Humanos), Volcanes, Primera Etapa, Infonavit, and several held on different days of the week at the city's Central de Abasto. I later accompanied some of the families with whom I had done in-depth interviews as they carried out their daily routines outside the market. This included visits to the wholesale markets, farms, workshops, kitchens and homes. These visits offered a more complete picture of the labor involved in tianguis and how the tianguis fit into family livelihood strategies.

In order to more deeply understand the perspectives of marketgoer perspectives, I conducted a Photovoice or auto-driven photo elicitation project (Pauwels 2015) with ten regular shoppers. Marketgoers took pictures to respond to a few basic prompts, then participated in an audio-recorded focus group in which they shared their photos in a slideshow and explained their meanings. This method complemented my observation by creating space for an ‘emic’ view where marketgoers could transmit their own norms and values through imagery (ibid.). Intentionally quite open-ended questions served to fuel the subsequent focus group discussion. I also joined some people in their daily shopping, including several young Mixtec chefs who had recently opened a restaurant specializing in Indigenous cuisine based on daily provisioning at the tianguis.

Interviews with a half dozen activists helped clarify struggles over urban food systems and urban development more broadly. They also offered a deeper sense of the popular significance of tianguis, clarifying ways that activists appropriate the tianguis concept, defend existing tianguis, create new ones, or struggle against the imposition of supermarkets over other alternative urban land uses. Thus, I attended workshops of the Mujer Nueva women’s tianguis, witnessed children’s theater at the Central de Abastos, strolled through public plazas hosting barter-only tianguis, and had breakfast at the organic producers’ markets. I followed related social media and interviewed activists involved in these projects about the meaning of the tianguis to them and their own work in meaning-making within the context the tianguis.

To understand the ongoing struggles between tianguistas and the state and municipal governments, I analyzed depictions of conflicts as presented in newspapers during two periods. For historical context, I looked to the period in Oaxacan history when the Saturday market was removed from the city center. I reviewed two daily newspapers during the period of 1977-1979, available as print archives at the Hemeroteca Pública de Oaxaca Nestor Sánchez Hernández. In the period between 2010-2019, I examined portrayals of state and municipal development priorities and conflicts between tianguistas and public officials. Interviews with tianguis vendors and municipal inspectors helped contextualize, nuance or correct these accounts. The perspective of the state, however, is mainly represented by these actors rather than through interviews with higher-level municipal officials and formal sector planners; while these actors' accounts are the subject of future research, this dissertation primarily privileges the voices of actors most deeply engaged in a more grassroots form of urbanism. For a longer historical view, I relied on primary and secondary sources, including maps and photos available at La Casa de la Ciudad and the state's general archives. With the help of a research assistant, I transcribed field notes and audio recordings. I used MAXQDA software to organize data and code according to emerging themes. Within initially broad categories, I developed a set of sub-themes to facilitate finer analysis of discourse around particular events and subjects. I used these codes to organize my writing (Emerson et al. 1995; Crang & Cook 2007)⁹.

⁹ For more detail on methods, see Appendix A.

Positionality

As in any research produced by situated, embodied researchers (Haraway 1988; Rose 1997; Šikić-Mićanović 2010) my identity and experiences influenced this work in important ways. I came to this particular project from years of involvement in Latin American social movements, both urban and agrarian. Efforts to create food systems that better serve the needs of everyone – from farmers to consumers – were central to some of these movements, yet the middle category of food retailers as a crucial link to ensure urban access was often missing. Having frequented Oaxaca City’s public markets and tianguis for many years, I was curious to see how they were faring when it seemed that new supermarkets were setting up shop each month, with the state governor unfailingly cutting the ribbon at the store’s inaugural ceremonies and corporations flooding the media with advertising. I was surprised to see that none of the tianguis seemed to be closing, despite the new establishments.

I saw all of this unfolding through a lens I had begun to focus during a statewide social uprising in Oaxaca in 2006, when I coordinated a collective organizing solidarity work, human rights accompaniment, and independent journalism. State repression against a peaceful teachers’ strike had triggered the creation of a broader movement, known as the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, or APPO). Movement organizers envisioned grassroots democracy and self-determined development as a counterweight to the neoliberal proposals of state officials, as well as as their corruption and violence. Though the repression unleashed by the federal government eventually overturned most of the nascent proposals of the APPO, the

experiences had a lasting impact in how residents understood the tension between the priorities of the state and the interests – and capabilities – of regular people. My own experiences during that period made me see the wave of supermarket openings – what might otherwise appear to be rather ordinary, mundane events – as firmly positioned within ongoing struggles between autochthonous forms and neoliberal propositions. Work as a research assistant under the supervision of Chris Tilly at UCLA’s Institute for Research on Labor and Employment helped me see this trend in its fuller, global South context and grapple with labor experiences spanning the formal-to-informal spectrum of the retail sector. I first learned of the historical importance of tianguis in classes I took with Kevin Terraciano on using primary source texts and images – produced by Spaniards as well as Indigenous peoples writing in their own languages – to understand the Conquest. Running across elaborate descriptions of precolonial and colonial-era Mesoamerican tianguis made it clear that contemporary Mexican street markets could not be viewed as simply a response to employment crises of the neoliberal era. Subsequent food systems research in Oaxaca further illuminated the tianguis as an Indigenous foodway. I coordinated a participatory action research project on food systems with Indigenous youth in Oaxaca’s cloud forest and worked as a research assistant to José Luis Chavez Servía, a botanist at Oaxaca’s Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Integral Regional Development, studying the contributions of native foods to rural diets; I often noted the presence of these foods in the city’s tianguis.

Thus, my particular framing of this project was shaped by each of these experiences. Moreover, my own race, gender, ideological, and national positions mediated what I

could see, the nature of access I had to different groups of people, and the kinds of exchange appropriate to conducting ethical research. As a foreign, white woman, I was occasionally met with suspicion, but I was more likely to be granted an unmerited, privileged place among tianguistas and marketgoers, along with access to research sites of interest. Many vendors had relatives in the U.S., and some had been there themselves; conversations about these experiences often helped establish rapport. My past involvement in Oaxaca's social movement meant that my access to activists was easy, while my access to state officials was more constrained.

In order to thank interviewees for generously sharing their time, ideas, and places with me, I offered honorariums in addition to engaging in informal acts of reciprocity, such as sharing food, giving gifts of books to children, printing and sharing photographs, and occasionally helping to navigate matters of health or legal bureaucracy. In an effort to give voice to research findings in more accessible ways, I am working with one organization to develop a module on urban food systems for their Escuela para el Bien Común (School for the Common Good), which brings together Indigenous youth leaders from around the state.

Literature

The theoretical framework informing this study integrates three bodies of literature that cross social scientific disciplines: critical agri-food studies, postcolonial urbanism, and Indigenous foodways.

Critical agri-food studies and retail restructuring

Critical geographers and rural sociologists converged on agri-food system studies in the 1980s and 1990s to analyze the processes of industrialization and globalization reshaping food production and distribution since World War II (Whatmore 2002). Research examines changing institutional contexts governing agri-food systems, including the new regulatory frameworks of the neoliberal period, the emergence of new types of commodity chains and their uneven manifestations across space, and the influence of multinational actors that have come to dominate these systems (Goodman & Watts 1997; McMichael 2009).

Scholarship has revived the ‘agrarian question’ (Kautsky 1899/1988; Lenin 1901/1961; Chayanov 1925/1986) to understand why agriculture has often followed a different trajectory than industry, with pre-capitalist modes of production in the former tending to prevail alongside capitalist development in the latter. They have examined both the role of nature (Mann and Dickinson 1978; Goodman, Sorj and Wilkinson 1987; Mann 1990; Kloppenborg 2005) and the non-capitalist labor arrangements on which much of small-scale farming is based (Friedmann 1978, 1980; Galt 2013) to account for these differences.

While earlier research in critical agri-food studies focused heavily on rural agrarian change, more recent literature looks downstream to examine the control that supermarkets now exercise across the food system (Burch & Lawrence 2007; Patel 2007; McMichael & Friedmann 2007). Power has shifted from food manufacturers to food retailers – and specifically the global supermarket chains – which manage the vertical coordination of

agri-food industries along the supply chain, making them some of the world's most powerful transnational corporate actors (Burch & Lawrence 2007).

Over the last three decades, supermarkets have exploded onto the food retail scene in the global South (Crush 2014; Peyton et al. 2015). In Mexico, supermarkets as a sector have expanded their market share from less than 10% of food sales in the 1990s to as much as 50% in recent years (Gasca & Torres 2014). Walmart, which opened in Mexico in 1991 – its first store outside the United States – rose to become the country's leading private sector employer by 2003; today Walmart employs nearly 198,000 people in over 2500 stores (Weiner 2003; Walmart 2020). With nearly 60% of grocery sales made in Walmart-owned stores, the company is clearly dominant (Solomon 2019), but Walmart's two closest competitors – Mexican publicly-traded Soriana and Mexican-based multinational Chedraui – have likewise expanded their operations in recent years (Chedraui 2019; Soriana 2019). Some scholars have seen this “supermarket revolution” (Reardon et al. 2003) as a natural progression of retail driven by changing consumer preferences and rising incomes (Reardon et al. 2004; McCullough et al. 2008). By this view, supermarkets are likely to eventually overtake and replace the informal and traditional food retail sectors as they expand across the globe.

Critical agri-food scholars have challenged this perspective on two accounts. First, they have demonstrated that the causes of supermarket expansion extend beyond consumer demand. They have taken a political economy approach to understand how supermarkets have become a strategic sector to expand the wealth and power of transnational

corporations within what has been dubbed a neoliberal or corporate food regime (McMichael & Friedmann 2007; Burch & Lawrence 2007; Howard 2016). Using insights from regulation theory, they have also demonstrated the role of institutions and government policy in mediating and paving the way for this supermarket-led restructuring of the food system (Friedberg 2004; Dixon 2007; Biles et al. 2007; McMichael 2009; Bernstein 2015), as well as accounting for variability in retail labor practices across countries even in the same multinational companies (Tilly & Galván 2006; Tilly 2007; Carré & Tilly 2017).

Second, scholars have challenged the notion that agri-food systems trajectories necessarily follow any one path (Hart 1997; Raynolds 1997; Goodman & Watts 1997; Friedberg 2004; McMichael 2013; Galt 2014). The few studies examining the effects of supermarket expansion in the global South on the traditional retail sector have shown surprising results. Neven and Reardon (2008) predicted the massive displacement of small shops in Kenya, but found that shops simply persisted on reduced sales because no better alternative employment existed. Guarín (2009) demonstrates that, contrary to what theory would predict, traditional mom-and-pops (family-owned corner stores) in Bogota, Colombia flourished even as supermarkets gained greater market share because of the innovations of industrial food suppliers, which developed a distribution system targeting these informal retailers. Denham and Tilly (2015) report evidence of degradation of work among traditional neighborhood market workers in Mexico due not only to supermarket competition, but also to a growing sector of itinerant vendors resulting from municipal policy aiming to alleviate persistent unemployment in the formal sector. Peyton et al. (2015) expose the limitations of a formal market strategy, finding that despite the

penetration of supermarkets in many parts of Cape Town, South Africa, they were incompatible with the food acquisition strategies of poor families. In their study, informal retailers provided services that supermarkets did not, such as convenience for small purchases for residents without a steady income and credit built through trust-based relationships. Such research highlights ways in which urban food systems subject to similar macro-economic political forces may evolve differently and suggests the need to examine the trend of supermarketization in local contexts with attention to the everyday, lived experiences of urban residents navigating the spectrum of retail options to meet their daily livelihood needs. I find that such an examination benefits from attention to the particular context of informality dominant in much of the global South as well as historicization beyond the neoliberal period. To this end, the body of literature on postcolonial urbanism serves as a point of departure.

Postcolonial urbanism and urban informality

Concerned with the ways that cities of the global South are theorized according to concepts developed in and for European and American cities, postcolonial urbanism urges urban scholars to dig deeper into everyday life in “ordinary cities” (Robinson 2006) as sites of theory-making in Urban Studies. While critical agri-food scholars have focused primarily on supermarket expansion as a product of neoliberalism, an export from global North to South, few studies have offered situated histories that privilege the perspective of existing urban food provisioning systems of the South. Postcolonial urbanism offers insight into contested conceptions of the urban commons and public space as well the persistence of informal economies that can enrich theory on these food systems.

One line of research investigates the strategies of local elites aiming to inscribe symbols of modernity on the landscape, tracing continuities from colonial era urbanization to today's contemporary cities and examining sources of resistance (Kooy & Bakker 2008; Meehan 2014, Ghertner 2015; Roy 2015). This research examines the fashioning of these “modern”, “hygienic”, “entrepreneurial”, “green” or “world-class” cities in relation to subaltern groups (natives, slums, street vendors, etc.), the constitutive others that such aspirational cities at once exclude and require (Crossa 2009; Ghertner 2011; Roy 2014). Scholarship has identified the coalitions of private sector actors and politicians in the global South that aim to attract foreign capital or otherwise perform the status of a modern city through emulation (Robinson 2002; Roy 2011) and analyzed the various dimensions of this process that are both discursive – through the enrolment of urban subjects into “appropriate” or “civilized” behavior (McFarlane & Rutherford 2008) – and material, via the absorption of common lands into private property regimes and the imposition of new public space norms (Chen & Skinner 2014; Ghertner 2015).

What has been theorized as urban informality stems from such constructions of the urban predicated on exclusion and segregation. Scholars have argued that inattention to the informal sector – and the processes by which members were excluded from legal access to land, housing, wage-work and entitlements enjoyed by “formal sector” counterparts – is the prime reason that urban theory based on U.S. and European models lacks relevance for the South (Centeno & Portes 2000; Roy & AlSayaad 2003; Roy 2005). Feminist scholars have emphasized the gendered nature of informality in the global South, highlighting the

increased reliance of women on informal employment in the era of neoliberalism and the need to better account for this work (Benería 2001; Chen et al. 2004). Aiming to counter the ideological bias that prioritizes men's work in economic statistics, a long line of scholarship has aimed to make visible women's work – including subsistence, domestic, and informal work – both by developing more comprehensive indicators of societal well-being (Benería 1995, Sen 2001; Stiglitz et al. 2010; Benería & Permanyer 2012) and by producing urban ethnographies of women generating survival strategies amidst the precaritization of work across informal and formal sectors (Benería & Roldán 1987; De la Rocha 2001; Lind 2005; Millar 2008, 2014; Buechler 2014). These ethnographic accounts offer evidence of the differential impacts of state-led modernization on women in Latin America, which vary according to class, race, and ethnicity as well as geographical location, political alliances, and household and individual livelihood strategies (Benería & Roldán 1987; Lind 2002, 2005). Such scholarship insists that only by recognizing what – and whose – work contributes to well-being can gender and class sensitive policies be developed to confront inequality.

Within scholarship on postcolonial urbanism, informality has been conceptualized as produced by the state, not through regulation (e.g. De Soto 1989) but by nature of its capacity to legitimize and delegitimize (Roy 2009; Ghertner 2011). Scholarship has problematized the dualism originally assumed between formality and informality, arguing instead for attention to a spectrum of formality representing different degrees of power, exclusion, legality and illegality (Roy 2005, 2009; Cobb et al. 2009; Etzold et al. 2009;

Denham & Tilly 2013, 2015). Scholars grapple with the persistence of the informal economy despite the well-documented exclusionary practices of city government – which range from regulation to relocation to repression (Bhowmik 2012; Chen & Skinner 2014). Politicians in the global South, aiming to emulate “world-class” cities, often perceive or construe the informal sector – and particularly street vendors – as a visible obstacle to their success (Cross & Morales 2007; Crossa 2009, 2012). Yet participants in the informal economy sometimes have the wherewithal to assert and defend their rights to public space (Cross 1998; Cross & Karides 2007; Staud 2007; Pieterse 2008; Leon Salazar 2010; Crossa 2016). Vendors have asserted themselves via organizing unions, public protests, and marches (Cross & Karides 2007); appealing to the social values of hard, dignifying work (Leon Salazar 2010); appropriating the state’s language of modernization (Jiménez 2012); securing the tacit support of lower level authorities and police officers (Simone 2012); forming cross-sector alliances (Mendiola García 2017); and through “incrementalism” (Simone 2013), gradually expanding into new spaces by setting up a few stalls at a time, constructing the urban fabric by establishing a wide network of reciprocal relationships. In violating the public space norms of a modernist-aspiring city – with its land use planning, anticipated order, and prescribed economy – vendors reconfigure space according to their needs and, often, in opposition to those of state and capital (Cross & Morales 2007; Crossa 2009; Crossa 2012).

Such work on the contestation of public space, the agency of informal laborers, and the emphasis on historicization beyond the neoliberal period, inform our understanding of the persistence of the informal economy in postcolonial contexts and nuances the structural

framing that dominates the literature on retail restructuring. However, while the services of the informal economy have been recognized as essential to the livelihoods of the urban poor – particularly in providing low-cost goods, particularly foodstuffs, in small quantities in convenient locations (Chen & Skinner 2014) – scholarship on postcolonial urbanism and informality has rarely examined their role in urban food systems. Thus, this study is further informed by the literature on Indigenous foodways.

Indigenous Foodways

Numerous studies of Indigenous markets in Mexico have been conducted – documenting their historic role in shaping Mexican geography and urban life (Olvera Ramos 2007; Long & Attolini 2009; Rios Cerón 2014); their function in a peasant economy (Malinowski & De la Fuente 1982; Veerkamp 1982); their regional organization (Beals 1975; Cook & Diskin 1976); their relevance to regional agrobiodiversity (Torres et al. 1982; Pérez Moreno et al. 2008; Ramos Elorduy 2008; Linares & Bye 2016; Argueta Villamar 2016) and their non-monetary forms of exchange (Arellanes & Casas 2011; Valencia Licona 2014). Yet an analysis of the meanings of Indigenous markets in contemporary urban food systems has yet to engage explicitly with scholarship on Indigenous foodways.

Anthropologists have long proposed attention to the symbolic value attached to production, exchange and consumption (Strauss 1965; Douglas 1966; Phillips 2006). Precisely at the line between nature and culture, food both makes people and makes some groups of people feel they are distinct from others (Appadurai 1988). Anthropologists, geographers,

historians, and Indigenous communities have examined the colonial and post-colonial policies that undermined traditional ecological knowledge and the integrity of Indigenous foodways (Nabhan 2008; Earle 2012; Wadiwel & Tedmanson 2013; Jarosz 2014). They have made efforts to recover these via the collection of oral histories, recipe recording and dissemination (Bodirsky & Johnson 2004) establishing university programs that incorporate Indigenous worldviews (Millburn 2004), recovering histories of resistance to assimilation of foodways (Millburn 2004; Bodirsky & Johnson 2008; Bess 2013); connecting ecosystem, community and human health to “decolonize” the diet (Salmón 2012; Ochoa 2014); and employing the notion of Indigenous food sovereignty as a form of decolonization (Grey and Patel 2015; Daigle 2019).

Scholars have also broadened the scope of scholarship by examining Indigenous experiences in the context of the global food system, linking the suffering of Indigenous agricultural laborers to broader processes of racialization and exclusion (Holmes 2013). As food studies have begun to engage with postcolonial theory, scholars have demonstrated the crucial role of food in political subject formation and in shaping history and identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts, with foodways used as a lens to analyze race, gender, class, power, violence, desire, assimilation and subalternization (Roy 2010; Tompkins 2012; Slocum 2013).

A number of studies have examined how the ruling classes enlist food in colonial and national efforts to establish their superiority and, later, to quell regional, ethnic, class and caste conflicts in attempts to forge a national identity (Appadurai 1988; Pilcher 1998;

Agora-Diaz 2012). As postcolonial nations often sought legitimacy and claims to modernity by emulating Europe, many initially aimed to fashion foodways that emphasized European roots (Agora-Diaz 2012). In one of the most ambitious studies on food and race in Mexico, Earle (2012) demonstrates the colonial roots of such constructions. She shows how food was used to represent the superiority of colonizers, who cited the mistaken consumption practices of the Indigenous people as a sign of their inability to self-govern, and aimed to control dietary practices in a simultaneous effort to assimilate Indigenous people and differentiate themselves (Earle 2012). Pilcher (1998) shows that the same beliefs about the connection between Indigenous foodways and social improvement resurfaced during the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz (1876-1910), featuring prominently in national discourse and reflected in social Darwinian policy. Nutrition and agriculture were key domains through which elites attempted to control social relations as part of a campaign to enlist Indigenous people into building the modern, capitalist nation imagined by elites. Foodways likewise, can reveal the workings of intersections between race and gender, as apparent in Weisenmantel's (1989) work on the *chola* market women of the Andes (1989).

While this “symbolic load” (Mintz 1985, p. 13) that food and foodways carry for humans – meaning that what and how people eat function as expressions of who they are to both themselves and others (Mintz and Dubois 2002) – has long been the study of anthropologists, the Indigenous markets of contemporary Mexico have yet to be analyzed under a food studies lens. Because these markets represent a central feature of urban Indigenous food systems in much of Latin America, this study contributes to the body of

scholarship on Indigenous foodways by examining the processes of racialization, dispossession, resilience and resistance embodied in Oaxaca's Indigenous markets today. Situating markets within this rich body of historical and cultural studies further informs debates in agri-food political economy and postcolonial urbanism.

Organization of the dissertation

Chapter One provides an overview of Indigenous markets in Mesoamerican history, as represented in colonial chronologies; native language texts, illustrations and archeological data; contemporary popular art; and economic anthropology. Through plans, maps and photos, it also offers a visual description of the tianguis in 20th century Oaxaca City.

Despite its centrality to urban life over many centuries, in the mid-1970s the tianguis begins to be depicted as a barrier to the city's progress. Chapter Two reviews two daily newspapers during the period of 1977-1979, when the Saturday tianguis, which had operated in the city center for over 400 years, was pushed to its outskirts. Cloaked in the language of hygiene and progress symbolized by the automobile, the tianguis was constructed as a specifically Indigenous and campesino space—one that urban elites agreed did not belong in a modern city. In this sense, the relocation campaign was in part a racialized project built on earlier precedents to exclude Indigenous people from the city. Tianguis are portrayed as antithetical to modernity at around the same time as the automobile becomes common among the rich, and elites double down on efforts to ensure that tourism would be the engine of the city's development. This chapter demonstrates that

the informalization of the tianguis dates a full decade before the supermarketization of food retail in Mexico but is part of the same process of state-led urban modernization.

Vendors' resistance stalled the relocation, but eventually elites won the battle. Victory, however, was temporary. Not only did the city soon arrive to the market it had pushed out, the tianguis model that traditionally organized regional food systems was reproduced at the urban scale. Almost immediately, tianguis began to spring up around the city, replicating itself in sync with urban expansion. How did the tianguis model expand, despite elite attempts to marginalize it? The remaining chapters address this question.

Chapter Three argues that despite marginalization by the state, tianguis survive as enduring spaces of cultural and social reproduction. Tianguis reproduce local culture rooted in attachment to Indigenous foodways and vernacular perceptions of public space. Just as colonial prescriptions never erased Indigenous food practices, the efforts of modern capitalism to marginalize systems of traditional food provisioning have met with fierce contest. These challenges to the vision of urban modernity proposed by state leaders come in several varieties. They include market-going as an everyday practice based on reproducing food cultures that are interwoven with the needs of the popular classes. They are also present in the conscious appropriation of the concept of tianguis for radical ends by activists. I examine these using a lens of food sovereignty. I find that tianguis survive in part because they represent a counterhegemonic symbol of Indigeneity both cherished as local custom and upheld as an alternative to neoliberal globalization. I examine activist relationships with the tianguis as concept and practice and hold these in conversation with

the perspectives of shoppers as documented in an auto-visual elicitation (photovoice) project.

Of course, preferences for tianguis alone are insufficient to will them into existence. Vendors, themselves, fight for their livelihoods at the tianguis on multiple fronts. Vendors have agency in two respects: they personally confront adverse circumstances through their own hard work and determination, and they join vendor organizations that work to secure access to public space by many means. Chapter Four argues that tianguis endure because they allow vendors to combine productive and socially reproductive activities while depending on pooled family labor and self-exploitation to make ends meet. This chapter draws on the Chayanovian theory of peasant economy to demonstrate how families pool labor in a contemporary urban context, along with insights from feminist economic geography. It delves deep into the family-based livelihood strategies of tianguistas through extended interviews with multiple family members and visits to their homes, farms, workshops and wholesale markets. In addition to clarifying the non-wage labor arrangements and self-exploitation on which most tianguis stalls are based, it reveals a number of subsidies that tianguistas depend on – including combinations of migrant remittances from the U.S., ejidal or communal land, urban land obtained by squatting, government cash-transfers, and initially free permits to sell in public spaces. This ‘stretching’ of tianguista families and dependency on resources that come from outside the tianguis allows them to offer low prices competitive with supermarkets.

As important as these family-level vendor strategies are, tianguis would not likely exist in the absence of the strong vendors' unions that represent them. Chapter Five argues that tianguista organizing can be understood in two opposing ways. On one hand, vendors take part in what can be understood as a form of insurgent urbanism. Vendors radically reshape urban space, redistributing resources – in the form of streets and plazas – from the de jure leisure and transit uses designated by elites to the livelihood needs of poorer vendors. In doing so, vendors provide not only for their own families but also for poor urban consumers, who can access culturally relevant, economically accessible food in their own neighborhoods. At the same time, this chapter demonstrates that the organizational basis of most tianguis is far from radical. Instead, it is based on a system of *caciquismo*¹⁰ with a long history of indirect rule in Mexico. The chapter describes the political infrastructure behind the tianguis, which involves a complex web of social organizations, leaders, clientelism, a dance of political favors during election time, and tacit agreements with local inspectors and public officials. It explains how urban space is claimed, “owned,” and partitioned, and it demonstrates that the means by which which these claims are made range from state-sanctioned to semi-legal and confrontational. The chapter also reveals contradictions in the state vision for modernization in the era of neoliberalism. What politicians promote officially (on television, at ribbon-cutting ceremonies of new stores) clashes with extra-official practices of sanctioning informal retail. Finally, a brief Conclusion returns to the main arguments outlined in these chapters

¹⁰ A system of indirect rule with roots in the early colonial period in which community leaders or *caciques* (a Spanish transliteration of a Taino word referring to leaders) dominate by controlling the flow of economic and political resources that members of a given community cannot freely access.

to clarify the contributions of this ethnographic study, situated in an “ordinary city” (Robinson 2006) of the global South, to broader debates in geography and urban studies.

Chapter 1. Indigenous markets in Mesoamerican history

Figure 1.1 El Tianguis de Tlatelolco by Diego Rivera, 1945

Source: Palacio Nacional, Mexico City, Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MURAL_DIEGO_RIVERA.jpg

This chapter offers an overview of Indigenous markets in Mexican history in order to demonstrate their significance for urban social life and food systems over many centuries and across Mesoamerica. I start with a review of conquistador chronologies, which offer detailed descriptions of the markets at the heart of the Aztec empire as well as accounts of the same market system across what is today central and southern Mexico, including Oaxaca. I then review descriptions and illustrations of market culture by Indigenous people in the early colonial period, and I revisit pre-Conquest archeological evidence of markets. Finally, I examine the importance of tianguis in the twentieth century as represented in Mexican modern art and, focusing particularly on Oaxaca, a series of market studies by economic anthropologists.

Markets at the heart of the Aztec empire

In 1519, when Spanish conquistadors arrived in the city-states of Tenochtitlán and Tlatelolco, built on two islands in Lake Texcoco, the markets they encountered astonished them. Cyclical, open air and regionally organized, these markets demonstrated the enormous biological and cultural diversity of the land as well as the capability and reach of the Mexica (or Aztec¹¹). They shared an island with the *altepetl*¹² of Tlatelolco, site of the empire's largest market. In his Second Letter to Charles V, written in the fall of 1520, Hernan Cortes describes the sprawling market of Tlatelolco. The city had, he wrote, "many squares where markets are held and trading is carried on. There is one square, twice as large as that of Salamanca, all enclosed by arcades, where there are more than sixty thousand souls engaged in buying and selling, and where all that is produced in these lands are found" (Jaffray et al. 2009, p. 40). In his *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, the conquistador Bernal Diaz is similarly impressed by the sheer size of the market. He writes of his first tour: "When we arrived at the great marketplace, called Tlatelolco, we were astounded at the number of people and the quantity of merchandise that it contained, and at the good order and control that was maintained, for we had never seen such a thing before (Diaz 2012, p. 208)." Both conquistadors were impressed with

¹¹ The term Aztec makes reference to the origin story of several Nahua groups (speakers of the Nahuatl language) who settled in and around Lake Texcoco after migrating from the legendary land of Aztlán in the 1300s.

¹² Of these Nahua groups, who formed the basin's *altepetl* – roughly, city-states – the Mexica came to rule Mexico-Tenochtitlán. The people of this double-named capital were alternatively known as Mexica or Tenochca. (See Restall et al. 2005).

the “perfect order,” overseen by a council, where each type of merchandise was sold in its respective street without mixing. They describe street after street of markets – streets specialized in wild game, tanned hides, medicinal herbs, building materials, furniture, tobacco, candles, liquidambar scented reeds. They mention an “infinite variety” of clay cookware and liken the streets of cotton cloths to the silk markets of Granada. They make long lists of the minerals they find.

The accounts also offer a glimpse into Mesoamerican diets. Without offering much detail, Diaz notes that women “sold cooked food, dough, and tripe in their own part of the market,” indicating that prepared food was an important part of market day. Their lists of foods for sale do more to shed light on the diversity available, notwithstanding Old World nomenclature. Cortes writes:

There is a street for game, where they sell every sort of bird, such as chickens, partridges, quails, wild ducks, fly-catchers, widgeons, turtle-doves, pigeons, reed-birds, parrots, owls, eaglets, owlets, falcons, sparrow-hawks and kestrels, and they sell the skins of some of these birds of prey with their feathers, heads, beaks, and claws. They sell rabbits, hares, and small dogs which they castrate, and raise for the purpose of eating... There is a street set apart for the sale of herbs, where can be found every sort of root and medical herb which grows in the country...

There are all sorts of vegetables, and especially onions, leeks, garlic, borage, nasturtium, water-cresses, sorrel, thistles, and artichokes. There are many kinds of

fruits, amongst others cherries, and plums, like the Spanish ones. They sell bees-honey and wax, and honey made of corn stalks, which is as sweet and syrup-like as that of sugar, also honey of a plant called maguey, which is better than most; from these same plants they make sugar and wine, which they also sell...

They sell maize, both in the grain and made into bread, which is very superior in its quality to that of the other islands and mainland; pies of birds, and fish, also much fish, fresh, salted, cooked...

The whitish, slippery, fermented liquor called *pulque* is extracted from the maguey, as it must be drunk fresh, special pulque trains daily carry supplies to towns along the railway lines. Flavoured with pineapple, strawberry, and other fresh fruit juices, and well-iced, it is a very good drink, wholesome, and only intoxicating if drunk immoderately. The manufacture and sale of the fiery spirit, mescal, also drawn from the maguey, are under careful restrictions and it is as destructive as absinthe...

The drinks they describe – mezcal and pulque, both derivatives of the ever-important maguey succulent – maintain their popularity in present-day Mexico, as do the fruit drinks. Maize-based products likewise retain their centrality to contemporary diets. Fish and other freshwater creatures were perhaps particularly important in the diets of residents of a city built in the middle of a lake, but are still commonly found salted and smoked in today's tianguis across the country. As for the fruits, vegetables and animals

mentioned, it is difficult to decipher precisely what they might have been; in any case, the sheer diversity of these is similarly found in today's markets.

Though both conquistadors provide long lists of the products they see, they acknowledge that their descriptions are just the tip of the iceberg. Writes Cortes, "Finally, besides those things I have mentioned, they sell in the city markets everything else which is found in the whole country and which, on account of the profusion and number, do not occur to my memory, and which also I do not tell of, because I do not know their names." Diaz, too, laments: "I could wish that I had finished telling of all the things which are sold there, but they are so numerous and of such different quality and the great marketplace with its surrounding arcades was so crowded with people, that one would not have been able to see and inquire about it all in two days" (Bernal de Castillo 2008).

These accounts must be tempered by an understanding that conquerors tended towards hyperbole in order to impress the king and queen of Spain with the bounties of their discoveries and (as we see below) the motives for and success of conversion of Indigenous peoples to Catholicism. I quote them at length, however, because they offer some of the first existing written testimony of the market system in Mesoamerica and because their records documenting the centrality of this system to Mesoamerican cultures are substantiated by several native language sources. These early conquistador letters and diaries also became the primary source material for many chronologists, historians and artists who follow. Descriptions based on them can be found in the works of colonial chronologists such as Francisco López de Gómara and Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y

Valdés as well as modern historians and writers such as Salvador de Novo and William Prescott. Diego Rivera painted *El Tianguis de Tlatelolco*, the mural pictured above (Figure 1.1), from these accounts.

The accounts of Diaz and Cortes reflect an eye for riches, aiming to enumerate the abundance on display rather than the ways different people participated in the market or how it shaped their everyday lives. Yet it is clear by the sheer number of participants that the market was central to the people of central Mexico far beyond the class of elite rulers. Indeed, historians have shown that it was not just these grandiose markets at the center of the Mexica empire that served the people of Mesoamerica; nearly all Mesoamerican towns were part of a tianguis system (Restall et al. 2005).

Toribio de Benavente, the Spanish friar nicknamed and henceforth referred to as “Motolinía” arrived in central Mexico in 1524, just a few years after these conquistadors. Sometimes called the “first ethnographer” of the New World (Serna Arnaiz and Castany Prado 2014), he learned Nahuatl and wrote extensively about the customs and histories of the region. While his observations are laden with the biases one would expect of an early post-Conquest friar, many references to markets across central and southern Mexico help us sketch out several important points.

Motolinía’s observations of precolonial markets coincide with those of Cortes and Diaz with respect to Tenochtitlán (perhaps relying on their eye witness accounts and complementing these with his own testimony), corroborating their centrality to city life.

Like these earlier arrivals, he describes the opulence of the recently conquered Tenochtitlán, and offers a sense of the city's layout, with towns organized around a series of lakes. He describes efforts to segregate Spaniards and Indigenous peoples while explaining the organization of markets:

[Tenochtitlán] is very large and also there are in it many houses of Indians, although outside the area [*traza*] designated for Spaniards. The other neighborhood called Tlatelolco, which in their language means little island...this whole neighborhood is populated by Indians...In each city or neighborhood there is a great plaza where each day ordinarily there is a large market in which an infinite number of people come to buy and sell. And in these markets, which the Indians call *tianguetz*, everything on earth is sold...(Motolinía 2014, 194)

Diego Durán arrived as a small child in the altepetl of Texcoco, on the lake's eastern bank, as a child, some twenty-five years into Spanish rule, and grew up in Mexico-Tenochtitlan (today's Mexico City). His *History of the Indies of New Spain*, which he wrote as a Dominican friar and finished in 1581, relied on the oral histories of Nahuas who had lived before the Conquest as well as Spanish eyewitness accounts such as those reviewed above (Heyden 1994). His fluent Nahuatl and deep immersion in Nahua cultures facilitated insights different from those of other early colonial chronologists (ibid). Despite the challenges of relying on oral history accounts for accurate details of particular events, his references to markets are useful in several respects. Crucially, they capture a sense of the importance of women in day-to-day markets as buyers and sellers.

In one instance, women from Tenochtitlán, “were on their way to the market [in Coyoacán] with their merchandise to buy and sell as usual” (Durán 1994, 84) before they were attacked in a declaration of war; they then returned to their husbands in Tenochtitlán to tell them what had happened. In another story, women from Tenochtitlán go to the market at Tlatelolco and quarrel with other women over purchases. With respect to rival towns of Azcapotzalco, Coyoacan and Tacuba [in a separate account] a council decides the people of Tenochtitlán should go to the market days of these places “without humility or submission,” and “as lords...[rather than] subjects”, and “their wives should go sell fish and frogs and other creatures found in the lake, together with waterfowl they hunted...In this way they would buy stone and wood and everything they needed to build their houses (Durán 1994, 45).” They proceed to hunt waterfowl, frogs, shrimp, and worms for sale. “And knowing which were the market days in each town, they went to these market places as hunters and fisherman and bartered the fowl and fish and water creatures for beams and boards, for small wood, for lime and stone” (Durán 1994, 46). They would use these materials to build a temple to Huitzilopochtli. This segment captures women as merchants in these local markets; it also offers a sense of sellers as harvesters of what they sell and the kinds of products that could be traded. In a vignette describing how merchants inform Moctezuma about Nahua murders by Oaxacans, Duran also makes clear the role of long-distance traders as informants to the empire, a point also highlighted in the *Florentine Codex* (see discussion below).

Some early colonial writing treads beyond the biggest and most spectacular markets at the heart of the Mexica empire to document the reproduction of this same system across central and southern Mexico. Motolinía was the guardian of the monastery of the city of Tlaxcala until 1542, and appears to have traveled a good deal, including spending time in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca. A number of passing references clarify the widespread presence of market culture. A town called Atlixco, “which in their tongue means a freshwater spring,” also “for whoever does not know, is where they hold the market or *tianguetz* of Indians” (Motolinía 2014, 256). In another passage, he describes a neighborhood that was “the most heavily frequented of Tlaxcala and where many people went because of a large market that was held there.” (Motolinía 2014, 248]. In recounting a story to illustrate how peaceful the town of Zapotitlán had become after a period of unrest, he cites a particularly safe marketplace: “And it is true at the end of this month of February of the year 1541...it happened that an Indian left, in the middle of the market, more than 100 loads of merchandise, and it was there a night and a day in the market without anything going missing” (Motolinía 2014, 151).

Motolinía also offers insight into the calendric organization of the markets. In one passage, explaining the calendar system more generally, he explains:

Every thirteen days their weeks were counted but the names of the days were twenty, all named by their names and signaled with figures or characters. And with this same counting system, they also counted their markets. Some were held

every twenty days and others every thirteen days, others every five days, and this was and is how it is in general, except in the great towns where every day their market and plaza is full from noon onwards (Motolinía 2014, 41).

In reference to the town of Zapotitlán, Motolinía writes: “[On] market day, which is every five days, each person sets up with a little bit of goods to sell. And between those five days there is another small market, and that’s why goods are always in the ‘tianguetz’ or market, if it is not the rainy season...” (Motolinía 2014, 151). Most Mesoamerican markets followed the five-day rotation he describes (Hassig 1982).

Aside from confirming the widespread existence of the tianguis and documenting their periodicity, Motolinía’s writing clarifies tianguis as places central to the social and religious life of the cities and towns where they took place. In one vignette he describes a scene that unfolds in the tianguis:

The day that there was dancing in the morning, then [male and female] painters would come to the ‘tianguetz,’ which is the market, with many colors and their paint brushes and they would paint the faces, arms and legs of those who had to dance according to what they wanted or what the solemnity and ceremony of the celebration required. Then, decorated and painted they would go to dress, and some of them made themselves so ugly that they looked like demons, and that’s how they served and celebrated the demon. (Motolinia 2014, 58-59).

In keeping with the worldview of early Spanish evangelists, much of Motolinia's writing is preoccupied with idols, demons, and human sacrifice. He offers a series of vignettes that offer a glimpse into the tragedies of religious conquest for native communities; I cite them here to demonstrate the centrality of the marketplace to religious and urban social life. Many of Motolinia's depictions of religious ceremony and conflict, especially in the context of crowds of people, unfold in the marketplace. In Texcoco, when Spaniards burned down the main temple, which was "the tallest of New Spain," the entire town mourned prolifically, and "the people that were in the market, who were many, raised their voices and cried in agony, and showed that they held on to hope to remain and worship their gods" (Motolinia 2014, 393). In another scene, Motolinia describes a group of people "loyal to their gods" who wished to challenge the evangelism of those teaching "the doctrine of our holy faith." These people, who, "served in the temples of the devil and did not stop working in the service of the idols and inducing the people not to leave their gods" staged a religious act in the town tianguis:

For this reason, one of the ministers of the demon... [dressed as] the demon Ometochtli Acaloa, came out to the 'tianguiz o mercado'. This demon Ometochtli was one of the principal gods of the Indians and was adored as god of wine and very feared and respected because everyone became drunk, and from the drunkenness came all of the vices and sins.

In another scene, children converted to the Catholic faith "had to cross through the tianguiz or market and watched the crowd gathering, which said, 'Our god Ometochtli'.

The children end up stoning this god in the middle of the marketplace where the crowd had gathered, and as a result, the common people (*maceualtin*) are led to understand the vulnerability and falseness of their god. In another description, punishment [by local rulers] for becoming very drunk could include having one's house torn down and “publicly in the market, which the Indians call *tianguiztli*, whether man or woman, they would be publicly scalped” (Motolinía 2014, 317). These stories – regardless of how accurate in detail – suggest the tianguis as a place central to daily social and religious life in Mesoamerica.

Figure 1.2 Merchants inspector interrogates a couple of pochtecas (merchants) during their journey. Source: Florentine Codex, Book IX. *The Merchants*. Folio 19. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Florentine_Codex_Fol_19_tepoztli_decorado_camino_quetzal_pumas_de_quetzal_demonio.png

The fundamental role of markets in facilitating Mesoamerican social, cultural and economic life is also demonstrated in native language records. The *Florentine Codex*, a compilation of twelve books on Nahua culture produced between 1540 and 1585, dedicates an entire volume to the merchants, a specialized class of long-distance traders known in Nahuatl as *pochtecas*. The Codex was overseen and translated by missionary Bernardino de Sahagún¹³ but written in Nahuatl and illustrated by a group of bilingual Nahua. As historians have noted, the Spanish translation, which appears side-by-side the Nahuatl writing, is an abbreviated, and sometimes quite different, version of the Nahuatl descriptions (Terraciano 2010; Peterson and Terraciano 2019). The subjects treated are

¹³ See Sahagún (1892) and Anderson & Dibble (1982) for an English translation from Nahuatl.

wide-ranging, offering an Indigenous perspective on the history of the Spanish Conquest, a rich ethnobotanical catalog, detailed information on agriculture and food preparation, and documentation of calendric systems. We learn about social classes, maize harvest cycles, child birth, medicinal plants, and prized and ritualized cacao beverages. Book 9, *The Merchants*, offers elaborate descriptions of the long distance traders and their wares. It describes how they prepared for travel, including making special offerings to particular deities and holding banquets as demonstrations of their high social status. This special class of merchants was close to that of nobility and sometimes played a secondary role, serving the empire as spies and informants. The Nahuatl historians trace an evolution of the system of marketing, which they date as beginning in the late 1300s with trade in painted feathers. Later, it expanded into stones, cloth, hides, and cacao. Merchants were also involved in the production of some of these objects, including stonework and feather art.

These long-distance traders dealt less in everyday foodstuffs, which was presumably more ordinary and the domain of women. Though local food marketing receives less attention, a few images offer insight. Folio 28 shows a woman selling textiles, what appears to be *petate* or straw mats for sitting (translated as reed seats); “food”, a turkey, which also would have been for consumption.

Figure 1.3. (Female) merchant of textiles, food, reed seats and a guajolote [turkey]

Source: Florentine Codex, Book IX. The Merchants. Folio 28, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Florentine_Codex_Fol_28_compras_fiesta_mantas_alimentos_guajolote_vasijas_asientos.png

Codices produced in other regions also provide evidence of market activity. Even documents supervised by Spanish priests and written in Spanish offer insight into local perspectives because of their teams of Indigenous illustrators. Their techniques and motifs straddle precolonial Mesoamerican and Renaissance European, attempting to communicate a local perspective to a foreign audience (Afanador-Pujol 2015). In *Relación de Michoacán*, a text commissioned by viceroy Antonio Mendoza and produced by a friar (whose identity is uncertain, but suspected to be Jerónimo de Alcalá, working with a team of four Purépecha-speaking artists and narrators, document the history of the pre-Conquest Tarascan empire, which had remained outside Mexica rule. It also documents religious ceremonies and post-Conquest life. One of the forty-four paintings, a collaboration by two of the artists, features a market scene, where the mid-14th century ruler Tariacuri searches for two of his nephews (See Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4 Tariacuri searches for his nephews at the market

Source: Relación de Michoacán, fol 101r. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain, C IV, 5. © Patrimonio Nacional, Spain. Reproduced from Afanador-Pujol (2015).

While I have reviewed the earliest surviving textual documentation, there is substantial evidence that market life in Mesoamerica extended far beyond the reach of the Mexica and substantially predates the “beginning of commerce” as recorded by Tlatelolco nobles in the *Florentine Codex* (Hirth 2010; Hirth & Pillsbury 2013). Maya archeologists of the Classic period (A.D. 250-900) generally agree that markets were an important part of city-states, facilitated by a substantial system of roadways (*sacbe*) and sometimes found in association with ball-courts (Jones 1979, 1996; Chase & Chase 2014; King 2015).

Though Maya glyphs focus on political and religious themes rather than economic, some recently uncovered pictorial evidence seems to make reference to markets. A mural in a prominent building in Cakamul depicts people of varying ranks eating and drinking, accompanied by glyphs of items that were consumed (salt, atole, tobacco) with the prefix “aj” (person of either gender), thus referring to “salt person”; “atole person”, etc. (King

2015). Another recently-deciphered glyph on a Late Classic vessel that could be read as aj k'iwik (person of the marketplace) though there is some uncertainty around this interpretation (ibid). Chase and Chase (2014) argue that the archeological evidence from Caracol, in modern-day Belize, makes clear that marketplaces were central to the Maya landscape in that region. Still, because markets were often held in large open spaces, and sometimes in between settlements rather than at the heart of them, they are often difficult to locate in archeology; archeologists face the challenge of rendering “the invisible visible” (King 2015 & Blanton et al. 1999).

The textual evidence available to document markets not located in imperial centers comes from the colonial period in the form of native language legal documents. These texts from the colonial period offer sufficient reference to the humbler local markets to give evidence of their essential role in village and urban life (Terraciano 2001). In the provincial markets of Oaxaca, legal documents such as wills, in which merchandise inventories were carefully enumerated, records of local disputes that unfolded in markets, and protests over taxation issues, offer record of daily market life that otherwise go unwritten (ibid). Kevin Terraciano, who studies these documents in their original Nudzahui (or Mixtec) language finds that local markets were vital to the exchange among neighboring communities, and supplied Spaniards.

Though day-to-day life in the markets was not significantly altered (Terraciano 2001), Spanish colonists recognized the ways that these tianguis could benefit them and went about appropriating them to their own ends. They introduced the Gregorian calendar,

instituting a new, seven-day market cycle to replace the original five-day cycle (Beals 1975; Hassig 1982). Some markets were located in native ceremonial administration centers, which colonizers appropriated to build churches and promote evangelization efforts (Terraciano 2001). In central Mexico and Oaxaca, colonizers raised money for their endeavors through taxes on vendors, appropriated ancient trade routes, used long-distance traders to carry village tribute, and aimed to eliminate competition by making laws that limited the number of mules that Indigenous people could own (Terraciano 2001; Olvera Ramos 2007). All of these policies met with protest, recorded in native language texts (Terraciano 2001). In the Mixtec region of Oaxaca, Indigenous long-distance traders were often nobles, but lost ground to Spaniards, who dominated commerce by the 18th century.

The post-Independence state maintained control over tianguis by determining where tianguis were allowed to happen. While many tianguis remained in the same places they had been prior to the arrival of Spaniards, archives at the turn of the 20th century reveal that towns regularly petitioned the state to host their own tianguis. In these letters, they express their need to open a tianguis in terms of the products their own residents' need to sell what they produce, the products they must import from elsewhere, and the long

distance to the nearest tianguis in their regions. They promise that the tianguis will not cause any disruption of public life nor create conflicts with neighboring towns.¹⁴

Markets in contemporary popular art and culture

Figure 1.5 La Vendedora de Frutas, Olga Costa, 1951

Source: Museo de Arte Moderno, D.F. Reproduced from <https://3minutosdearte.com/pintoras-maravillosas/olga-costa/>

Despite being subjected to various forms of colonial and post-independence state control, tianguis persist as a mainstay of Mexican urban life and an iconic symbol of Indigeneity

¹⁴ Letter from síndico municipal of Yatrachi el Bajo, Villa Alta, addressed to the Secretaria General del Superior Gobierno del Estado, petitioning the opening of a tianguis, Feb. 10, 1900. Letter from síndico municipal of Santiago Apoala, Nochixtlán, addressed to the Secretaria General del Superior Gobierno del Estado, petitioning the opening of a tianguis March 9, 1901. Letter from the síndico municipal of Zacatepec, district of Choapan, addressed to the Secretaria General del Superior Gobierno del Estado, requesting permission to open tianguis. Dec. 5, 1903. All three of these requests were granted, documented in subsequent letters, within the course of one to two years. Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca, Caja 3290.

and popular culture. The tianguis feature prominently in contemporary Mexican art. Plays and short stories of late 19th and early 20th century writers – such as Dr. Atl, Salvador Novo and José Lopez Portillo y Rojas – unfold in the markets. They feature in classical movies, theater and dance (Carballo 2007). They have equally captured the imagination of visiting foreign artists. During his exile in Mexico in 1940, Uruguayan poet Pablo Neruda writes that:

Mexico is in its markets. It is not in the guttural songs of the movies or the fake rodeos of mustaches and pistols. Mexico is the land of deep red and turquoise shawls...of pitchers and vessels of opened fruit under a swarm of insects...an infinite countryside of steel-blue magueys with crowns of golden thorns. All of this is found in the most beautiful markets in the world (Neruda 1992, 150).

Twentieth-century artists such as Diego Rivera, Olga Costa and Rufino Tamayo depict them in their sketches and paintings (Figures 1.1, 1.5, 1.6). Tamayo, a Zapotec Oaxacan painter who grew up selling fruit at his aunt's market stall, painted market scenes and fruit collections. The sliced watermelons that appear as a common subject in in Tamayo's work, are testament to this early influence.

Figure 1.6 Rodajas de Sandía, Rufino Tamayo, 1950

Retrieved from: *El Siglo de Torreón*, Torreón, Coahuila, 2016

<https://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx/noticia/1270387.watermelon-slices-de-rufino-tamayo.html>

Markets in Oaxaca

Oaxaca had its own vibrant precolonial market culture. While Nahuas came to dominate the region shortly before the arrival of the Spaniards, some linguistic evidence suggests that these were not merely borrowed institutions. In the most common language of Oaxaca, Zapotec, *queya toche toche* referred to a market held every five days (Córdova 1978) while the Mixtec word *yahui* refers both to a market and a public plaza (Terraciano 2001).

In 1522, Spaniards began building Oaxaca City (then called Antequera) over what had been a Nahuatl garrison and, prior to that, a Zapotec center during the era of Monte Albán

By 1910, the adjacent street is also called “Market Street” and the next plaza over is reserved for manufactured or non-food goods (Figure 1.9). The fountain visible on these earlier maps appears again in this image of market day in the early 1900s (Figure 1.11), and the aerial photo taken in 1960 (Figure 1.10) shows how the market begins to gradually fill the surrounding street space.

Figure 1.9. Market plazas, market Street, 1910. Centro de Documentación Ferroviaria, Puebla, México

Figure 1.10. Market and tianguis, 1960. Casa de la Ciudad

Figure 1.11. Central fountain, Mercado 20 de noviembre (early 20th century).

Archivo Hamilton, Casa de la Ciudad

In a series of studies conducted between 1940 and 1976, anthropologists stress the continued centrality of Oaxacan tianguis to the regional food system, highlighting their dual function for producer-vendors who also came to buy. They studied the spatial and periodic distribution, nature of specialization and range of goods sold, ethnic and class characteristics of vendors, institutions and networks governing markets, and reactions to a modernizing and industrializing national economy (Malinowski and De la Fuente 1982; Waterbury 1976; Beals 1975; Cook and Diskin 1976). Similar studies were conducted all over Mexico and Central America, documenting the tianguis as an institution vital to everyday life across Mesoamerica (Marroquín 1957; Bonfil Batalla 1971; Báez and Warman 1982; Veerkamp 1982; Calderón 1984; Camacho 1986; Anzures y Bolaños, 1991; Villegas 2016).

Anthropologists Malinowski and De la Fuente wrote in 1941, that the “peasant markets of Oaxaca” were an “ephemeral, dramatic museum of the day” (Malinowski 1982, p. 61). Captivated by what they understood as a display of customs, values, technologies, crafts, agriculture and connections, they set out to understand the function of the peasant markets of the Central Valleys – the main economic mechanisms of distribution in the state. They observed that these markets were essential to the regional food system, noting that “if the nearest market in the Valley disappeared overnight, the Indians from adjacent mountain districts...would be on the verge of starvation” (p. 128). The markets, for Malinowski and De la Fuente were a function of the “hand to mouth existence of the poorest Indians and the short-term budget of the majority of people” (p. 68).

Malinowski and De la Fuente help us imagine the Oaxacan tianguis at the beginning of the 1940s. Vendors came from surrounding pueblos in the valleys and the northern mountains by donkey, which they parked in a courtyard. They slept outside to set up their stalls the following morning. The fruits and vegetable stands were the first to open, with a section where “the poorest Indians” sold cheap or bruised fruits. Livestock was sold at an urban stockyard; at the meat market, marketgoers could choose their cuts for immediate roasting and eating. He sees ixtle bags, ropes, leather, “an astonishingly large display of flowers”; amidst the rows of goods one could find buskers, a merry-go-round, vendors coming back from mass in “a regular type of religious devotion connected with the success of a marketplace”. The day after the market, peddlers would take what didn’t sell in the market door-to-door. Malinowski describes how villages come to life on market days; he takes special interest in precolonial technologies such as the metate corn grinders and non-monetary barter systems. On one corner of the market was the office of the Administración de Mercados responsible for taxation, where “prime vending spots” were paid.

Malinowski and De la Fuente draw up a plan of the market as an aid to understanding class associations of vendors. They write:

The professional merchant from Oaxaca is able to construct a wooden booth or elaborate tent, but his stock in trade will be varied and voluminous and he can afford to pay more for the larger space occupied. The poor Indians, on the other hand, will be found huddled together selling their wares out of a bag or a basket or a frayed mat, each occupying a very small space and disposing of a small quantity and limited range of articles. Thus, one can see that the fixity of configuration, type of selling site, class of transaction and economic background of the vendor or all intimately related (107).

They identify classes of vendors including campesinos, increasingly specialized middlemen, and “professional buyers” who would buy in bulk to sell during the week at daily markets and shops. Though some urbanites interviewed suggested that the market persisted because “the natives like the market” and highlighted its social functions, Malinowski attributes the existence and persistence of the market to the “hand to mouth of the poorest Indians and the short-term budget of the majority of people.” Because most vendors came also to buy, the market had an equally important dual function where many shoppers were also producer-vendors. He also mentions the huge variety of goods and the comfort of Indigenous people in a traditional market setting compared to in fixed urban stores.

At the market, everyone brushed elbows. Malinowski describes five social classes in relationship to the market. This includes the “bourgeoisie...the main industrialists and

wholesale merchants, the highest government officials and a few mine owners” who are mostly Spaniards and one or two other foreigners. While they have “motorcars [and] comfortable houses” and import much of their goods, they “still frequent the marketplace” (p. 124). The next group are town dwellers who buy clothing from shops but use markets for everything else. A third group of “urban mestizos” including teachers, small shopkeepers and government employees” depends on the markets as does the largest urban category, the “poor urban population” of small artisans and employees. They are “distinguished from the peasant in dress and mode of life, and might afford an occasional newspaper, etc. unlike the mountain Indian”. Finally, there are peasants, who represent the lowest class in Malinowski’s description. He notes the various racist terms used to describe them, always in contrast with “civilized”, “gente de razón” (rational people), “los correctos” and “gente de castellano” (Spanish-speaking people.). They are, then, called, “naturales”, “tontos”, “gente de idioma” and “yopes”. Markers are native language speaking, mended clothing, huarache-wearing farmers. Finally, there are the Indians from the mountains, who Malinowski considers the “most important...to the vitality of the market.”

Notably, everyone depends on the market. Even the higher classes wishing to distinguish themselves as consumers of particular goods frequent the market, though, perhaps, it is the most fundamental to the survival of peasants and lower urban classes. This continues to be the case thirty years later, when anthropologists Beals (1975), Waterbury (1976) and Diskin and Cook (1976) embarked on their studies of the Oaxacan markets in the city

and across the state. We know that the main Saturday market in Oaxaca City continued, in the 1970s, to dominate the rhythm of urban life for city and village dwellers alike just as it had for hundreds of years (Beals 1975). In 1975, it had an estimated 2,000 vendors and 30,000 marketgoers in a city of 62,000 (Waterbury 1976). Other markets of the Central Valley are likely much older than that established in Oaxaca City (though some locations may have changed) (Beals 1975). They were organized so that each occurred on a given day of the week with limited overlap (ibid). An overwhelming majority of economic exchange occurred in the tianguis of the region, and Oaxaca's Saturday market was the most important (Diskin and Cook 1976). All these studies note that peasants produced only partial subsistence and thus were heavily reliant on the market to buy and sell. Beals (1975) compared the traditional marketing system with regard to the "modern" economy – the stores, warehouses, and wholesalers set up since the completion of the Pan American Highway in 1948, which sold industrialized goods produced elsewhere. In 1975, he finds that they are largely parallel systems that do not compete because the kinds of products they sell are different. The corporate retailers that have since entered Oaxaca present a different story.

Conclusion

This chapter has sketched a history of the tianguis in Mexico based on Spanish and native language documents from the early colonial period, including a pre-Conquest approximation represented in these texts and in earlier archeological findings. It traces their development into the 20th century, describing the importance of tianguis to

contemporary art and popular culture and demonstrates their continued dominant role in urban and regional economies. These varied materials offer evidence of the long-time centrality of tianguis across Mesoamerica for many centuries and underscore their historic role in shaping urban space. As we shall see in the following chapter, it is during the last quarter of the 20th century that the modern elite begins to re-construct the meaning of tianguis. Questioning its previously unchallenged role as the foundation of urban food provisioning, this elite class begins to depict the tianguis as something that is not just pre-modern, but also counter to the progress of the city.

Chapter 2. The urban modernization project and the informalization of Indigenous markets

Figure 2.1. Cartoon depicts police ticketing donkey for illegal parking at one of the city's new parking meters. Donkeys constituted the main form of transportation of goods and people from rural communities into the Saturday tianguis at this time. Source: *El Imparcial*, (1970, Oct. 1).

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the history of tianguis in Mexico as represented in pre-Conquest archeology, Spanish colonial chronologies, early colonial Indigenous accounts, contemporary popular art, and economic anthropology. This collection of materials makes evident the vital role that these markets play in daily life among diverse groups and spanning many hundreds of years. The review also demonstrates that, until quite recently, tianguis constituted the central source of urban food provisioning across the country, including in Oaxaca. In this chapter, I argue that tianguis began to be

“informalized,” or delegitimized as urban institutions (Roy 2005), starting in the 1970s. I show how the state, in conjunction with a class of urban elites, began to construct the city’s tianguis as a barrier to urban modernization several decades before the mass supermarketization of food retail in Mexico. While critical agri-food scholars tend to focus on economic neoliberalization in the global South as the cause of supermarket expansion and resulting challenges to traditional food provisioning systems, I show that the marginalization of these systems can predate the onset of such competition.

Scholarship on postcolonial urbanism has proposed an idea of informality as produced by the state – not through regulation but because of its authority to legitimize and delegitimize (Roy 2009; Ghertner 2011). Scholars have also problematized the assumption of an informal-formal binary, arguing, instead the existence of a spectrum that represents different degrees of power, exclusion, legality, and illegality (Roy 2005, 2009; Cobb et al. 2009; Etzold et al. 2009; Denham & Tilly 2015). AlSayaad and Eom (2019) argue that this authority to delegitimize the activities of the popular classes produces a category of informality regardless of the presence or absence of particular legal statuses; the activities of the rich, on the other hand, enjoy a reputation of formality independent of irregular or illegal practices. (Indeed, the various bribery and tax evasion scandals of Walmart in Mexico and across the global South (See Barstow & Xanic von Bertrab 2012; Bose 2019; Corkery 2019; O’Boyle 2020) have yet to earn it the label of an “informal” business). In the context of the tianguis of Oaxaca in the 1970s, it is not so much that the nature of labor arrangements or legal entitlements among vendors changed during the period under study. Instead, the defamation of its public image produced the

tianguis as what would soon be taken as emblematic of informality; the tianguis went from being simply the place where everyone bought their food to a place (and people) distinct from the modernizing impulses of the city, and, as such, no longer dignified to operate with it. Illustrating this change, one life-long vendor first introduced herself to me as a *comerciante* [business-person], and described the street corner where she sold umbrellas. “I’m a street vendor,” she clarified. Then she added, “In the *comercio informal*. Well, that’s what they call us now. *Informales*.” She had sold her entire life in the street, but being called an “informal” – and perceiving herself as such – was something she said happened a few decades ago, though she couldn’t pinpoint the moment.

A review of local newspapers from 1977 to 1979 in Oaxaca demonstrates that this process of informalization of the tianguis by local elites coincides with three moments: the imposition of a particular vision of the modern city that prioritizes the automobile, a state-led sanitation campaign that produced the impetus for a ‘hygienic city’, and tourism-focused economic development planning, dictating that public space should be molded to please tourists. I argue that notions of vehicular right of way and hygiene coded racial categories that reinforced an existing hierarchy, which functioned to establish the legitimacy of elite over popular claims to the city. I find that this framing was used to justify the semi-forced removal of Oaxaca’s nearly 400 year-old Saturday tianguis,¹⁶ the

¹⁶ The word ‘tianguis’ is used in the singular and plural. However, this chapter uses the term in the singular because it focuses on one individual tianguis, the only one in Oaxaca City for hundreds of years.

most important in a regional system of tianguis¹⁷. This chapter focuses on the campaign mobilized to relocate this tianguis from the streets of downtown to an enclosed location outside the city proper. I focus on the two-year period that captures the finalization of the state construction of a building outside the city center intended to house the Saturday tianguis, followed by two years in which the facility was rejected by tianguistas and stood empty. In late 1978, the urban elite won the battle: the tianguis abandoned the city center streets and set up in the new market facility on the periphery. The debates¹⁸ that unfold during this period demonstrate that the urban elite comes to identify the tianguis as a blemish on a city otherwise making strides towards progress and modernity.

The restriction of the tianguis to particular places in (and out of) the city is closely linked to *who* the market represents to the elite class rather than merely a product of its function as a place where food provisioning happens. Rather than simply a discursive category or imagined concept applied to bodies, Nemser (2017) argues that race emerges through spatial domination. He holds that race – and “the Indian” as racial category – were produced by Spanish colonists through spatial practices; subsequently, race becomes enlivened with its own power to reproduce patterns of domination born in early colonialism. From the establishment of New Spain, colonists attempted to segregate racialized Indigenous bodies from their European counterparts while confining them to

¹⁷ Malinowski & De la Fuente (1940) and Diskin & Cook (1975) considered Oaxaca City’s Saturday tianguis to be the most important in a regional system of tianguis; other large tianguis in the región (such as Tlacolula, Ejutla, Ocotlán, Etlá, Zaachila, and Miahuatlán) all hosted their tianguis on a different day of the week, and many goods sold in these markets were procured in Oaxaca City.

¹⁸ If they can be called that – an elite perspective is largely unified and given voice in local newspapers while tianguista perspectives can only be inferred by reported actions/inactions.

particular locations outside city centers. In mid-20th century Oaxaca, the elite diagnosis of the “Indian market” (Malinowski and De la Fuente 1982) as *the* problem of the modern city has roots in racial hierarchies established in this early colonial period. The practice of tianguis removal can be understood through these patterns of racialized spatial dominance.

However, racial terminology in both government and newspaper documents fades in the post-liberal era. As Jiménez (2019) notes in her work on popular claims to the city in Morelia, Michoacán, the liberalism of late nineteenth century Mexico led to a reduction of racially identifying language in government documents even as existing racial hierarchies remained intact. In the twentieth century, ‘conduct’ and ‘reputation’ emerge as the coded language of enforcement and reification of racial categories, with Indigenous peoples finding themselves the targets of sanitation campaigns intended to reform or repress their urban presence (Jiménez 2019). In Oaxaca, a review of the newspapers of the 1970s clearly identifies the continuation of this practice. The campaign to remove the Indigenous market from the city center was largely cloaked in the language of two main markers of modernity/urbanity: motorized transit and hygiene. The tianguis, as it is depicted in newspapers, takes on qualities of the people with whom it is associated – Indigenous peoples and campesinos who are, implicitly and by association, anti-hygienic, unruly, and generally disruptive to (the traffic flow of) a modern city. For the modern city as envisioned by local elites to function, these groups had to be both physically removed from it and educated in regard to its virtues. These issues take on special concern in light of the desire

of Oaxacan elites to fashion the city as a tourist hub, in which Indigenous people could appear as a tourist attraction, but not within a cosmopolitan urban center.

Two main daily newspapers circulated in Oaxaca during this period – *El Imparcial* and *Carteles del Sur* (referred to simply as *Carteles*). *El Imparcial* is Oaxaca City's first daily newspaper, opened in 1951 purportedly to challenge the failures of a particular politician of the era ("Quienes Somos," 2020). In reality, throughout much of the city's history, it has largely functioned as a media outlet that disseminates the ideas of urban elites; controversy, as expressed in the newspapers, often represent dissonance among elites rather than leftist or grassroots challenges to the status quo. *Carteles* (1965-1987), on the other hand, was founded by journalist Néstor Sánchez to provide a slightly more critical voice than that of *El Imparcial*. Differences in coverage can be found, for example, during a student-campesino uprising in 1977, where *Carteles* is somewhat more sympathetic to the demands of movement organizers and *El Imparcial* portrays organizers as foreigners and infiltrators. However, on the subject of the tianguis that occupied so much print space in both papers during the mid to late 1970s, the newspapers' perspectives are aligned: the tianguis must go.

On this topic, these newspapers converge to push the opinion of the local elite. They clearly share a way of thinking about urbanism – about what and who belongs inside and outside the city, what a city should look like, and how a city reflects on its inhabitants. As many a lengthy editorial laments, these elites do not have full control over the way their city presents itself. Indeed, as we shall see, the subaltern classes permanently engage in a kind

of insurgent urbanism, re-shaping the city according to their needs and to the best of their abilities. Local elites have, however, wielded significant power and influence in city-making, including formally shaping the built environment and repressing some manifestations of informal urbanism. This chapter is thus dedicated to understanding the ideas that formed the elites' eventually successful campaign to banish the tianguis from the city center.

The local elite

Before we proceed, a note on who constituted the elite in Oaxaca City during the period under study is necessary. Since the establishment of Antequera (the colonial name for Oaxaca City), Oaxaca's elite underwent a few key moments of transition, corresponding to the War of Independence (1810-1821) and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1924) (Murphy and Stepick 1991). In the former, many prominent Spanish families, who had accumulated wealth as merchants of cochineal¹⁹, fled the city (Baskes 2012). The latter saw an exodus of North Americans and Europeans who had arrived during the reign of Porfirio Diaz and owned most of the region's mines and textile factories. In both waves of departures, mestizo merchants and professionals came to occupy the city's highest socio-economic and political ranks. According to Miguel Basañez and colleagues in *La Composición del Poder: Oaxaca 1968-1984*, by the 1970s, Oaxaca City was run by around fifty families, some of these with ties to early ruling elites and others representing upwardly

¹⁹ Cactus-feeding insect used as red dye produced by Oaxacan peasants, particularly prized in Europe; after silver, it was Mexico's most valuable export for much of the colonial period (Baskes 2012).

mobile mestizos. The urban economy in the hands of these families was based primarily on commerce. As a result, the commercial sector constituted the most politically powerful—in contrast to other areas of the country where an industrial elite emerged from the “Mexican miracle”²⁰ (Camín and Meyer 2010). Elsewhere in Mexico, parties other than the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which had ruled since its creation in the 1930s, began to constitute nascent local political alternatives; Oaxaca City remained a PRI stronghold (Basañez et al. 1987). Leftist dissidence emerged in the 1960s and 70s, instead, in the form of a popular movement of students and campesinos, on which the wrath of a unified commercial sector and state government was unleashed (ibid.). Businessmen created a number of organizations to represent their interests, linked together by the oldest and most powerful Chamber of Commerce, created in 1927, which united Oaxaca’s private sector initiative and maintained close ties to state politicians.

One Oaxacan resident who I interviewed offered a useful description of these families’ strategies to promote their interests as a ruling class, including the diversification across sectors within a family and the creation of civic and business associations. He notes that some represent ties to elite families from earlier periods:

There were some fifty, sixty families regarded as the movers and shakers of the local economy. They had the Chamber of Commerce. And the Lion’s Club, up behind Hotel Fortin, was one of those places where the business, political,

²⁰ A roughly thirty-year period (1940-1970) of sustained economic growth achieved, in part, through import substitution industrialization.

professional community tended to come together. And what is lost is the extent to which those people had been running the city for 150 years. When you walk down Bustamante Street, it's named for somebody from the War of Independence. But in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the Bustamante family, the same family, were still important in local commerce and politics. One thing to understand about the old social elites of Oaxaca is they were a little like English nobility in their approach to maintaining their status. In any given family someone might have or oversee landholdings while others went into government, commerce, or perhaps even the Catholic Church hierarchy although they were more likely to appear in the bureaucratic support system. The idea was to distribute members in such a way as there was always someone who could intercede in ways that gave families an advantage or protect their interests. The goal was to protect privilege and interests. The Tenorios who today own the Hotel Luria. Around for generations. They always had some people in commerce, some people in professions, some people in politics. Who was Secretary of Health under [recent governor Gabino] Cue? Hernan Tenorio. The son of Luciano Tenorio, the head doctor at the Sanitorio del Carmen. His brother Tenacio was president of the state supreme court. They were people who had been around, *criollos* [Creoles], or even when they were mestizos, they were long-term families. Gabino Cue [Governor of Oaxaca 2010-2016] was a long-time commercial family and owned one of the city's first supermarkets. There are still a few families in Oaxaca with names like Elton or Hamilton who were descendants of American, Canadian, and English mining engineers in Oaxaca who arrived two or three decades before the Revolution.

Powerful families in Oaxaca disassociated themselves from any Indigenous part of their heritage. The speaker mentions a mix of *criollo*²¹, mestizo and even North American identities among elites. While *La Composición del Poder* does not deal with the issue of ethnic or racial identity within the ruling class, a telling moment is a description of conflict amongst its members. When prominent member of the elite Heladio Ramírez Lopez advocates a conciliatory rather than repressive response to the popular movement, he is criticized by other elites in racist terms. During the period of conflict, Basañez and colleagues write, “There wasn’t a day that went by that the press didn’t call him... a ‘*tercermundista mixteco*’ (‘Third World-ist Mixtec’)...” (159). The elite used terms related to Indigeneity pejoratively and as the fundamental “constitutive other” of regional and national progress. In the newspapers of this period, when people are explicitly mentioned as Indigenous, it is in four related contexts. First, in the late 1970s, the state embarks on a *castellanización* or ‘Spanish-ization’ campaign to teach Spanish to illiterate, monolingual Indigenous people. In this same period, road construction projects are intended to “change Indigenous mentality” by “putting communities in contact with other lifestyles and moral, cultural and political values.” “Cambio de Mentalidad de Indígenas,” 1978: 1). Third, in 1979, the pope comes to visit Indigenous people described as humble and poor – but in this context these are represented in paternalistic terms as honorable attributes. And fourth, photos of Indigenous people riding into the market on donkeys or selling clayware, baskets, tortillas and *tejate* [maize-based traditional beverage of the valley] are used to illustrate

²¹ In the Spanish *Ley de Castas*, criollos (or Creoles) were people born in New Spain of Spanish parents.

unchanging traditions. Indeed, the elite's depiction of Indigeneity as a counterpart to urbanity and modernity is a constant thread that runs through the colonial period, the Porfiriato and into the 20th century (Murphy and Stepick 1991; Overmyer-Velazquez 2002).

In what follows, I describe the campaign to move the Saturday tianguis to the outskirts of the city, describing how it was blamed for the city's traffic, how it was construed as anti-hygienic, how it was positioned in relation to the state development project that centered on tourism, and how the tianguis resisted relocation.

Moving markets

In 1970, the state government of Oaxaca initiated construction on a complex of buildings that would eventually become the city's bustling, sprawling central supply market and second-class bus station known as the Central de Abastos ("Se inicia construcción," 1970). The first stone laid, the announcement reported, was "for our city... a symbol of unity for progress" (ibid.). Between the Atoyac River and the railroad tracks, and occupying twenty-one hectares, or close to a square mile, of land, the building complex was expected to be a state-of-the-art facility to house the city's two side-by-side daily public markets and the weekly tianguis, which, over the next few years would come to extend over several dozen streets in the city center. It was built on land within the municipality, but just outside of the street called Periférico – a half-circle highway built around what then functioned as the city proper (See Figure 2.2). In the context of today's Oaxaca City, it doesn't seem so far away – a fifteen to twenty-minute walk from the

city's first daily market around which the weekly tianguis was held. But the city at the time had expanded north from the city center, and the southern end along the riverbanks remained mostly farmland. For tianguistas who sold mainly to the carless residents of the city center and newer neighborhoods to the north, it felt very far away.

Figure 2.2. Map of Oaxaca City (1978) with original tianguis and central markets, and new market.
 The new market – called the Central/Mercado de Abasto(s) – is marked in yellow. It is on the southwestern side of the train tracks and Periférico that delimited the city center, and just northeast of the Atoyac riverbanks. The original walled daily markets are marked in green, and the 30+ streets occupied by the tianguis on Saturdays are marked in pink. This is a conservative estimate of streets occupied, based on those most frequently mentioned in the newspapers. However, many articles refer to as many as 50 and 60 streets. Original map source: Mapoteca del instituto de Geografía UNAM, México DF. Highlights, U. Marín.

The relocation seemed like a wonderful idea to urban planners interested in promoting a specific vision of public space, with implicit notions not only about which uses, but also about which public the space should serve. But it struck street vendors as a terrible one. They wondered who would go all the way out there to shop. While the new market was under construction, tianguistas were quiet. But when the space was complete six years after construction began, they began to resist actively. Taken aback by their refusal to move, the local elite recognized the need to craft a coherent argument that clarified the tianguis as a detriment to the city and premised urban progress on its removal.

Tianguis cause traffic, newspapers decry

Just as the tianguis spread stealthily into more streets in the city center in the 1970s, the automobile was arriving in Oaxaca City. Ford began taking out ads on double-paged spreads, its shiny cars parked on manicured lawns with elegant women lounging on them (“Ford advertisement,” 1970). Newspapers also printed unpaid praises to the brand. A photo of a Ford automobile exhibition in the city’s central streets reads, “for viewing by those who know how to choose and distinguish the best” (“Ford cars on display,” 1978). As new drivers took as self-evident their right to the city streets, they found themselves appalled by earlier claims to these public spaces. Images such as these (Figures 2.3, 2.4, 2.5) peppered the two main newspapers between 1977 and 1979, juxtaposing the tianguis with motorized modernity.

Figure 2.3. Woman with child shops for clay pottery at the Saturday tianguis.

Caption reads: *The Saturday tianguis occupies more and more of our streets, constituting a real problem for vehicle transit because it includes many blocks of the center. The Chamber of Commerce has asked that this tianguis be gotten rid of, but to no end. A solution to this problem is urgent.* Source: Carteles del Sur, (1977, Jan. 25).

Figure 2.4. Tianguis stalls fill the street.

Caption reads: *This is the tianguis that invades many of the streets around the central markets. Today we report on the problem and of the disposition of the tianguis to move to the new area.* Source: Carteles del Sur (1977, January 4)

Figure 2.5. Shoppers stroll through tianguis.

Caption reads: The problem of the markets strangles the city. Daily you can see many streets like this: crowds of people, street vendors' stalls and provoking traffic problems. A solution is urgent. Source: Carteles del Sur (1977, Aug. 16)

Indeed, 'traffic-inducing' was the most prominent and damning label that the tianguis receives during this period. Headlines abhorred, "The Saturday Tianguis Blocks More than Thirty Streets" ("El tianguis de los sábados bloquea," 1977). Another photo caption suggested that, "the Saturday tianguis is certainly picturesque but it blocks more than thirty central streets, which causes disruption around the city. For the good of the city, wouldn't it be better if it would move to the great and useful market in the large area that was built for it next to Periférico?" ("El tianguis sabantino es muy pintoresco," 1977).

What is abundantly clear in these articles is that newspapers did not frame urban traffic as a problem of the newly arrived cars to the city. Instead, they blamed the tianguis, a market dating back to the city's origins. Editorialists and newspaper photo caption writers appeared to be doubly offended that the solution, in their minds, is already in existence: a locale where market activities can appropriately be conducted far from the city center. In a long-winded editorial in *El Imparcial* titled, "Serious Problem, the occupation of streets by merchants: it interrupts traffic and is very dangerous" the newspaper framed the problem:

The demographic growth in this city owing principally to other factors like the lack of employment opportunities... has accentuated the problem of the clearing of more than fifty surrounding streets where the vehicular traffic is difficult and dangerous for pedestrians. This problem has been an issue for many years and municipal authorities and other government officials have not been able to resolve it. Recently, it has become aggravated despite having a locale ready – the Mercado de Abastos, where at the very least the activities of the traditional tianguis can be take place. ("Serio problema," 1977).

The articles and editorials, moreover, underscored a preoccupation with encroachment, both temporally and spatially. Perhaps when the Saturday tianguis was contained in a few streets around the markets one day a week, urban elites felt at ease. Yet, it appears that more campesinos were arriving from the countryside to sell their wares, and the tianguis itself began to extend beyond Saturday. The caption of a picture of clothing stalls on J.P. García Street declared, for example, that the street "has turned into a permanent tianguis

where clothing is sold, as you can appreciate in this photo and the traffic of vehicles is constant. A solution to this problem is urgent.” (“La calle de J.P. García...tianguis permanente,” 1977). Yet as another article noted: “The problem is being aggravated because lately the stalls that used to be only set up during the weekend tianguis are turning into fixed stalls in the streets, occupying entire blocks [lists streets] where the stalls are occupying several blocks during the entire week, which causes traffic jams in the whole city.” (“La actual administración,” 1977).

Concerns about traffic and spatial and temporal encroachment of the time reveal notions about a hierarchical right to the city rooted in the colonial period. Across Mexico, even in the many cases in which Spanish colonial cities were built atop a recently conquered precolonial city, authorities made every effort to administer them as separate from and exclusive of Indigenous peoples. The 1792 Oaxaca City census, which attempted to rigorously document all inhabitants according to the complicated system of castes imposed by the Spanish empire, left out Indigenous people altogether (See Chance 1976, 1978). The census thus reflected an ideal of the urban premised on exclusion, in spite of the large number of Indigenous people who did, in fact, live in the city (ibid.). At the same time, Indigenous people were obliged by decree of the Crown to feed Spanish colonial cities, and Spaniards set up or encouraged markets as they served their interests (Olvera Ramos 2007). Though urban market activities historically complicated segregationist policies, the arrival of the automobile centuries later offered a mode of reviving spatial hierarchies by amplifying urban space for the wealthy. As early as 1824, the state congress registered concerns that the tianguis damaged public plazas, and

mandated a plan to restore and “beautify” the plaza (without requiring vendor removal) (Ávila Delgado 2018). But only after the advent of the automobile could elites could advocate pushing Indigenous markets outside the city proper without forfeiting their access to its foodstuffs.

The removal of the markets in Oaxaca paralleled shifts in other cities in Mexico and the United States. Central supply markets – Centrales de Abastos – were being built across Mexico starting in the 1960 as a means of modernizing urban food distribution; ninety exist in the country today (Castillo Girón et al. 2015). Federal credits were made available to this end by the national Bank of Public Works and Services, so politicians also sought to take advantage of this fund. One newspaper article reported that the loan taken out by the Oaxacan state government for the construction of its Central de Abastos was forty million pesos, which would take the state government fifteen years to repay (“El Mercado de Abastos será pagado hasta el año de 1990, 1978). But beyond mere food system planning, elites elsewhere also construed central city markets as urban blight. Around the same time that the Saturday tianguis was being forced out of the center in Oaxaca, the biggest and most important market of Mexico City, la Merced, was confronting similar pressures. The more than one hundred-year old market that occupied fifty blocks of the historic center was likewise depicted as an unsavory center of delinquency, dirtiness, and low moral values (Reid and Aguilar 1983). The removal of vendors, and the social infrastructure on which the neighborhood depended, actually had the effect of producing many of the problems that the market had been accused of (ibid.).

Similar market relocations using similar rhetoric were undertaken in U.S. cities decades earlier; removals freed up central city land for real estate developers and contributed to subsequent urban ‘food deserts’ (Donofrio 2014; Vitiello & Brinkley 2014).

During the 20th century, local officials also layered notions of zoning that were trending in U.S. urban planning onto the colonial blueprint, defining distinct zones for distinct land uses. The connections between these spaces would be made possible by the automobile. Just as early zoning proponent Charles Nichols likened the city to a body (with the business district a “pulsating heart”, the administrative center as the brain, and the streets as “arteries carrying nourishment to every part” (Schwieterman et al. 2006, 17)), a Oaxacan wishing to influence local urban planning suggested that the city could be compared to a “big house”, with separate areas serving separate functions. The editorialist proposes such separation with the tourist in mind:

We cannot begin in any other way the urbanistic remodel of our city that is and must continue to be a small *urbe señorial* [majestic urban center] with sufficient touristic attractions that make and will continue to make more and more visitors come. What they spend here will make commerce come alive and prosper.

The first thing to do is to clear the central streets for the necessary flow of vehicles and people as well as to remodel the monumental center of the city and to put – as it is common to say – each thing in its place. A city is like a big house and naturally it must contain the temples for each neighborhood, well-distributed

gardens...Markets also should have their special designated space where people go to shop, be they housewives or tourists. The food stalls should have a place that is adequate and hygienic so that people can consume the famous Oaxacan food with interest and confidence. Smoke-producing industry should also be installed in the outside area. Businesses should be cleared of street vendors and beggars because the issue at hand is to make this city decent and decorous for ourselves and our visitors.

Naturally, to begin, surely with the next municipal administration, an integral remodeling of our city of Oaxaca, we have to start somewhere. And that somewhere for practical reasons and reasons of order, should be to clear our central streets. This indicates that the Saturday and Sunday tianguis must change locations immediately from those central streets to the large area that was built for them alongside the Periférico. It is a question of order...Oaxaca deserves for all citizens of this city to collaborate in its improvement and progress. No one should feel capable of denying it, either out of irresponsibility or due to being an enemy of progress of this most beautiful city that is ours. So that is where the program to clean up this touristic city should begin. The change of the tianguis is imperative and something that should happen at the latest in 1978, which could be the year of transformation for our city. Later, all of the central markets should transfer to the new installations next to the tianguis and next to the large second-class bus station south of the Periférico. Let's hope that the new municipal government, and of course the state government, will take on the remodel plan that is elaborated but

that needs to be put into practice and that should be done as soon as possible. (“El tianguis primero,” 1977).

As elites tried to consolidate a particular image of their cities, they revived the exclusionism rooted in colonial urbanism and crafted it in conjunction with contemporary visions of the city reflected in U.S. and European planning trends. Ultimately, demanding that streets be dedicated to the circulation of automobiles meant reserving most public space for a very small elite class of aspiring urbanites while expelling people of rural and Indigenous origins.

Dirty markets

The second issue used to depict the tianguis as a place unworthy of the city center was the depiction of tianguis as anti-hygienic places. Across Mexico, hygiene often emerged as a pretext for the imposition of assimilationist and other discriminatory practices towards Indigenous communities. Pilcher (1998) argues that when market foods and practices began to be regulated in Mexico City in 1841 with the founding of the Mexico City Health Board, what were “legitimate concerns about sanitation became conflated with a general disdain for the lower classes and their foods” (p. 59). In Oaxaca, this conflation is especially clear in the newspaper editorials that appear during the tianguis removal campaign. These editorials drip with disgust for market practices. Though no racial identifiers are explicitly used, readers’ own experiences make it immediately clear

whose dirty hands were responsible for the so-called filthy practices described. One editorial described the sausages and tostada stalls, where:

The hands with which such foods are prepared for us are, because we have seen them, very dirty. And the same happens in the stalls of regional sweets, full of flies, where they aren't covered behind a glass case even though recently an order was issued that all kinds of precautions should be taken so that all food reaches customers safely. The stalls where they sell the famous *jicama*²², continue following the same anti-hygienic protocol. We see that every so often [vendors] spray with water from a bucket, lacking in hygiene. And what can we say of the watermelon, of the ice cream cones, and so many other things that we eat every day? (Gúzman Nuñez 1978).

The editorial echoed government-launched public health campaigns underway during the same period. Imagery and examples used in the campaigns centered on Indigenous and campesino vendors in the public way, rather than urban household washing practices, as the source of contamination. The vendor practice of spraying fruits and vegetables to maintain their freshness was particularly targeted. A medical doctor underscored the issue in an article targeting fruit-based drinks: “In fruit stands in the streets, the [women] vendors who want their pineapple to look fresh are always sprinkling them with dirty water that they carry in their buckets, and then people consume those millions of

²² Turnip-like vegetable consumed raw

microbes.” He urged people not to consume the drinks sold by women street vendors (Figure 2.7) (“Las Aguas Frescas,” 1977). A 1977 ad sponsored by the state public health institution highlighted the same issue. The photo on the poster was a market vendor selling what appears to be *chicharrones* [fried pork rinds]. (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6. Public health advisory. Caption reads: *Many of the foods served to the public are contaminated because they have been handled by dirty hands, which causes intestinal diseases that are often fatal. Avoid eating foods that are not prepared hygienically by people with clean hands and fingernails.* (Source: “Muchos de los alimentos,” 1977).

Figure 2.7. People gather around street market stall.

Caption reads: *Sale of products made in an anti-hygienic way, sold in the public way and fatally preferred by little ones, can be the cause of serious illness. Given this situation, the intervention of Public Health authorities is necessary.* Source: *El Imparcial* (1978, Nov. 27).

In another article, the mayor is reported as “appealing to the sensibilities of street vendors, so that the foods they sell [be prepared with] a minimum amount of hygiene to avoid infections and the spread of disease... [He said] if we present a good image, a greater number of tourists will visit us and that will generate more income for everyone, including you.” (“Vendedores ambulantes desplazados,” 1978). In asking for a “minimum amount of hygiene” the mayor shows that he doesn’t expect much of the vendors, but hopes they will make an attempt for the benefit of tourists. He also aimed to educate them that the city’s main development initiative – the tourist industry – is in their best interest.

Yet it is not just the individual vendor practices targeted in the depictions of the tianguis that are portrayed as anti-hygienic. The same editorial cited above deplores the conditions of the entire market:

When it rains, said markets set up in the most unbearable muddy quagmire, creating an endless amount of microbes that contaminate the food even more. It is dangerous to walk during the rainy season, how many of us have suffered trying to pass through the markets full of mud and arrive home with our clothes in a piteous state.

The fact that the markets are in such a populated area contributes to the accumulation of garbage, dust, dirt, water, etc...That's why [we have] the now 'traditional' garbage dumps, which are mosquito-breeding grounds, in the areas around the market, such as on the second block of Miguel Cabrera, the corner of San Juan de Dios, the corner of Díaz Ordaz and Las Casas, and other places that the public has now designated as dumps.

Moving along the fourth block of Las Casas [lined by] the shacks of stalls is a feat. Doing it at night, if one doesn't find drunk individuals in the path, at least one gets a good scare going out and passing cautiously around the feet of the disgusting rats, which scurry under the stalls. That's if it goes well for you, because if not, without realizing it, you can step on them and get a bite. Under those rickety wooden crates [from which market wares are transported and sold],

the most complete lack of hygiene has been nesting now for a very long time. One sees puddles of bad smelling water. They are also a refuge for garbage, and in full daylight one sees that under those popular restaurant stalls, there exists the most complete lack of care and because they leave their things overnight and sell leftover food the next day.

As long as the markets aren't moved, as long as the tianguis doesn't move, there will always be those garbage dumps, those dirt piles, those piles of rotting fruits that affect the supposed touristic and folkloric custom of the tianguis, and according to opinions, tourists like this. Nothing could be further from the truth. What the visitor appreciates are products duly cared for, food that is well-prepared, fruits and other foods that are very clean. Why should we think that being dirty and without bathing is the prototype of Mexican Curious²³? It is to think that civilization has not yet reached Oaxaca (Guzmán Nuñez 1978).

For this editorialist, tianguis and tianguistas alike are hopeless and must be removed. In other depictions, they must be schooled in the way of proper hygiene. In both cases, hygiene stands in as a marker of race and class, where elites must either teach or segregate their inferiors; poor, Indigenous and campesino vendors, in these depictions, directly endanger the welfare of urban elites.

²³ A reference to a song that Oscar Chávez released in 1974 on loss of Mexican identity to U.S. cultural influence in Mexico (song's original name in English)

Tianguis in the eyes of tourists

The point raised in the last paragraph of the above editorial can be found as a thread in Oaxaca's urban planning throughout the second half of the twentieth century: what will our city look like to outsiders? In the early 1970s, tourists start trickling into Oaxaca, and the political class throws its chips in with tourism as the development engine of the city's future. An editorial written in 1970 insists on the importance of tourism to the local economy. The writer insists that by protecting tourists, "we will be protecting Oaxaca's own interests...In Oaxaca we really lack tourist consciousness...especially in the markets" ("Proteger al Turismo," 1970). The editorial makes a plea for vendors to avoid price gouging. "We must understand that our tourism is nascent and we are struggling to attract [tourists] in larger volumes." The writer recommends a concerted effort on the part of state entities to promote tourism and a local culture of treating tourists with particular consideration.

In fashioning a city for tourists, the urban elite face a conundrum. They themselves aspire to a cosmopolitan status, which they attempt to achieve both by identifying with the Spanish colonial past while emulating the imperial present dominated by the United States. At the same time, they recognize that tourists are drawn by an interest in Indigenous cultures, which elites set out to coopt, fabricate or commodify in the form of

folkloric dance festivals, commercialization of local handicrafts and guided tours to ancient ruins and contemporary villages.

The last editorial reviewed in the previous section implicitly addresses opinions that the author has heard circulating in urban Oaxaca, that the tianguis, is, in fact, good for tourism. In scoffing at this idea, he finds himself in good company with the market administrator at the time. In an interview with Susan Drucker-Brown in August of 1978, the administrator claims that the move of the main market was necessary to *protect* tourism in addition to freeing up the streets for smooth vehicular circulation and improving hygiene (Drucker-Brown 1982, p. 42). Drucker-Brown interprets this perspective as an insistence on making poverty and illness displayed at the market invisible to the tourist (ibid.). One photo suggests the accurateness of her analysis (Figure 2.8). In it two tourists are shown with two campesinos. The caption imagines the perspective of the tourists.

Figure 2.8. Tourists talk to peasants on a street in the city center. ("El Lamentable estado," 1977).
Caption reads: *The lamentable state and dress of this pair of campesinos who have come to the city with the intention of selling [wooden] posts. It was the motive for observation and astonishment for the foreign couple, one can only imagine their commentaries. A marked difference.* Source: El Imparcial (1977, May 9)

Other photographs give a nod to the appeal of the tianguis for tourists, even as their accompanying captions insist on the need for the tianguis to move (Figure 2.9).

Figure 2.9. A crowded tianguis.

Caption reads: *The street tianguis so typical, with so many attractions for tourism, has to move to a safe and hygienic place, leaving the streets free. Oaxaca needs to concentrate its markets in an adequate and functional area.* Source: Carteles (1977, Dec. 24)

By 1978, the writer has gotten his wish. Tourism has taken off. As many as 30,000 tourists are estimated to arrive for the annual Guelaguetza²⁴. (“Unos 30.000,” 1978). Ads geared toward tourists, including property sales, appear in English (“Beautiful house for sale,” 1978).

Vendors resist

²⁴ Festival featuring folkloric music and dance from around the state

The editorial that decries the many problems with tianguis also has a vision for what the city will look like when the tianguis has moved. It's a win-win. Customers will be happy with their hygienically-provisioned food in the new modern market. Drivers will be happy with a city free of traffic jams. Vendors will be comfortable. Yet the deeply Spanish bullfighting metaphor that the writer uses – where the bullfighter is the municipality and the bull (whose ears and tails are cut off after defeat) are the Indigenous and campesino tianguistas – is more telling of the power dynamics at play:

The day the tianguis moves, the streets will turn from mud baths to clean streets. Beautiful, buried facades of buildings will resurface from the walls. Motor vehicle circulation will be fluid and then, indeed, our city will look very clean, colonial and a great attraction for tourism...If the Alameda de León [in the central plaza] will be cleared and the *neverías* [ice cream stalls] too... and [ice cream vendors] occupy some local near the center, and this [public] garden will be clear, then and only then, will the market and the tianguis, once they are in the appropriately hygienically installed locales and without causing harm to traffic, be comfortable for vendors and consumers. Leaving the actual [daily/walled] markets while moving the tianguis, would be an error. [We would confront] the same traffic bottlenecks, the ambulant vendor stalls, the bothers. The move should be complete, [first] the tianguis and then the markets. The municipality that achieves this will receive the applause of the people and will come out like good bullfighters: carried on shoulders, circling the ring, waving the tail and two ears (Guzmán Nuñez 1978).

While the bull is defeated in this editorialist's mind, the two-year struggle to remove the tianguis suggests that victory was not always certain.

The insides of the negotiations are difficult to decipher from newspaper articles. What is clear is that tianguistas had the wherewithal to resist the imposed move for more than two years. Before imagining a traffic-free future, the editorial quoted above singles out the tianguis as *the* central problem facing the municipal government. In one passage, the author writes:

Authorities have tried everything...but never will they find the answer. Always in opposition [to resolving the city's traffic] – like an impregnable fort, a wall of granite, impossible to climb, whose colossal dimension has destroyed many governments, the singular giant that has caused so many headaches to many administrations, this Goliath, this iron fort with feet of clay – are the markets and especially the interminable tianguis (ibid.)

Despite being made up of humble, Indigenous people (“feet of clay” here doubles as a reference to a fundamental fault and a metaphoric marker of class and race in a tianguis dominated by clay vessels made by Indigenous potters), the tianguis is a force to contend with. Yet it appears that vendor strategies were largely non-confrontational. Leaders and vendors quoted in the papers (despite representing a biased selection by the newspapers) reveal a central strategy that amounted to stalling while generally professing

acquiescence – that is, performing (verbally) the ideal of urban citizenship that the elite class was constructing. First, tianguistas stalled by making their move contingent on improvements to the market infrastructure. In an article including a photo of an empty, new Central de Abastos (the name of the new market building on the urban periphery, also called Mercado de Abastos), tianguistas are reported to agree to the move provided that the “construction, placement of water spouts and lighting and traffic signage” are repaired (“Coordinan ya el cambio,” 1977). It appears that the early refusal to occupy the building led to its deterioration; these signs of disrepair were then used as further reasons to delay the move (“Deterioran los Mercados,” 1977). The government promised to act. “Given the city’s need to stop suffering so many traffic jams every weekend and in the seasons in which the tianguis stays for days clogging so many streets in the center, the problem will be dealt with by both the State Direction of Public Works, the Municipality and the Direction of Economy and the organizations of stall keepers...” (ibid.)

While making the move contingent on renovations, vendors’ associations’ leaders’ quoted in papers represented their members as in agreement with the new norms of urban space in construction. “The members of the Bakers’ Chamber of Oaxaca are conscious that the change to the new markets is necessary in order to facilitate the circulation of vehicles on the invaded street, above all on the day of the tianguis,” says the president of the chamber, Arturo Cruz Ramírez (“Han comprendido que las calles no deben invadirse,” 1977). He went on to note that as soon as the authorities decide, they would not oppose the change, in virtue of the fact that the center of the city needed a better image because the street stalls stretched all the way to the zócalo and were an obstacle for

vehicular and pedestrian traffic (ibid.). Newspapers were likewise eager to portray vendors this way. Painting the tianguistas as simply entities that must be taught what a proper city looks like, the paternalistic headline of the same article reads: “They have understood that streets should not be invaded” (ibid). Rumblyings of tianguista organizing were likewise attributed to ‘agitators.’ An article titled, “Outside interests against the tianguis” reported that these “agitators,” who did not have the best interest of vendors at heart, had begun to persuade tianguistas to refuse the move even though, reportedly, both daily market vendors and weekly tianguistas are in agreement that it should happen (“Intereses Ajenos,” 1977).

Vendors also stalled by taking advantage of existing factions and divisions among vendors’ associations. Vendors who professed to be in agreement could point to other groups’ opposition to justify refusing to move until everyone agreed. Vendors at the walled daily market, moreover, relied on the portrayal of tianguis as traffic-generating to distinguish themselves from the tianguistas. The women cooks of the daily market refused to move at all, with “señora doña María Gutiérrez” quoted as saying, “We have never accepted moving to that place given that here we aren’t in anyone’s way” (“Cocineras se oponen,” 1977). Indeed, though the Central de Abastos was originally intended to house the daily market, with plans drawn for turning market space into a plaza and parking lot, negotiations eventually fell apart with these vendors. The local elite ultimately allowed themselves to be satisfied with the removal of the tianguis alone. The two adjacent daily markets, 20 de noviembre and Benito Juárez, continue to operate today, in their same historic location just south of the zócalo.

Finally, some street vendors allowed to remain in the city center did so on the basis of an appeal to tourism. This strategy was especially successful for sellers of handicrafts and ice cream. The *neveras* – or ice cream makers – re-occupied the city center carefully. The image in Figure 2.10 was printed in January 1979, then again in March, with two different captions. The first read, “The *neveras* have returned to the Alameda [zócalo], though without the shacks [market stalls with tarp-roofs]. Public opinion is pressuring the Municipal President so that this central garden remains clear and decent as a public promenade.” (“Han vuelto las neveras,” 1979). The second caption read, “Las *neveras* continue [in the city center plaza], as you can see in this photo. By these dates they should have [had] a definitive place. Of course, the Alameda de León must remain clear because it is a Public Promenade of the city and must remain clear and clean.” (“Ice cream makers,” 1979).

Figure 2.10. Ice cream makers in plaza. Source: Carteles (1979, March 4).

Yet these ice cream vendors managed to advocate on their own behalf in terms of their value to the tourist industry. One newspaper article, titled “Oaxacan ice cream, a tourist attraction,” reported that tourists prefer Oaxacan ice cream because they are made with “natural fruits.” (“Las Nieves Oaxaqueñas, 1979). They ultimately managed to protect their claims to street space, remaining in the city center’s zócalo long-after the tianguis removal. Today, they are no longer in the zócalo, but one of the city’s other important central plazas is known locally as “*plaza de las nieves*” where only ice cream vendors are permitted to sell.

On the whole, vendor resistance meant that the market remained empty until the end of 1978. Headlines peppered newspapers: “Finished and without being Occupied”, read a *Carteles* front page (“Acabados y sin Ocuparse,” 1978). One photo (Figure 2.11) showed animals grazing at the empty market complex (“Animals grazing at Mercado de Abastos, 1978). * Another headline warned that bus passengers were using the unoccupied markets as bathrooms (“De Sanitarios usan nuevos mercados,” 1977). Many an article, accompanied by photos of empty market stalls (Figure 2.12), accused it of being another of the government’s “white elephants,” where millions of pesos had been wasted on unused infrastructure. In the end, however, elite wishes were granted—at least in the short run.

LOS VERDES PRADOS de los Mercados de Abastos, son "aprovechados" de esta forma: Animales de todas partes llegan a pastar a ese lugar que debería ser rescatado y utilizarse para lo que se hizo. Las autoridades tienen la palabra.

Figure 2.11. Animals graze at the Mercado de Abastos

Caption reads: *The green meadows of the Mercado de Abastos, are "used" in this way: animals from everywhere come to graze in this place that should be rescued and utilized for what it was made. The authorities will decide.* Source: Carteles, 1978.

Figure 2.12. An empty Mercado de Abastos

Caption reads: *This is the spacious interior of one of the new markets that was built with more than 50 million pesos and nonetheless remains abandoned for years, without being put to use. The question is: When will vendors move to this location?* Source: “Coordinan ya el cambio,” 1977, *El Imparcial*).

The tianguis moves to the city’s periphery

Clear streets

“Finally! They will occupy Mercado de Abastos” read the front page headline (“Por fin!, 1978). On August 21, 1978, tianguistas started moving to the new market installations on the outskirts of the city. Mayor Jesús Martínez Álvarez thanked Governor General Eliseo Jiménez Ruiz who has offered support for a difficult task “given the complexity of the interests” and is grateful for “the comprehension of all the organizations of the markets whose leaders share our idea that it is necessary to give our city a different look” (ibid.). Vendors who were part of the move are certain that, eventually, steep payoffs to some

leaders from government officials eventually led to their cooperation. Still, the two years required to make the move to the new location attest to the organizational power of the tianguis, even if the details of internal organizing are somewhat thin. “The disappearance of the Saturday peasant market from the streets of downtown Oaxaca,” writes Clark (2000), “left the city center to the ‘respectable’ urban classes – as the shopkeepers wanted (115).”

The move made the front page for days. The day following the move, the announcement read: “...the supply markets came to life yesterday after verifying the change of wholesalers and tianguistas from the streets around the central markets, which will be clear and free to vehicular transit by tomorrow.” (“Abastos Cobró Vida Ayer,” 1978). On September 4th, the bus companies agree to start operating from the second class bus terminal located adjacent to the market.

The governor, the mayor and many public officials were present for its opening. Sixhundred daily street vendors received permits. In the coming weeks, more than 3,000 tianguistas would be granted permits to sell on Saturdays and Sundays. With that, said mayor Jesús Martínez Álvarez, “One of the most serious social problems that the city of Oaxaca suffers – the concentration of the tianguis in more than 60 blocks around the central markets – has begun to be resolved by the Municipality of Oaxaca with the support of the State Governor, General Eliseo Jiménez Ruiz and [other public officials].” Moreover, he continued, “All of this [move of vendors to new facility] will allow for

greater cleanliness and hygiene provided by the municipality and the stall keepers themselves (“Por fin!” 1978).

When the move finally happens, newspapers are ecstatic and, for several weeks, publish photos of the cleared streets (Figures 2.13, 2.14, 2.15).

Figure 2.13. Tianguis stalls being removed and a street with no tianguis

Caption reads: In these images you can appreciate firstly, above, the removal of established stalls on Las Casas and below the way that the arterials of Flores Magón, where before it was impossible to cross due to the agglutination of vendors of diverse products. Source: El Imparcial (1978, Aug. 23).

Figure 2.14. Streets formerly used by the tianguis under construction

Caption reads: Completely clear are the streets occupied previously by the tianguis around the central markets... Source: El Imparcial (1978, Sept. 5), p. 4.

Figure 2.15. Street under repair.

Caption reads: The streets around the old markets continue being repaired and some stretches have suspended traffic as you can see in this photo that we took yesterday in front of the market "20 de Noviembre." These works take months. Source: Carteles (1979, Jan. 11).

Conclusion

Despite the move, and all the symbolic power it held for the urban elite, daily life in the city persisted much as before (Figure 2.16).

Figure 2.16. Boy walks in the city center with his donkey, carrying comales²⁵

Caption reads: *Our Oaxacan reality live, captured by our camera. Just like every day, this school-aged child has to help his parents bringing the traditional and primitive comales from his pueblo to the city, hurrying along his patient little donkey. It's an eloquent photo!* Source: Carteles (1979, Feb. 26.)

In a review of a two-year period of two newspapers, only one editorial offered a perspective sympathetic to vendors and poor consumers:

To the great satisfaction of many people, and especially taxi drivers and car owners, the vendors and stall keepers that invaded the city streets have been removed to the Mercado de Abastos. But surely many circumstances must be

²⁵ Flat pans, traditionally made of clay [Singular *comal*]

taken into account, principally how this could affect small vendors and those who buy in small quantities because their economic situation does not permit bulk purchases. For those who are able to get to the Mercado de Abastos because they have a car, sufficient money, and, above all, time, this change perhaps doesn't affect them. But it is possible that for humble people it is causing some harm, which should be dealt with as far as possible so that we don't increase our poverty. That is our concern. Generally, the people who are always most affected are the low-income class. The first day of tianguis in the Mercado de Abastos, many did not sell because people from the city are not going to go all the way out there...the majority of the inhabitants are inside the center of the city ("Con el Cambio del Tianguis, 1978)

But despite the initial concerns expressed in this editorial, the new Central de Abastos triumphed in the end—customers found their way, vendors sold. A few months after its opening, an article reports, "traffic anarchy" around the new market ("La anarquía e irregularidades," 1978). Today, all roads in the urban food system lead to the Central de Abastos. In it, one finds a maze of wares, a mosaic of wholesalers, retailers, producers, ambulantes selling products from all over the region, nation, and many parts of the world. Within the market, which includes both wholesalers and retailers, at least five tianguis specializing in food products are held throughout the week.

However, the market flourished not in opposition to the tianguis street markets or street vendors, but in rhythm with them. From the Central de Abastos, and following the

contours of urbanization and an age-old Mesoamerican tradition, new tianguis emerged to operate in each neighborhood of a growing city. Starting almost immediately after the relocation, leaders of vendors' associations located in the Central de Abastos began to negotiate with politicians to start new tianguis around the city. Moreover, street vendors, in what has proved to be a nearly unstoppable if incremental campaign, re-took the city center little by little. The same streets "cleared" in the 1970s are again filled with daily vendors.

Meanwhile, the city's earliest supermarkets were operating as small dry good stores. While shopkeepers had been an important source of pressure on public officials in the tianguis removal campaign (Clarke 2000), supermarkets were not significant enough to constitute their own lobby. In their nascent state, they occupied a niche sector that served wealthy urbanites with specialty items, dry goods and household products and were not yet competitive with the tianguis. Yet, in advertising (Figure 2.17) they were already being coded as spaces for wealthy, white, Western and "modern" shoppers—the shopping choice of those aspiring to craft such an image of themselves.

Figure 2.17. Supermarket ad
Source: El Imparcial (1978, Sept. 19)

The groundwork for their eventual full-fledged entry onto the food retailing scene, however, had been laid.

While much critical-agrarian scholarship deems supermarket expansion the result of an embrace of neoliberalism by global South governments (Burch and Lawrence 2005; McMichael and Friedmann 2007; McMichael 2009; Mosley et al. 2015), this chapter argues that their arrival and expansion is part of a longer trajectory of an elite-led urban modernization project. This finding resonates with other postcolonial urban scholarship, which identifies the strategies of local elites who aim to inscribe symbols of modernity on the landscape, tracing continuities from colonial era urbanization to today's contemporary cities (Kooy & Bakker 2008; Ghertner 2011; Doshi 2013; Meehan 2014, Roy 2015). An

examination of how elites fashion these “modern”, “hygienic”, “entrepreneurial”, or “world-class” cities in relation to subaltern groups (natives, slums, street vendors, etc.) offers an opportunity to historicize events beyond the neoliberal period and identify continuities in racialization implicit in contemporary urbanism.

Though nuancing the structural framing that dominates the scholarship on retail restructuring, literature in post-colonial urbanism lacks in its ability to explain the persistence of the street-based economy as it intersects with local food systems. The following chapters examine the central meaning of tianguis as urban foodways and the strategies – individual and collective – of vendors whose determination is vital to tianguis survival.

Chapter 3. Tianguis as an experience of food sovereignty

What is a tianguis? A tianguis is a place full of atmosphere, full of smells, colors, flavors.

The role of a tianguis in society is to reproduce the community. It's where our cultures are reproduced. – Oaxacan tianguis customer

Figure 3.1 Fishmongers from Oaxaca's isthmus²⁶ region at Calicanto tianguis, Oaxaca City

(Photo by author)

Since the Saturday tianguis was removed from the city center in the late 1970s, new tianguis began to spring up around the quickly growing city. Some of these were achieved through what were dubbed “invasions” (“Invasiones, Reacomodo y Barracas,”

²⁶ This is the state's easternmost region and Mexico's narrowest strip of land between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

1977) – where vendors occupied an urban area and began selling without permits, then later secured permission from the municipality to operate a tianguis. In other cases, leaders negotiated beforehand with public officials to permit a group of vendors to sell in the neighborhood. The result of these various forms of organization (further discussed in Chapter 5) was that nearly every neighborhood in Oaxaca came to have at least one weekly tianguis, which supplemented state-built enclosed daily public markets and served areas where these did not exist. Despite the proliferation of tianguis, their position has always remained somewhat precarious; they confront occasional threats and acts of removal, relocation, and closure from state authorities.

In this chapter, I argue that despite this marginalization by the state, the tianguis survive as enduring spaces of social and cultural reproduction. Tianguis not only feed the city, they reproduce local culture rooted in attachment to Indigenous foodways and vernacular perceptions of public space. Tianguis survive, in part, because they are experienced as an enactment of food sovereignty, where foodways are enlisted to reshape urban space for subaltern groups—especially women, Indigenous, campesino, and working-class people (in all combinations). Tianguis are perceived as a counterhegemonic symbol of Indigeneity and peasantry that is cherished as local custom by everyday marketgoers and upheld as an alternative to neoliberal globalization by activist groups.

I examine both the everyday practices of urban food provisioning and the political conjunctures and activist appropriations of the tianguis concept to illuminate what a tianguis means to contemporary city dwellers. The conscious construction of the tianguis

by activists highlights a set of ideals that resonates with the motivations of working-class consumers who meet everyday food provisioning needs in the popular tianguis of their neighborhoods. These reflections on the custom of tianguis-going from everyday marketgoers reinforce, clarify, and supplement activist depictions.

Taken together, their perceptions and actions demonstrate that tianguis survive, in part, because people experience them as a practice in food sovereignty. Though neither activists nor other marketgoers use the term, their associations with the tianguis reflect the values of the contemporary food sovereignty movement. A concept that has galvanized movements across Latin America and the global South, food sovereignty emphasizes diversity over standardization, local sustainable agriculture over long-distance ‘food miles,’ peasant control of the means of production, and democratic over corporate control of the food system more broadly (McMichael 2009; Desmarais 2013). Mexican marketgoers affirm the tianguis as an embodiment of these ideals. Activists view tianguis as a challenge to capital accumulation in the food system – of both large-scale agribusiness and transnational retailers. In promoting tianguis or shopping in them, customers believe they can realize the foundational goals of food sovereignty²⁷: accessing healthy, culturally significant foods produced in ecologically sound ways and exercising a voice in shaping and defining the kind of food system they want.

²⁷ La Via Campesina global movement of small-scale farmers popularized the concept of food sovereignty as an alternative to neoliberal globalization and the expansion of capitalist agriculture. This definition emerged in the Nyéléni Declaration, produced at a Food Sovereignty forum in Sélingué, Mali. (Via Campesina 2007; Burnett and Murphy 2014).

Since food sovereignty emerged as a platform for proposing food system change, peasants, farmworkers, scholars, activists and eaters (and various combinations of these) have sought to ground the concept in practice. They grapple with questions that are definitional (does it mean the same thing in different places or should it be defined contextually?); scalar (recognizing that the bases of sovereignty are multiple, relational and overlapping, what are the appropriate scales for the implementation of food sovereignty?); and institutional (what kind of institutions might facilitate it?) (McKay et al. 2014; Edelman et al. 2014; Trauger 2014). Examining the tianguis as practice in food sovereignty contributes to a growing body of scholarship on the subject that decenters the ‘sovereign’ in sovereignty. Rather than exclusively considering the state’s role in legislating the food system, recent literature considers multiple, overlapping sovereignties that work beyond geopolitical boundaries (Sachs 2013; Desmarais & Wittman 2014; Gupta 2015; Kamal et al. 2015; Jarosz 2014; Trauger 2014; Grey and Patel 2015; Schiavoni 2015). This study also furthers literature on Indigenous food sovereignties, where self-determination is not simply granted by the state, but grounded in everyday practices of resurgence (Daigle 2019).

Following Daigle (2019) and Grey & Patel (2015), the contemporary project of food sovereignty is necessarily part of a long struggle against the colonization of Indigenous space and place. As spaces historically occupied by Indigenous peoples in precolonial Mesoamerica and, later, as Indigenous and campesino spaces within colonial and postcolonial cities, tianguis represent a physical site of defense against colonization and imperialism in the popular imagination. At the same time, tianguis are constituted by the

continuous revival of Indigenous foodways in ways that transcend bounded notions of territory, where the self-determination of communities is cultivated through food practices connecting multiple, relational scales. In this sense, the tianguis reaffirms an ideal of Indigenous food sovereignty both as resistance to colonialism and capitalism and as a resurgence of Indigenous forms of autonomy grounded in everyday practices.

Moreover, this case allows for the examination of an *urban* Indigenous foodway. Even as food sovereignty scholars and activists have dug deeper, both scholars and the movement as a whole, have generally opted to skip the middleman, heavily focusing on either rural production (including issues such as land reform, seed sovereignty and control over other means of production) or, in some cases, the eating itself, in a vision of ‘farm-to-table’ that sometimes fails to grapple with the complexity of the food system and its injustices (Desmarais & Wittman 2014). Missing is a theorization of distribution and provisioning at an urban scale, including an engagement with the meanings people attach to these foodways. The tianguis offers an opportunity to examine an urban institution, enacted at the scale of the street but connecting diverse geographies and scales, which activists and marketgoers understand to capture the values intrinsic to the concept of food sovereignty.

An analysis of the tianguis also allows for engagement with complicated questions of the *practice* of food sovereignty, in particular, issues of gender, race, and class. Matters of sovereignty often involve claims to space. Recognizing that markers of identity such as race, class, and gender are mapped onto physical spaces (McKittrick and Woods 2007; Stehlin 2015), I find that tianguis can be understood as islands of temporary urban control

by non-dominant groups in each of these categories. First, tianguis are women's spaces. Plenty of men sell and shop, but most vendors and most shoppers are women. Moreover, in every conversation I have had with shoppers recounting market experiences, it is women with whom they are interacting. This is especially apparent in Spanish, where words like 'vendors' are necessarily gendered. In their imaginary or remembered conversations with vendors, tianguis shoppers refer to '*vendedoras*', '*doñita*,' '*señito*', or '*las señoras*'. Second, tianguis are campesino spaces within the city. Even though many tianguistas are not actually producers themselves, they are broadly thought of as such because they facilitate relationships with the products and peoples of the countryside. Campesinos are closely linked with Indigeneity in public discourse, and tianguis persist as distinctly Indigenous spaces within the city. This is in part because of the fact of their pre-Conquest existence, popularized in the work of artists such as Diego Rivera, but it is an image perhaps more powerfully reconstructed in contemporary marketgoing experiences. Tianguis activists and customers (whether Indigenous or not) tend to reinforce rather than challenge common stereotypes of Indigenous people as pre-modern, rural, and close to nature (Cadena and Starn 2007), though they herald these supposed qualities as a line of defense against the ills of capitalist modernity, especially in association with the corporate food system. Tianguis also exist as Indigenous spaces in the cities in the sense that they represent a claim to land from which Indigenous peoples have historically been dispossessed and that contemporary urban elites would wish to put to other uses. It is this clash with modernist hegemony (Kapoor and Shizha 2010) that cements an association between Indigeneity and the tianguis. Finally, tianguis are unabashedly *popular* – that is, of and for the popular classes. In what follows, I often

substitute ‘working class’ for the Spanish ‘*popular*’, but here I want to make a distinction. While ‘working class’ in the Marxist sense refers to people who work for wages and do not own the means of production, *popular* in Spanish is somewhat more general. It refers to everyone not belonging to the elite class, including overlapping groups of campesinos, people who work in Mexico’s enormous informal economy often outside of wage work, and low-income people who perform primarily unpaid domestic labor. ‘Poor’ could often substitute for ‘*popular*’ but the latter has political significance and is often used with a sense of pride. ‘Subaltern’ could be one contemporary translation. Tianguis function to claim urban space for and by these groups.

Chapter organization and notes on terminology.

In what follows, I distinguish between interlocutors as ‘activists/organizers’, ‘marketgoers/shoppers/tianguis customers’, and ‘chefs/cooks’. These are imperfect and overlapping categories. By activists or organizers²⁸, I refer to people who are or have been engaged in organized resistance against state entities responsible for deepening social injustices in Oaxaca. ‘Chefs’ or ‘cooks’ refers to a group of young Mixtecos opening a restaurant specializing in Indigenous cuisine. ‘Marketgoers’ and ‘tianguis customers’ refer to people who do their regular shopping at these urban popular tianguis but who do not have a background in political organizing or a preconceived, mobilized analysis of food systems. Their opinions are captured in a Photovoice project and focus group at one neighborhood tianguis – recruited through tianguis vendors with whom I

²⁸ I distinguish these from the leaders of tianguis organizations and unions that are the subject of Chapter 5.

had an existing relationship – and in individual interviews with customers who frequent tianguis around the city. In practice, activists and chefs are also marketgoers – people who regularly shop at the various tianguis located in nearly every neighborhood in Oaxaca City. The regular tianguis customers, likewise, are also mestizo and Indigenous cooks for their own families. Given that I did not explore the nature of their political formation, I recognize the divide I have constructed between regular marketgoers and other categories of interlocutors is, in reality, likely to be somewhat porous.

To illustrate how tianguis are experienced as a practice of food sovereignty, I put the narratives of marketgoers, chefs, and activists in conversation throughout the chapter. Section 1 describes how activist campaigns frame tianguis as counterhegemonic institutions in opposition to the hegemony exercised by transnational corporate retailers. Section 2 looks at how marketgoers understand tianguis as a culturally significant urban foodway. Section 3 considers the reflections of a group of young Indigenous chefs that opens a restaurant showcasing the tianguis as a central aspect of Indigenous foodways. Section 4 looks at how activists have created their own, alternative tianguis based on their interpretation of the role played by the traditional tianguis as central to community social and cultural reproduction. It focuses on the story of women involved in a broad-based state uprising who decide to organize their own tianguis to create an ongoing space for popular education, community-building and local production. It also describes another activist appropriation of the tianguis concept in the form of a barter-only market.

Recognizing the need to separate research from reification (Bonnet 1996), in Section 5, I note some of the ways that tianguis do *not* always live up to the ideals presented by their enthusiasts. Because the question at hand is about how tianguis persist in spite of state pressures of supermarketization and general marginalization, customer perceptions matter more than any given, objective reality. However, in the spirit of sympathetic critique (North 2010), I note these discrepancies because it is important that activists and other consumers concerned with matters of food sovereignty grapple with the complexity of the food system, including the ways in which the prevailing political economy of food makes impossible the agrarian nostalgia sometimes imagined by city-dwellers.

1. Tianguis as a counterhegemonic institution in opposition to transnational retailers

1a. Supermarkets as hegemonic

In the introduction to this dissertation, we saw how activists challenged state allegations of food shortages supposedly caused by the teachers' union road blockades in 2016, with a photo campaign disseminated in social media in which the tianguis – depicted as a bounty of local, culturally relevant foods – took center stage.

The issue at the heart of the original protest had nothing to do, ostensibly, with food systems; the protests originally focused on education reform, then barricades were erected to protest state repression. Yet in movement responses to state accusations that barricades were causing food shortages (*'desabasto'*), we can see how supermarkets are perceived as instruments of state hegemony, while tianguis persist as a counterhegemonic symbol of

Indigenous, peasant, and popular resistance. Following Antonio Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony, one way that the state exercises its power is to establish, in conjunction with the elite class, its interests as public or universal, and, as such, obtain consent through persuasion rather than coercion (Gramsci 1971). Supermarkets play a role by seducing shoppers into a performative emulation of Western culture and linking new tastes to personal upward mobility and national progress. As one regular marketgoer described:

When Sam's opened, it was a very different kind of shopping experience...People would go out of curiosity or because they heard you could get good prices. But also it was a mark of status. Because you had to pay a membership. You don't have to pay a membership at the Mercado de Abastos. And if you were there, you were there looking at big screen TVs, or buying fancy sweets. All of that in a social setting that is very sensitive to hierarchy and status. To simply be seen in your new car coming out of Sam's, wheeling your carts of stuff, or telling the poor guy you were paying five pesos [to help with your bags], to hurry up. That placed you somewhere.

Organizers of the photography campaign to counter the alleged *desabasto* with images of abundant local markets were unsympathetic to such stores. Supermarkets, their representations suggest, can be understood as neocolonial institutions installed to establish or cement tastes imported from elsewhere while the surplus provided by the low-wage labor of their countrymen would be sent in the form of profit to already richer,

whiter places. While the tianguis are not explicitly or necessarily anti-capitalist institutions, they are taken as a front against big capital – the foreign investment that governing officials so eagerly welcome. Tianguis are thus upheld as a counterhegemonic symbol of subaltern identities, ties to the land and community, food self-sufficiency, and an autonomous vision for well-being.

Activists and other marketgoers understand transnational retailers as hegemonic actors who at once further the interests of the state and capital while undermining the tianguis as well as alternative proposals for the use of urban space. In a hotly contested case in 2008, the municipality secretly granted permission to cut down over 200 trees for the construction of the multinational chain supermarket Chedraui. This property had been the last remaining greenspace in a quickly densifying urban neighborhood, and neighbors had solicited the government to create a public park (Guardarrama 2010). In lieu of opening the issue to public debate, the municipality negotiated with the supermarket in secret. The company sent workers from the neighboring state of Veracruz to cut down the trees in the middle of the night. Neighbors and activist groups held candlelight vigils as they mourned the loss of the neighborhood's greenspace and organized a sit-in while they petitioned the government to cancel its agreement with Chedraui. When their petition was unsuccessful, they organized a boycott (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2. Image produced in campaign to boycott Chedraui. The image replaces the store logo shopping cart with a chainsaw and the slogan “costs less” with “one less forest”. (Source: Guardarrama, 2010).

Activists stressed that the neighborhood didn’t need another big supermarket. A small, Oaxacan-owned dry goods store was just across the street, a daily public market a few blocks away, and several tianguis were held in the streets each week. One organizer involved in both the Chedraui protests and the campaign to counter the *desabasto* myth analyzes the state’s push to make urban land available to corporate retailers:

I think [the government] wants disposable people, wants us to eat disposable foods. Even if you’re full, [food from transnational retailers] makes you sick every day. That’s not the case in a tianguis, where maybe you can find some of that food but you have options to eat criollo²⁹. And of course, it’s a clear transnational proposition. We’re in a period of corporation-nation. The state isn’t

²⁹ *Criollo* can roughly be translated as “local,” but see full discussion in Section 2b.

interested in producers. They're interested in the businesses that can make profits with the product of that producer...In a transnational business, many times that profit isn't going to stay here, it will be sent somewhere else. Besides that, it has a different logic. Putting Oxxos³⁰ all around, it's like breaking with peoples' culture. Because you'll find the reproduction of a culture that isn't ours. And the wages they pay people are minimal compared to what people can produce. That's what I mean when I say the state wants disposable people.

This speaker's focus on disposability is multifaceted. She emphasizes low wages that inhibit a higher quality of life and the dependency associated with the erosion of local production. She also recognizes that the cultural change brought about by the incursion of supermarkets (and their mini-counterpart, convenience stores) is neither neutral nor a simple matter of preference. Instead, it is a power-laden process with deleterious health effects. Global supermarket chains, which manage the vertical coordination of agri-food industries along the supply chain, are some of the world's most powerful transnational corporate actors (Burch & Lawrence 2007). As they have exploded onto the food retail scene in the global South (Crush 2014; Peyton et al. 2015), so have chronic non-communicable diseases (Hawkes 2008). In Mexico, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that made possible the expansion of Walmart across the country has also created the conditions for a three-fold increase in the incidence of obesity and

³⁰ A chain convenience store that has rapidly expanded across Mexico, now numbering over 15,000, that has replaced many Mom-and-Pop corner stores

diabetes to rise to the leading cause of death in the country (Clark et al. 2012; Jacobs and Ritchel 2017).

Both tianguis activists and everyday marketgoers emphasize wealth concentration in corporate retailers. The main difference between supermarkets and the tianguis, for one marketgoer was that, “in a tianguis you have many women selling, not just one vendor or one owner.” Tianguis defenders argue that not only are sales distributed among many small vendors, money spent at a tianguis tends to circulate locally while profits from transnational retailers enrich the United States. Other marketgoers underscored this idea: “Actually, there’s a commercial lately that says, ‘support your local economy’ and all the people from here who produce their products – to support them – and in doing so we also support ourselves because we know that the products have an organic origin.” Another felt that tianguis were important because of “local gastronomy, since Oaxacan cuisine is recognized in the entire country,” then added:

Plus the money stays here, right? Because sometimes they say that the companies turn [our money] into dollars and it goes who knows where, but here, money circulates here. Because someone buys something from you, you buy something from him, and so on. It’s a way of activating the economy.

While organizers are ideologically motivated and accustomed to pushing back on state policy, conversations with everyday marketgoers demonstrate that their perspectives

reveal similar lines of critique. Both focus on the economic and health effects of importing consumer culture from elsewhere, with organizers specifically calling out the role of the government in facilitating the expansion of transnational retailers.

1b. Tianguis as social spaces attentive to economic needs of the working class

Marketgoers contrast corporate retailers with tianguis, which they depict as social spaces that attend to the needs of low-income urban households. Under a *guaje*³¹ tree in the cemetery next to the tianguis in Calicanto del Camino, shoppers concurred that tianguis allow for local verification of product origin and production processes. Taking a cue from the *desabasto* photo campaign and the tradition of auto-driven photo-elicitation or photovoice in the social sciences (Pauwels 2015), I asked ten customers in a working-class neighborhood in Oaxaca City to spend an hour taking pictures of what they like and dislike about their tianguis and why they shop there, then spend several hours as a group sharing their photos and their reasons for taking them. Mestizo and Indigenous city-dwellers, they are mostly neighborhood residents who go to the market on foot. The group is divided evenly between men and women, and two have worked at the same tianguis. They estimate buying between half and seventy percent of their weekly groceries at the tianguis.

The marketgoers highlight the flexibility that neighborhood tianguis offer to customers, many of whom work in the informal economy and have unreliable incomes. First, many

³¹ The tree Oaxaca was named for, derived from the Nahuatl word *huaxyacac*. The tree produces pods filled with green seeds that are eaten. Scientific name: *leucaena esculenta*.

consider prices at the tianguis to be more accessible than other options – especially supermarkets, neighborhood stores, and daily public markets. But aside from low prices, generally speaking, quantity, credit, and price are often negotiable at the tianguis, adapting exchange to the needs of low-income families. Marketgoers can access no-interest credit based on their relationships with vendors. “As long as they know you, they’ll sell on credit,” participants in the photovoice focus group agreed. One marketgoer added, “Sometimes if they don’t have change, they just say, ‘Pay me later,’ since they know me and know I come every week.” Customers can also negotiate on quantity (‘I’ll take one peso of cilantro,’ ‘give me half of that bunch of squash blossoms’) and can count on vendors often throwing in a little extra.

Marketgoers say they sometimes negotiate at the tianguis, but noted that haggling is often unnecessary because:

[Vendors] often drop the price before you ask. They say twenty-five pesos, then they see your face and say, we’ll give it to you for twenty. Or sometimes if they want to go home. Because there are times when sales are low. Also prices for a product fluctuate seasonally. Sometimes we come to the tianguis with little money. We think it will be cheap but the cost of a product has gone up. That’s why [we might negotiate].

Another marketgoer added, “Or they say they’re charging thirty. Then [before you can say anything], ‘twenty-five, take it’. You say, ‘I just have twenty.’ [They say] ‘twenty-two,

órale.” One described how prices may change over the course of the day. “Generally in the afternoon when it’s close to closing time, that’s when the tianguistas start reducing prices. It’s so they don’t have to take their product home, they have to sell everything, so they start cutting prices.” Half of the group of marketgoers said they often go to the tianguis around three in the afternoon to take advantage of these lower prices.

The practice of haggling is an old custom, one some find distasteful. “Try doing that at a Walmart or a Soriana,” said one taxi driver, who found it embarrassing when his friends would bargain with tianguistas whom he perceived to be poorer than they were. However, the possibility of negotiating on price not only benefits urban consumers on a budget; for many, it is part of the social experience that marketgoers value—what one customer referred to as ‘the human touch’:

It’s the human touch. The connection. The language. When you go to a tianguis, language is very important, even more than the product. [Mimicking a vendor] ‘Come oooooon over! Right this way, shopper! Come here, my love! Come lovely lady, it’s cheap and it’s fresh!’ In the supermarket, the product doesn’t speak to you, but in the tianguis it does. It convinces you, it enamors you. You don’t buy anything without a conversation. In the supermarket, you won’t say to the cashier, ‘Listen, just lower the price by 5 pesos. I only have ten.’ Or, ‘take away a handful, just give me half of that.’ Or, ‘give me a little extra. My *pilón*.’ They give you a little extra. Like when you buy *nicoatole* [maize-based pudding], you might ask, “And my

pilón?” And the señora gives you a little more. Or the señora says, “As a *pilón*, I’m throwing in an apple.” It’s really nice. You earn when you buy with the señoras.

But conversations between tianguistas and customers also veer beyond negotiations, and tianguistas ensure that the shopping experience is a social one. They chat with the children of customers, ask about their families. Photos taken by Calicanto shoppers included their own friends and families at the tianguis, and pictures of others: a man walking with his daughter, people gathered at food stalls eating and talking, a group of friends. “These are my friends from the tianguis and they hang out there,” said one photovoice participant, “The tianguis is also a distraction. Besides shopping, you come to talk.” Two shoppers took pictures of the same bread stall. One took it because “I like how everyone’s eating, sharing.” Of her photo, another shopper said, “Here’s the bread, which is really good. I don’t buy there, but more than what they sell, I like the family environment, or the freedom to stay and chat or something like that, right?” Their pictures showed a guitarist wandering the aisles, and the stalls of flowers people bought to take to the adjacent cemetery.

These human interactions are what makes one customer describe the tianguis as a “place of encounters – a place to go and talk.” A woman in her forties, living in Oaxaca, recalled the tianguis of her childhood:

I grew up in Mexico City and we were a big family, so my mom had to do a whole juggling act to make ends meet. We always had the tianguis around the corner – a megatianguis! Three blocks around an entire park filled up. And it was so cheap.

Even today, when I visit Mexico City, I always want to go to that tianguis to have lunch or breakfast or shop. And there are people who recognize me, who ask about me and remember me and my mom. She did her shopping there for 25 years – her whole life. So it's part of a culture of rootedness, of connection and recognition. That never happens in the supermarket. You don't go and ask the cashier, "Where's the one who sells mangos?" She doesn't know who sells mangoes or who sells cheese. But in the tianguis, the people who sell have a name and a face and there are stories that unfold there.

Activists interested in creating their own tianguis homed in on this aspect. One insisted that tianguis:

create a favorable environment for many things. For conversing with each other, for people to continue to connect to each other, to talk to each other. Because if [we don't have spaces like these] we're all going to turn into *individualistas*. That is, each person doing her own thing, everyone at her own home, and there won't be a sense of community. A tianguis gives a sense of community.

These reflections on locally-rooted economies, sociality, and community position the tianguis as an institution aligned with the values of food sovereignty.

2. Food from somewhere

2a. Local verification

The food sovereignty movement emphasizes not only local food, but also transparency along the food supply chain. Whereas supermarkets – as kings in the corporate food regime – obscure the origins, processes and journeys of food thusly dubbed “food from nowhere” (Campbell 2009), marketgoers firmly locate the tianguis as an entity both offering and symbolizing “food from somewhere” (ibid.). One activist insisted, “In a tianguis [from a rural community], you see where the *pulque* is produced, or the beans or bananas. From an economic point of view, it’s resistance against the invasion of the transnationals. That is, it’s an exchange between people.”

Such everyday resistance requires local verification of marketgoers based on their knowledge of place, regional agricultural production, and markers of producer identity.

“The tianguis are different,” one customer says, because:

Much of what is sold in tianguis is produced locally. In a supermarket, you find transnational production that’s difficult to know where it comes from. In a tianguis you can question [a product’s origin]. [Whether] a potato is criollo [locally- produced] and it comes from the Sierra or whether it’s well-washed and comes from [agro-business in] Puebla. So you decide if you want to eat from Puebla or get what’s criollo and still fresh with dirt that comes from Cuajimaloyas, for example, a village that produces potatoes. At a tianguis you’re

sure to find things that are completely *criollas* and know who the producer is. And often it's the producer who is there at the tianguis selling. At a supermarket, you see only products. You don't see people other than the cashier or the stocker. That's a real difference.

The Calicanto neighborhood tianguis in the municipality of Santa Lucía del Camino (Figure 0.5 in the Introduction), just east of Oaxaca City's downtown, occupies two long, perpendicular streets. Along one side is the neighborhood cemetery, and a twenty-minute stroll without stopping will get you from one end to the other. In the custom of tianguis across the country, the streets are closed on a given day of the week – in Calicanto, market day is Sunday. The stalls, most of them two by two meters, fill each side of the street with vendors elbow to elbow. Murals cover some of the walls behind the vendors and the tianguis stalls obscure the entrances to open storefronts behind them. In one business popular on market day, youth are busy playing videogames. In many ways, tianguis *are* the 'somewhere' in food from somewhere. Tianguis like the one in Calicanto are not only part of a long-standing tradition in Mexico, they are places where traditions are reproduced. Before Day of the Dead, market stalls are brimming with marigolds and coxcombs, candles and incense, freshly baked *pan de muertos*, sweet tamales and mandarins for altars (Figure 3.3). At Christmas, lichen from the northern mountains is sold alongside woody forest vines braided into reindeers, and shoppers fill their bags with sugar cane, hibiscus, guavas, and *tejocotes* for holiday punch. Tianguis mark the rhythm of the seasons, and shoppers count on them to carry the range of regional agrobiodiversity. The content and character of the tianguis, however, vary with the

cultures of the regions where they are located. One customer described the tianguis as “[a place] where culture is verified, where identities are verified. I think that’s the most significant part of a tianguis. That we can see, in each tianguis, the culture of the community where it’s established.”

Figure 3.3. Calicanto tianguis at Day of the Dead, 2017 (Photo by author)
2b. Eating criollo as cultural verification

The Mexican version of ‘local’ and ‘transparent’ is captured in the practice of identifying criollo foods, as mentioned by the speaker above. Customers who participated in the photovoice project recognized that not everything at a tianguis is locally-produced, but the possibility of acquiring some of the foods that are from nearby draws them to the market. By consuming “criollo” foods, marketgoers enact a preference for the cultural representations of their place. One tianguis shopper flips through her pictures quickly, highlighting the local produce she likes at the tianguis, “This is *capulín*, it comes from the Sierra Mixe and right now it’s in season, so they bring it to sell. It’s a wild cherry and it’s sweet (Figure 3.4a). And here are plums. They’re really good, and they’re criollo too.

Sweet corn (Figure 3.4b). Chayotes. Criollo avocados. There are so many varieties of avocados here at the tianguis. Locally-made clothing. I like the honey and the maguey worms (Figure 3.4c).”

Figure 3.4. Shopping criollo at the tianguis. (Photos by participants in Marketgoers’ Photovoice)

3.4a. Criollo plums and capulín from the Sierra Mixe

3.4b. Elotes [sweet corn]

3.4c. Maguey worms

3.4d. Black and yellow maize tlayudas, tostadas and wheat bread from Ixtlán, Sierra Juárez

3.4e. Chayotes, passion fruit, criollo avocados, eggs
3.4f. Vegetable stall

Originally, *criollo* was a racial category created by the Spanish *ley de castas*, a colonial system that attempted to apply a different categorization to each new “race” created by the various mixes of people of European, African and American origin in New Spain. Criollo, or Creole, was the name given to people of Spanish parents born in the New World³². Today, criollo is a word rarely used to refer to people and frequently used to describe food. Depending on the context, criollo can be used to refer to: food that is native to the region or precolonial in origin, food produced without chemicals, old varieties of crops and animals not produced by agro-business that might be labeled ‘heritage’ or ‘heirloom’ in English, and food produced by campesinos at a smaller scale than agro-business. Its contemporary usage is rather unrelated to its racial origin, except perhaps to the extent that criollo came to represent a break from Spain during the Independence War, where European-descendants born in New Spain claimed allegiance

³² More typically, these were children of Spanish men and Indigenous women. The categories quickly became incredibly complex and substantial fluidity existed between them in practice. See Chance, 1978 for a fuller discussion.

to their birthplace and cultivated a ‘homegrown’ identity connected to the construction of a glorified Indigenous past (Earle 2001). An alternative explanation is that some of the foods that are today considered criollo, originally came from Spain, but are varieties that have been adapted locally over hundreds of years and are mainly produced by Indigenous campesinos rather than on large-scale agro-industrial farms. Broadly, criollo has become a catch-all term for what shoppers identify as regional, culturally significant, healthy, and produced in ways that represent a food system they wish to support.

Marketgoers verify that a product is criollo using their knowledge of regional production in Oaxaca, identifying a vendor’s origin based on their dress, language, manner or – and especially – the type of produce she sells. They can tell by how the product looks, the quantity in which it is sold, and, often, the type of sales space occupied by the vendors. Criollo vendors are more likely to sell from a mat on the floor or to sell in particularly small quantities. Vendors of criollo products sometimes bear markers of campesino and Indigenous identity, particularly ways of dressing and speaking. As the marketgoers share their photos, they also often refer to the origin of the product along with the product itself. A woman identifies a vendor as Mixe because of, “what she sells. She brings limes, epazote, avocado. This avocado is the avocado that they call *bola*, it’s really good. So we always come to the tianguis and buy a bag of four avocados.” Another marketgoer shows a photo of the man who walks the aisles selling bunches of braided garlic. They know he is from the Zapoteco town called Tlacoachahuaya, where “mountains” of garlic are produced, one says. Some know a woman who produces the piles of corn from the neighborhood. “She has her *milpa* here in Calicanto, but it’s irrigated [in contrast with

most maize production in the state, which rain-fed],” a marketgoer says. Other maize sellers come from the Sierra Sur, from Miahuatlán, they explain, and are, “people who harvest who come to sell.” Ixtlán, a pueblo in the Sierra Juarez, is home to the flower sellers whose bouquets appear in many of the photos, along with tostadas, large chewy tortillas called tlayudas, and some ornamental plants (Figure 3.4d).

While customers report occasionally asking where vendors come from and whether they produce what they sell themselves, most attribute their knowledge of vendors and their products to being long-time customers. “We know where they come from because of the long time we’ve known them,” says one customer, showing us one of her photos. “For example, that woman is from Etna, she brings many things from there, from her pueblo, that’s why I like to consume things from her stand, like the criollo eggs, the baby squash, the squash blossoms and these criollo limes (Figure 3.4e).” Another customer shows her pictures, “And here’s the woman who brings tortillas, tostadas. They bring bread from the Sierra Norte, I think the bread is from Zolaga, a pueblo in the Sierra, it’s a round bread made with panela”. The next picture is of the vegetable seller (Figure 3.4f) who “produces the vegetables and brings everything fresh. That’s what we like best. We’ve gotten used to their product.” The next photo features blackberries measured out in small buckets. “The people who I buy them from,” she says, “say they are organic so they don’t have preservatives and who knows what all [other producers] spray them with.” In another customer’s photo, a woman and her daughter sell what the photographer explains are peanuts, pecans and roasted squash seeds produced in Zaachila, along with popular

homemade beverages, *tejate*³³ and *agua de chilacayota* – a squash-based drink I tell them is reminiscent of pumpkin pie. The next customer shows a couple with their vegetables spread out on a mat on the floor. “These people come from the Sierra. They bring potatoes, peas and all their produce is organic (See Figure 3.5). I really like that.” The next photo is “the *señora de pan*. She sells bread from Tlacolula. It’s what’s traditional here in the tianguis.” More often than not, relationships between customers and vendors are not deep friendships. Customers often refer to the women by what they sell – the bread lady, the peanut lady, the pineapple lady. But they are sufficient for customers to place food and assess its quality in conjunction with their sense of local geography; ongoing relationships both deepen this knowledge and develop confidence in the products sold.

Figure 3.5. Potatoes, peas, blackberries, quelites from the Sierra
(Photo by participant in Marketgoers’ Photovoice)

³³ Pre-hispanic beverage made of cacao, maize, mamey seeds and rosita de cacao

When criollo foods cost more – especially the case for eggs, tortillas and meat – marketgoers differentiate quality. A price premium for tortillas from maize dough rather than industrially produced flour and criollo maize has long been found around the state (Malinowski and De la Fuente 1940/1982, 134). One market photographer shared a photo of a woman making tortillas: “Here is the woman who makes our tortillas (Figure 3.6). She makes them [by hand] in the moment. She used to only sell on weekends and now she sells all week, but during the rest of the week she sets up at the entrance of the [Sunday-only] tianguis. But we always go to her for our tortillas. We like her product and that she doesn’t add processed flour, it’s all natural. She buys maize in bulk and then prepares the *nixtamal*³⁴, takes it to the mill. We’d rather have that than the kind from processed flour, for example Minsa or Maseca.” Everyone in the group preferred handmade tortillas to their industrially produced flour-based counterpart sold at the *tortillería*, though some conceded to buying at *tortillerías* when the others are unavailable. Price trumped quality preferences in other instances. While everyone expressed strong preferences for criollo eggs, all but two generally buy factory-farmed eggs by the crate due to price (at the time of study, two pesos compared to three to four for criollo eggs).

³⁴ Process by which maize is made into dough by boiling kernels with lime. Also sometimes used synonymously with the boiled maize before grinding.

Figure 3.6. Tortilla maker (Photo by participant in Marketgoers' Photovoice)

Aside from these few products, most criollo food sold at the tianguis is actually cheaper than agro-industrial counterparts found in supermarkets. Food produced for a regional, rather than export, market tends to be sold at lower prices. Avocados, for example, that are not sold for export – around five varieties can be found in the Calicanto market – are cheaper than the Haas avocados produced in Michoacán for export. The many chilies, herbs, fruits and vegetables mainly produced for local consumption are also both less expensive and prized for local dishes. Regarding how she selects her produce, one woman said, “Especially the people who spread out their wares on the floor, they give a better price and they give you more.” Another woman adds, “And it’s criollo, too.” “Yes,” says the first, “it’s criollo and they give you more. More product. A *pilón*.”

2c. Criollo street food: a working-class pleasure

Figure 3.7. Flavored aguas

Figure 3.8. Families eating goat barbecue tacos

(Photos by participant in Marketgoers' Photovoice)

As marketgoers share their photos, our mouths water. In addition to procuring weekly household groceries, they emphasized coming to enjoy prepared foods and drinks that represent the culinary street food traditions of the region. Said one marketgoer, “I took this photo [of the *aguas frescas*] (Figure 3.7). There are a lot of stalls like this of aguas and they tempt you, you know. You can tell that this woman brings her own aguas, that she doesn’t buy them to resell them. No. She makes them and brings them herself.”

Another marketgoer adds, “A trip to the tianguis wouldn’t be complete without its aguas. When we’re walking through the tianguis, we stop for one, to fully take advantage of the trip.” It seems that all of the market photographers include a picture of the aguas. The popular Mexican juice-like drinks are water mixed with sugar and fresh fruits. In the tianguis one finds a diversity of aguas – such as prickly pear, nanche, pineapple, passion fruit, coconut, and a cinnamon rice drink called horchata. One marketgoer says she often buys a liter of squash water to have with the goat stew she makes, with a little bit of

lemon, a little chili. They equate aguas with a simple (and affordable) pleasure. One marketgoer explained her photo:

Why did I take photos of the aguas? Because now, for example, in the hot season, you just want one, right? And how would it taste with a little *nieve* [ice cream] in it? Makes you crave it even more, right? Here in the tianguis, you can drink it here or you can buy food to take home. That's why there are little stalls with tables set up so you can sit down and enjoy it, and that is something we like. You also just want to sit for a little while and enjoy.

Marketgoers like seeing how foods are prepared. "This photo is like the empanadas that I had mentioned. You can see how they cook, how they roast the chicken. Here's the grill and where they roast it and how they prepare it. I like it because you see the process of your food, the process of preparation." Another shared:

Here is a stall of barbecue [Figure 3.8, above]. Goat barbecue. I took this photo because every time I get a whiff of that meat, I want it. And it's only here on weekends, so you stop by, buy yourself a taco to satisfy your craving or have some goat-meat soup, that's what I like. And [in this photo] the woman is serving soup in the deep clay dish, like I mentioned. It's the most traditional here in Oaxaca.

Another marketgoer says, “I’m one of the people who come [to the tianguis] besides to buy my things. I also sit down to enjoy, even if it’s just a *memelita* or a yellow mole *empanada*” (Figure 3.9) Another narrates a similar photo (Figure 3.10). “The empanadas, you can see that they are made here, you can see them being made. They’re made with masa [maize dough] and they make them right there. These are empanadas with pork and yellow mole, and these are made with mushrooms. They make them golden, but they take a long time, like half an hour, and they top them with cilantro. But it’s on the comal, without oil.” Not everyone who comes to the tianguis can afford to buy prepared foods. Some come only to buy their groceries. But others tack onto their grocery trip the working-class luxury represented by criollo street food.

Figures 3.9, 3.10. Memelas and empanadas

Figure 3.11. Clay pottery and comales (Photos by participants in Marketgoers' Photovoice)

Along with the idea of criollo foods is an emphasis by marketgoers of how the tianguis reproduces the traditions of particular places. “Here’s the woman who sells pottery,” says one man, showing one of his photos (Figure 3.11). “At home we try to conserve the traditions from here. So we buy things made of clay and we’ve bought things from her. She sells clay pots for beans, comales.” Tianguis-goers seek out what they perceive to be local traditions:

Tejate [See Figure 3.12] looks so fresh and delicious, makes you want to drink it in a *jicara* [gourd]. Although what I don’t like is that now they sell it in a [disposable plastic glass]. It’s like the tradition is being lost. It was always a *jicarita* decorated, red. Now it’s being lost. The essence, right? [Flipping to another photo] Well, I like to see tamales and all of that. But sometimes, I repeat, it’s like the essence is being lost. Before, tamales were sold in baskets. Now they

are in aluminum pots and aren't as attention-grabbing. They used to smell more delicious because they were a certain size. Now they look exaggerated.

Figure 3.12 Tejatera in Calicanto tianguis (Photo by participant in Marketgoers' Photovoice)

Others nod in agreement. "They used to be in reed baskets," says another man. Another marketgoer took a picture of the tamales of a particular vendor because she had maintained these traditions: "She brings her basket of tamales, that's how they used to be sold, in reed baskets and covered with an embroidered cloth. That's why one comes looking for what's [traditional]. You get accustomed to what's traditional, right?" Many related these traditions to taste. A woman shows hot chocolate being served in a deep clay cup. Asked how they prefer to drink hot chocolate, all preferred these cups. One woman answered, "In clay [cups], of course. They give it more flavor." Their concern with these changes clarifies the vision of the tianguis as an institution that safeguards peoples' traditions—echoing a long-standing perception. Even in the 1970s, when the

tianguis was being attacked in the media, occasional images appeared connecting it with deep-rooted customs (Figure 3.13).

Figure 3.13. Tejate makers, 1978

Caption reads: *Eternal image of Oaxaca is what our camera has captured in the market: the tejatera, woman from a pueblo who serves her refreshing beverage to the market-goers. This Oaxacan costumbrísimo [super custom] hasn't been lost. It can be seen here.* (“Tejate makers,” Carteles 1978).

2d. Tianguis as ‘popular’

Even though the tianguis persists in popular imagination as a farmers’ market and a space of local traditions, contemporary urban tianguis are what one speaker called *revueltos* – scrambled. Alongside the producer-vendors exhibiting the region’s cultural and agro-biological diversity, one finds an abundant show of industrial agriculture, much of which is imported from neighboring states and countries. Tents filled with pirated DVDs or knock-off sneakers are interspersed among these vendors.

Most of the pictures taken by the Calicanto tianguis customers feature food. But a few participants emphasized that one thing they like about tianguis was that “it’s complete.” They continued, “We have clothing, dry goods, milk, eggs, diapers, cookies, whatever you need...Here are the toys, entertainment for children. Clay pots. And since you can find everything, here’s a make-up counter. You can always find make-up.” A man includes a photo of some locally-made wooden furniture where he recently bought a shelf for his house. To my surprise, nearly half of the group reported having bought goldfish from the fish tank stall. One said his mother had bought thirty-five over the years. “They’re a kind of attraction because a child walks by and says, ‘Look mom, it’s a little turtle.’ And they entertain themselves that way.” “You can find anything in a tianguis,” another said. “Meat, cheese, remote controls. I took a picture of the remote controls, the antennas, to show you can find anything. That’s the same man who sells the poison for rats and the ointments for pain.” The non-food objects, including used and pirated products, reinforce the tianguis as a space of the popular classes.

People go to the tianguis to stock up on weekly groceries and part of these include foods produced by agri-business. Indeed, procuring the week’s *despensa básica* – a legal term referring to the set of basic foodstuffs necessary to meet the needs of Mexican families popularized to mean basic weekly groceries – is a crucial reason shoppers visit their neighborhood tianguis. While some report buying cooking oil, dish soap and other household items at small dry goods stores, the part of their *despensa* commonly purchased

at the tianguis includes: tomatoes (“tomatoes are the first thing we buy,” said one marketgoer, with the others nodding in agreement), onions, garlic, tortillas, dried beans, meat, dried fish, bread, avocados, eggs, and other fruits and vegetables.

Some of the group of marketgoers identify as Indigenous and others as mestizo. When I asked if the tianguis were important to the Indigenous cultures of Oaxaca, all voices unanimously and emphatically answer “yes,” but when pressed as to why, it takes them a few minutes to formulate their ideas. “One of the reasons could be that people from different pueblos come here to commercialize their products...to offer their products. I can’t find the word.” A second marketgoer adds, “Tianguis are important to Indigenous cultures of Oaxaca...they are places where there are more things from that place.” Another suggests, “It’s just our custom, right? They are part of the tradition of this place.” In the next section, a group of Mixtec chefs elaborates on instincts, positioning the tianguis as an everyday practice of Indigenous food sovereignty that connects diverse landscapes and breaks down the divide between city and countryside.

3. Tianguis as urban Indigenous foodway

3a. Indigenous cuisine as a vehicle for cultural resurgence

“What’ll it be? What’ll it be?” sound the syncopated voices of the Zapotec women from San Antonino. I watch as Toño, a young chef, carefully selects the smallest radishes and loveliest squash blossoms. He goes to the Tuesday tianguis at the Central de Abastos where much of what is sold is regional produce. Loosely organized by product and

region, the aisles of the market traverse the state: the fresh vegetables of San Antonino and Ocotlán weave eventually into the piling high banana leaves of the Huave women from the isthmus, their dried fish and shrimp pungent to passersby. Toño raises an eyebrow when a price seems too high, makes a rhetorical comment. We sample new pecans from the northern mountains and roasted grasshoppers cured with lime, then stroll past stands where blocks of unrefined brown sugar from the coffeegrowing cloud forest are stacked high. Inside the daily market, long aisles of busy garlic sellers peel and braid and stack garlic from the Central Valleys. We pass the live turkeys and chickens, legs tied together but otherwise alert and watchful.

Toño wants to make mole that day. He looks for *chile costeño*, buys ten pesos worth of raisins. He hauls an increasingly heavy basket and a large sack, carefully placing the produce so that it won't bruise. When the shopping is almost done, we stop for blue corn *memelas* hot off the clay comal, smeared with a little lard and bean paste and the topping of our choice. I douse mine with a salsa of cilantro, tomatillo, chili serrano and chunks of avocado.

Along with a few fellow young self-identified Mixtecs, Toño opened a restaurant they subtitled "Indigenous cuisine" – a small, rustic, and unassuming spot near the center of town with a fixed price menu catering to a middle class clientele. They are passionate about their project. "We call it Indigenous cuisine because we go to the market every day, buy what's in season and what's fresh," he tells me. Toño plans the menu as he wanders through the tianguis, no list in hand. Today's menu: a *tetela* – a tortilla triangle wrapped

around beans and cheese – squash blossoms stuffed with a grasshopper mixture, a thin cut of beef in red mole, maize-based pudding called *nicoatole* topped with raspberries, a water mixed with the bitter herb known as *ruda*. Many of the ingredients are of precolonial origin – maguey worms, grasshoppers and a variety of local chilies flavor the dishes. Others are not. Cream and cheese and beef and raspberries and grapefruit all find their way into the recipes. Less than a strict adherence to showcasing exclusively precolonial foods, they wish to reclaim Indigenous identity as a creative and evolving – rather than static-in-time – endeavor. What would the difference be, I asked, if you had called your restaurant, ‘cocina mestiza?’ “Maybe the menu would be the same,” Toño’s partner suggested after some thought, “but we wouldn’t feel identified with it.”

They tell me that their project focuses on recovering the dignity of oppressed peoples and confronting racism by infusing Indigeneity with positive associations through a culinary experience. But it is as much an active grappling with their own identities and concepts of contemporary urban Indigeneity. Toño’s partner, Noe describes their motivation:

We do this out of respect for what we are and where we come from. It’s what we know, all our lives. Since we come from the countryside and we’re Mixtecos, here in Oaxaca [there is] racism. There’s an insult that’s used, “This dude is really *yope*” or “Look at that Indigenous [person], he’s really Indigenous.” And we say, why should we be offended with those insults? Because we are Indigenous, that’s where we come from, right? We are Mixtecos. We are Indigenous people. We are from a community, and proudly from the Indigenous people of the Mixteca, right?

Maybe for one reason or another, there was a time when we were looked down upon for speaking our language, so our parents chose not to teach it to us. Maybe that's the reason we don't speak Mixteco, but even so, we are still Indigenous and we'll be proud to go anywhere and defend that.

Their concept of Indigeneity exists along a spectrum described with reference to connection to peasant production, ties to Indigenous communities, and the ability to speak an Indigenous language. Noe hopes that, at the restaurant, they will reproduce the customs and hospitality of Indigenous communities: "You know, of the people in the countryside, the people who smell and taste like Indigenous people. They always offer you something. A glass of water, something from their harvest. We want our restaurant to feel like that." His description of these 'wholly Indigenous' people indicates his own feelings of alienation from what he considers important aspects of Indigenous culture.

The first qualifier the chefs add to their own claim to Mixtec identity is language. Toño's mother is a bilingual educator, the name for a category of teachers charged with teaching Spanish to children who speak an Indigenous language. The teachers themselves are bilingual (though usually not in the variant of the language where they are assigned to teach), but the education is wholly focused on teaching Spanish and, until recently, often included violent measures to punish children who spoke their native tongues. Given her wish that her son would not experience the discrimination associated with speaking an Indigenous language (and that she, herself, was charged with imposing) she always spoke to him only in Spanish.

The second qualifier the chefs attach to Indigenous identity is connection to the land – farmland and rural communities. They all have ties to rural communities but mostly grew up in smaller cities. They visit for festivities, recall being sent home with loads of squash and other produce as they made their way back to the cities. They recall the *tequios* [communal labor] at harvest time, when neighbors and families would harvest maize together for one family, then move on to the crop of the next – drinking tepache as they worked in a festive, community-building atmosphere. Indigenous foods, for them, are foremost about respect for one’s roots manifested in what they called, “respect for the product”:

We grew up in the countryside so we can have an orange on our table, but maybe that orange was cut by my grandfather. And you know your grandfather got up early, went into the forest to cut the oranges, carried them on his back. In the pueblo, you ate things that now you would call organic. But it wasn’t a luxury or a fad or to take care of the planet, but out of necessity. Because you had to feed your family. It’s being lost because in the stores the brands you find are Bimbo and Coca-Cola so we’re losing the rich culture of the Indigenous pueblos of consuming fresh foods, the product of your labor.

As young residents of Oaxaca City, Toño and his partners’ project allows them to reaffirm and define their own identities, connecting to Indigenous campesinos, small-scale farming, and community life. The tianguis bridges the worlds they navigate – an

urban, uprooted one with a communal, agricultural one. When they have a chance to go home, they stock up at the tianguis in their cities in the Mixteca region, but they do most of their shopping at the tianguis at the Central de Abastos. “The market is another world. The people are different. The lifestyle is different. When you go into the market, you leave Oaxaca City. It’s like crossing a portal and you go into another world.” They savor the diversity. “Each soil produces its own flavors – even of the same kind of produce.” The people are from across the state, and can be distinguished mainly by their accents in Spanish. Some of the vendors are friendly: “*Mijito*, the best produce is right here.” Others feign a rough manner, “Are you going to buy something, or just stare?” To shop at the Central, you have to know what they call, “the art of shopping”:

You bargain and joke with the woman. You’ll ask if they grow what they sell or just resell what they buy wholesale. The women will say, “You’ve got to be kidding. How am I going to resell, *muchacho*? Don’t say that! Look at my [rough] hands!” Then they’ll give you something. “Here, take this so you’ll stop bothering me next time you come!”

The Mixtec chefs describe an atmosphere of conviviality at the tianguis that reproduces customs of the countryside. “In the streets of the city, if you say, ‘Good afternoon,’ people think you’re crazy, but in the market that’s all you hear. ‘Good afternoon, young man.’ ‘God bless you.’ Just like in the pueblos,” explains Noe. He compares the tianguis to his hometown. When he visits, his family loads him up with beans and oranges and other products of their harvest. In the tianguis, likewise “you rarely leave without a gift.”

He explains, “After you buy something, the vendors will say, ‘Take these for the road,’ and she’s given you an apple. It’s a way of thanking you even though she’s losing money. Like a *trueque* [barter] of gratitude.”

Ultimately, the chefs hope their idea will be contagious:

People think there’s nothing there, but really Indigenous food and Indigenous culture has so much to offer. There’s so much diversity...Maybe we are not going to change people’s ideology. But maybe they will stop saying, “Oh, those Indigenous people.” No, because Indigenous is quality. So they won’t use it as a pejorative. Maybe in the future our idea will be contagious and more Indigenous kitchens will open that will be truly Indigenous, continue respecting the product, realizing this ideology that comes from Indigenous peoples. Maybe ours is from the Mixteca, but maybe the idea will be contagious to a Mixe chef and they’ll open a Mixe restaurant, or a Zapoteco or Chocholteca, or Maya, there are so many. We are many Indigenous pueblos... They’ll see that Indigenous people can also do great things.

These chefs follow the footsteps of many other Indigenous peoples around the world who attempt to recover traditional ecological knowledge and elements of cultural and community integrity through regeneration of Indigenous foodways (See, for example Bodirsky & Johnson 2004; Millburn 2004; Kamal et al. 2015).

While Toño and friends do not explicitly propose to “decolonize” the diet (Salmón 2012; Ochoa 2014; Gupta 2015), they do aim to restore appreciation for Indigenous cultures by at once defending traditions and heralding creativity and adaptation as foundational elements. Simply affirming the legitimacy of victims of discrimination is, of course, an insufficient platform from which to tackle racism (Nemser 2017); indeed, isolating elements of Indigenous cultures in the form of restaurant food in a tourist town risks commodifying a publicly palatable version of Indigeneity detached from broader political and social demands of the country’s Indigenous people. Still, recovering a sense of dignity is often a strategy to further both self-acceptance in the context of discrimination and movement-building (See for example, Hernández Castillo 2002; Simpson 2013; Camp 2015).

Reclaiming the space of the tianguis as an Indigenous foodway provides these young chefs with a cultural counterweight against the dual pressures of Spanish-centric education and urbanization that have pushed them away from two major markers of Indigeneity – belonging to a community³⁵ and speaking an Indigenous language. For these young men, the tianguis allows them to enter into a recognizable space, reminiscent of home, that at once bridges the distance between the city and their own community roots. In doing so, the tianguis also functions to claim urban space as Indigenous space.

³⁵ After the Mexican Revolution, the federal government recognized land rights of agrarian communities that could demonstrate precolonial rights to particular territories (Bartra & Otero 2005). Though there is ambiguity around the legal definition of Indigenous community today (Martínez 2020), common usage reflects recognition of a communally-held land base governed by an ethnically similar group of people.

Moreover, the chefs' defense of innovation as part and parcel of Indigenous custom, facilitated by the lively exchange of recipes and other knowledge at the marketplace, allows them to challenge the prevailing, limiting notions of Indigeneity. While they reaffirm culinary and farming traditions as something good, rather than backward, their project also allows them to insert themselves within their cultures from outside the rural space so closely linked with Indigenous people in the Mexican imagination.

3b. Tianguis as People's Science

To claim their own culinary experimentation as itself Indigenous, the chefs highlight the creativity of people in Indigenous communities. They take inspiration from campesinos who make use of each part of the maize plant to produce dozens of local dishes, and from mothers who disguise the same beans – all there is to eat in a given week – in varied preparations, changing spices and cooking-styles to surprise their children. Some of their recipes have come from conversations with the market women:

The best conversations start, “And this – where do you bring it from?” And they end up telling you how you’re going to cook it. You tell them your plans and they say, “No, you’ve got it all wrong, *mijo*. Look, before you start, you’re going to sprinkle it with such and such.” In that sense, you’ve exchanged a recipe. You’ve shared yours and she’s given you hers. And she’s thrown in some extra radishes. And you learn to respect the product more. “Hey – and these mushrooms, how long is rainy season?” “This year it hasn’t rained much, so use them well.” And

out of respect for the product and the harvesters, you know to give them a good use, so they shine.

The exchange of knowledge described was not unique to the chefs. Invariably, talking about tianguis involves the exchange of food knowledge. “What’s this?” customers commonly ask as they gesture towards an unfamiliar fruit or vegetable. Another customer or a vendor will chime in, “It’s a kind of mushroom and you can make it in a yellow mole sauce.” “How do you make purslane?” “Scramble it with eggs.” “What do you do with *nanche*?” “You can make a liquor with mezcal. It’s sweet and good, but you need time so that it will ferment and release the fruit flavor.”

Marketgoers in Calicanto del Camino described food preparation as they shared their photos: “Grasshoppers (Figure 3.14) – you see them and want to eat them with a *tlayudita*. We buy the tlayudas already made and just toast them with a piece of meat and a little salsa with the tomatoes are roasted on the coals, because it tastes delicious.” “Dried cranberries for a salad.” “[I like] epazote (Figure 3.15) for *paradito* beans.” “Sometimes on Sundays I make my limeade, and the flavor is very different if it’s a limón criollo or a germinated lime – the big variety.” A conversation ensues about favorite mangoes – petacón, mango piña, ataulfo, manila, “el criollito” – and their many preparations (Figure 3.16a). Some are eaten green, others in vinegar, with chili, in a sweet broth. One marketgoer sends mangoes in vinegar to his uncle in the U.S. Tianguistas, for their part, are always innovating and sharing their recipes with customers. Even the tortilla – the most quintessential of Mexican foods and the dietary staple since pre-Columbian times – is regularly innovated by creative

tortilleras. In Calicanto, women infuse their tortillas with amaranth, chia, sesame, cactus, garlic and herbs.

Figure 3.14. Grasshoppers roasted with garlic and chilli

Figure 3.15. Epazote, limes, chamomile, mustard greens, capulín

(Photos by participant in Marketgoers' Photovoice)

The exchange of knowledge flows between customers and vendors. Tianguistas are quick to integrate new ideas into their products. Five years back, it was difficult to find ginger or turmeric anywhere in the state of Oaxaca; today all the neighborhood tianguis offer these products, along with explanations of their health benefits. One stand specializes in what are known as “red fruits” – strawberries, plums, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries – some of which are imported (Figure 3.16b).

Figure 3.16. Fruits of the tianguis (Photos by participant in Marketgoers' Photovoice)

Figure 3.16a Frutos rojos [red fruits] at the tianguis

Figure 3.16b Large fruit stall with four varieties of mangos

Tianguistas transmit their own knowledge about the foods they sell as part of their sales pitch. When asked when customers became interested in such products, the vendor responded, “You know, I think I gave people the idea. Today health is what’s selling. What I’ve seen is that [my customers] have hypertension or diabetes, etc. I started telling people about the antioxidants in red fruits and the anti-carcinogenic properties of turmeric.” The vendor’s mother had cured an ailment with red fruits and believed in natural remedies because of experiences with her children and the advice of a local *curandera*. One customer in the photovoice group spouted off properties of fruits as she showed us her pictures: “Strawberries help you lose weight. Raspberries are good for your vision. Bananas help with muscle cramps. Papaya with digestion. Blackberries with a skin condition.” Some of this information, she has learned from tianguistas themselves. “They say a natural product will always help you,” she says. Such exchanges of recipes and health tips made one customer suggest that a tianguis is “where you find the people’s science, a place where knowledge is exchanged. It’s where, for a long time, we have found our material culture.”

4. Tianguis as resistance

Because of tianguis' centrality to Indigenous cultures and urban social life and because they possess (or historically possessed) features that exist in tension with modern capitalism, a number of activist groups have found inspiration in them. Some of these activists have created their own tianguis, inspired by the traditional popular markets but focusing on or elevating a particular aspect. In Oaxaca alone, there are tianguis that aspire to be ecological, organic, autonomous, self-governing, and *trueque* (barter) only. Some center on social justice as a precondition for food sovereignty, with food practices functioning as a means to an end for broader social transformation (Patel 2009; Figueroa 2015). The reflections of these alternative tianguis participants complement those of everyday marketgoers to help articulate a public perception of the popular tianguis that accounts for their survival. This section considers two examples of these alternative tianguis, describing in some depth the Mujer Nueva feminist tianguis and more briefly a barter-only tianguis.

4a. Mujer Nueva's tianguis in movement

Mujer Nueva – a feminist collective with its own small tianguis – has its origin in one of the most dramatic challenges to state power in recent history. In 2006, in what was known as the March of Pots and Pans, women marched to the studios of the state television channel, demanded the removal of all employees and began to run the station with movement-related content in a takeover that lasted three weeks. The march was part of a statewide uprising that had begun several months before. Two months earlier, state

police attacked the tens of thousands of teachers who were occupying the city center, part of an annual union strike that had gone on longer than usual due to stalemate negotiations. Oaxacan residents rose up in mass – indignant at the use of state force against a peaceful protest, an event which ignited the already widespread discontent with the governor and the regime he represented. In the months that followed, the broad spectrum movement that sprung from this repression, known as the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, or the APPO, successfully closed the offices of each branch of government, shutting down congress and the courts, and forcing the state governor to abandon the state. Movement leaders argued that the media constituted the “fourth branch of government,” and set out to occupy state-run media. The March of Pots and Pans was the first act of the uprising that was specifically organized along the gender lines. It served as a platform for the politicization and activation of women, who were encouraged to organize around women’s issues beyond the duration of the movement³⁶.

The idea to start a tianguis came the following year at a large political gathering held to commemorate the March of Pots and Pans and set an agenda for continued women’s organizing. One group of women formed a collective they called Mujer Nueva and decided that creating a tianguis would allow them a space for ongoing political formation where they could also create and distribute products aligned with their own values. “It was one of the resolutions of that gathering – to recover the tradition of the tianguis.

³⁶ For more context, see Denham, D. (2008). *Teaching Rebellion: Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca*. PM Press.

Because we had to create a front against the big chains,” said one organizer. *Mujer Nueva* took the model of the tianguis in the spirit of community-building, given its vernacular perception as a community institution. They began with an itinerant market (Figure 3.17), setting up in different neighborhoods each month. The intense neighborhood organizing that happened as a result of the APPO helped to connect the collective with neighborhood spaces:

We’d go to the *colonias* [popular neighborhoods], since there was a lot of effervescence around the movement, there were *colonas* [neighborhood women] who were organized and they’d invite us and it was a way of showing them that we were present, too, right? That the movement was alive, you know, in spite of the repression. And of course, the tianguis is a Mexican tradition, local, with cultural and community significance and that’s what we wanted to recover.

Mujer Nueva: colectivo feminista en Oaxaca

Figure 3.17. *Mujer Nueva* Tianguis (Jiménez 2016)

They set up around twenty market stalls, a table for barter, a table where everything is free, and a used book exchange. After a few years, they decided to meet in a single location, in front of a building owned by the teachers' union. Theirs is a smaller tianguis than most neighborhood tianguis and focuses more on creating a community learning and social space.

4b. Generating critique and restoring urban connections with the countryside

Tianguis Mujer Nueva is fundamentally based on a critique of the prevailing political economy of food. The women link the failing health of many Oaxacans due to diabetes and hypertension with the practices of agro-business that seek profit over the public well-being. As one participant said, "We decided it was necessary to share our knowledge about what we were eating and start to question all the packaged foods and the chemicals in them. To be able to build an alternative to everything that bombards us from every direction. So we made the tianguis as a starting point." Theirs is a producer market, which they define as: crafting their own health care or food product using natural ingredients, selling plants or produce they have grown, or bringing agricultural products from rural communities to which they have ties. They are critical of organic certification, which is prohibitively costly for many producers, but they aim to make products that are "100% natural" and "100% criollo" and foster a "respect for nature that some campesinos still have." They are concerned with the heavy share of the profits that stays with distributors and retailers of agricultural products and the low prices paid to producers. They aim to shorten the chain, commercialize what they produce, value the labor of

producers. One woman explains, “The idea is that producers come from their own community and exchange their produce directly, without intermediaries like sometimes, a lot of times, happens in the [urban popular tianguis]. But the difference is in ours we also want to create a space to exchange knowledge.”

Just like the Mixtec chefs, this group of mostly city-dwellers is interested in strengthening or revitalizing its connections with the countryside. “Pasiflora relaxes you,” says a vendor of the medicinal drops she makes from passionfruit. When I ask her how she learned about the properties of the plant, she highlighted both her rural upbringing and her frequent trips to the tianguis at the Central de Abastos. “The thing is,” she tells me, “I’m from a community...My mom cured us with things that were natural. We were eleven brothers and sisters. She’d say, ‘Go over to your grandmother’s and pick the white rose’ if we woke up with an eye infection.” Her mother sold cheese that she made at a daily market in Oaxaca City. She would come home from the market with a little meat to complement a lunch she expected her children to have made. “So we would go to the fields for wild greens – purslane, *quelites* or *nopales*, which is what grows there. If we were going to make nopales, we’d make a pot of beans and throw them in...so in some ways we grew up with this idea of the plants, and of the food that grows in the countryside. We had a *milpa*³⁷ where we grew squash, beans and the milpa [maize] itself.

³⁷ Basic element of traditional Mesoamerican agriculture; maize-field where other crops are often intermingled/harvested such as squash, beans, chillies, wild greens, and mushrooms. *Milpa* can also be used to refer to maize specifically.

After the men cut the mazorcas, we'd *pepenar* [pick up fallen grains] what was left over."

4c. Exchanging knowledge

Perhaps an even more important goal is to create a community learning space run by women. "Why a tianguis?" asked one Mujer Nueva member, rhetorically:

Because you can find everything there. If you go to an old tianguis, a neighborhood tianguis, you can find everything. You find people talking, eating. The idea of tianguis is a sense of community. You feel good being there. You prefer to be there over a closed space that you only go to see and you can't ask questions... That's what we've done in this tianguis. The goal is to share a space where we can be together. It's a tianguis initiated by all women and – I don't mean to say we don't invite men – but I do want to say that it is born from the administration of women. We meet once a month and run it as an assembly and make decisions by consensus and divide up some of the tasks, decide who's going to make the poster – it's the invisible work, but someone's got to do it.

Dialogue and learning, through both an informal atmosphere of conviviality and sharing, and through formal workshops are central to this process of community-building.

Workshops include topics such as recycling, natural pesticides, urban agriculture, and natural soap-making as well as spaces of reflection on a range of political topics:

One of our *compañeras* was a doctor and she gave us workshops about natural ointments. At these workshops, one starts to reconnect with what one already knows, right? As a doctor she had the scientific knowledge but she didn't know that much about plants so we complemented [what she taught]. Because she and I always go to the tianguis at the Central de Abastos and chat with the people. Many things we know from the people from the Sierra [Norte] who come to sell. We ask, "What's this for?" "Oh, it's for such and such." They even buy our ointments and sometimes even ask me [about plants]. "Ours is a variation on the tianguis theme. We don't just exchange goods. We also want to create a space to exchange knowledge. You don't go to Chedraui and get a workshop, do you?"

Much of the sharing that goes on at the tianguis is informal. "We ask ourselves how we can substitute or supplement with natural products. For example, I've always shared a recipe of an *asiento* [pork lard] made with seeds, which is vegan. We talk about why our diets need to change. We make the asiento from natural oils that aren't saturated and it serves as asiento that is used in a lot of traditional Oaxacan food but is made of pork lard. We want to mix our traditions with the healthiest ways of living."

4d. *Tianguis as care*

Another Mujer Nueva organizer clarified the mission: "We think that you can't just see the revolution as changing things outside of yourself but that you have to make changes from within, too, in your daily practices. What you eat, what you wear, what you use. It's also about recovering the true sense of humanity and the right to plenitude and

happiness...So that's what we did. Because the movement doesn't have spaces like that, so we created a healthy space where you can go to share, to learn, and, if you want, you can buy something."

The focus on self-care perhaps belies the militant roots of many of the organizers, whose formation includes intense confrontation with the state. One collective member describes fellow participants:

There is Yésica³⁸, who makes her own soaps and Catalina who makes salsas, the women from a Mixe community who sell clothing they make, the family of Damián G. Martínez who is a political prisoner and his family is dealing with the process to pay a lawyer by selling crafts from their region. Then there's a compañera who brings things from the coast, like tamales costenos. Mónica and Gaby have their coop called Colectivo Gueza, then those from Usila who have an organization that sells products from the communities where they work. There are those of us who have [political] prisoners. We sell products they make. Then there's Mary of San José del Progreso who brings chocolate to sell.

The speaker herself was a political prisoner in 2006, and the family of political prisoners she refers to were in jail for more than a decade under accusations of guerrilla activity. The chocolate maker actively struggles against a transnational mining company in her

³⁸ Names changed except for publicly-known political prisoner.

community; in a recent confrontation her partner was murdered and she was shot in the leg in an injury leaving her disabled. A demand for the freedom of political prisoners appears on the fliers advertising the tianguis and on banners at the tianguis stalls themselves (Figure 3.18).

Figure 3.18. Mujer Nueva poster advertising the tianguis

Poster advertises “artisanal and natural products”, a teach-in about the legalization of abortion in favor of “the right to make decisions about our bodies”. It also includes a reference to a campaign against femicide in Mexico (We want [women] free and alive!), an image of a political prisoner demanding his freedom, and a reference to the ongoing demand for justice for the 43 students ‘disappeared’ by the state in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero in 2014.

An older member traced her involvement in the Mujer Nueva tianguis to her earlier political formation in a student-led movement four decades earlier:

While I was in high school and I had two teachers, one who was accused of being a guerrilla, who talked about justice and the government. Around that time more people who were from the countryside, children of campesinos and workers, started entering the university so there starts to be a movement that demands more democracy, more public funds to the university. There were two blocs, the democratic and, we called them, the reactionaries, elites who wanted a traditional university. So I would go to the public protests. I watched the university divide and the repression come. [The state government] put the democratic university director (rector democrático) in jail, and that was a terrible blow. Because then the military came in. Classes were suspended. I had friends who were expelled, arrested. Later came the amnesty. Some were freed but there were people who were killed...And then there was the most recent movement, 2006. Lots of women had participated in the movement without belonging to any organization, but we liked the idea of forming a collective. The idea was not to be isolated, because of all of the repression, the assassinations, we thought it was better not to be isolated. I was inspired [to join the collective] because of Mire, a contemporary of mine who was a political prisoner in 1976. We had big dreams, and started giving workshops amongst ourselves. The tianguis became a platform for learning from each other.

From her experience in Mujer Nueva, this woman was moved to start an even smaller tianguis in her pueblo. The tianguis began as a tool in a territorial struggle. “Even though it’s not a political tianguis it did come out of an issue of political aggression,” she told

me. The neighboring town and county seat was using land in her community as a garbage dump, and releasing untreated sewage water near a stream on that land. Community members were tired of the pollution, particularly the garbage burning. In an Assembly, they decided to guard the land to prevent further dumping, rotating groups of people to occupy the space, day and night, for over a year. Men tended to stand guard during the nights while women took the day shifts. Vicky offered to bring some of her friends from *Mujer Nueva* to give workshops. “They gave workshops about how to make paper lanterns or figurines with maize, so that people who went to the sit-in wouldn’t just be sitting. “Of course, they brought their embroidery – the classic activity you see at the sit-ins here. But we tried to make it so you could learn something, too. In those gatherings, we said, ‘Well, [the county seat] is harming us and yet we go every Sunday and Wednesday to buy everything from them. Why don’t we make a tianguis here in the pueblo [on this land]?’

Thus, the tianguis was established as a means of accomplishing two goals at once: to address territorial issues and to create a community space for women. Another all-women’s tianguis includes a small assortment of products – snow cones, aprons, house plants, tamales. There are no longer workshops, and sales are often low, but women have gotten to know each other and created a space for social exchange. Though the tianguis emerged in response to political aggressions, it isn’t political in the sense of *Mujer Nueva*. “It’s also an exchange of feelings and of experiences even if there isn’t much political sense,” clarified Vicky. “There isn’t an analysis of reality, of capitalism, of the

big commercial centers. We are still very lacking in the critical sense. But it's a space of self-support, and that's good. It's a start."

5a. Tianguis as a practice of alternative economies

Mujer Nueva is not the only group that has taken up the tianguis as both a symbol and physical space of resistance; the tianguis has been appropriated by a range of groups to consciously reshape urban social life. The Tianguis Truequero, or barter-only tianguis, takes inspiration from traditional pre-Hispanic tianguis, which operated without currency. Indeed, trueque is a practice still alive in many popular tianguis today, though less common in city markets.

In Oaxaca City, the Tianguis Truequero poster invites people to:

find a little shade under a tree to show what you come to trade (anything for one's own well-being or the common good, from seeds to ideas), to enjoy fellowship and sharing, because trueque is not just exchange. It's good vibes, knowledge, stories and equal relationships (and NOT a hierarchical client-vendor relationship).

The logo is a prisoner behind a barcode that reads, "Don't confuse quality of life with consumption" (Figure 3.19). Another flier includes a message that says "Here your money is worthless." Among the principles of the Tianguis Truequero include:

1. Mutual respect, solidarity and empathy.

2. We accept no kind of money, just trueque (exchange).
3. It's very important to be conscious that trueque is not a substitute for buying and selling: in trueque we do NOT take into account monetary value.
4. We support the exchange of services and knowledge (make a sign to specify what you're offering)
5. We support the exchange of local, natural, artisanal and homemade and environmentally friendly products.

Figure 3.19. Barter tianguis poster, 2017

Inspired by the traditional tianguis practice of barter, these young activists have appropriated the idea to imagine a small space whose rules are not governed by

capitalism. The construction of such alternative spaces allows participants to re-imagine social life inspired in a community institution with which they identify.

5. Contradictions for food sovereignty through the tianguis

These alternative projects construct the tianguis as spaces of de-commodified goods and services; spaces of learning, gathering, and care; spaces of conscious connection between city and countryside; and spaces of political resistance to a food system governed by the rules of neoliberalism. Broadly resonating with the reflections everyday marketgoers, these activist perspectives also help articulate what people value about the more widespread popular neighborhood tianguis. The activists, chefs, and regular marketgoers all put forth a notion of tianguis that reflects the values of the food sovereignty movement: in particular, the right to access culturally relevant food produced (and in this case, distributed) such to support traditional ecological and Indigenous knowledge and campesinos' rights to land. They feel that the tianguis offers them an important degree of control over their own food system, food cultures, and environments (Wittman et al. 2010). In contrast to many alternative food networks in the U.S. and Europe, these foods are specifically accessible to low-income consumers.

Yet, as will become apparent in Chapter 4, the tianguis also presents a number of challenges for the realization of food sovereignty. One reason is that low prices come at a cost. In Mexico, cheap food for the urban poor (what Patel and Moore 2017 call a 'timeless imperative' to keep wages down and prevent civil unrest) has historically included active government involvement in subsidizing the tortilla supply chain and other staples,

including through imports from the U.S., and imposing price ceilings on a range of foods (Fox 1993). Today, the principal subsidy to food prices come from labor (the subject of the following chapter) and nature, on both sides of Mexico's borders. Whether produced in the agro-industrial hubs of Puebla, Sinaloa or Iowa, food is made cheap by passing the bill to the soils and waterways on which its long-term production depends. Even though foods produced by agri-business make up much of the *despensa* that people procure at the tianguis, they find themselves in the shadow of ideals projected by both tianguis activists and regular marketgoers. The co-mingling, and arguably, dominance, of these foods captures one fundamental contradiction for tianguis as a practice in urban food sovereignty: maintaining accessibility for poor urban consumers while providing a decent living to campesinos, farmworkers and those in between.

What Born and Purcell (2006) dub a “local trap” in food systems further illuminates contradictions for the tianguis as a practice in food sovereignty. The scholars are concerned that “local” has become conceptualized as an end-goal by food systems activists and consumers rather than one possible scalar strategy evaluated according to its effectiveness in achieving a normative goal – such as just labor practices or environmentally sound farming. Even some foods that people identify as criollo, local, and representative of Indigenous foodways, are produced with pesticides and fertilizers – contradicting the assumptions of most tianguis shoppers. At one Mixtec woman's farm, I notice empty plastic bottles of pesticide next to the vegetable fields. “I wish we didn't have to use those,” she tells me. “We are trying to use less. But vegetables that have spots on them won't sell.” Another campesina and tianguista, a Zapotec woman from

Tlacoahuaya produces *chile de agua*, which she sells out of a single basket. When she describes her growing practices to me, she describes a moment when she adds “*vitaminas*” to the soil. “Vitamins?” I ask. When she explains what she means, it is clear that she refers to industrial fertilizer, but that she herself sees the practice as healthy and integral to production. While many campesinos whose produce is sold at tianguis *do* farm according to agro-ecological practices, customers’ assumptions of a link between ethnicity and farming practices prevents an honest conversation about the influence of state intervention and climactic changes that have propelled farmers – Indigenous or not – to use agro-industrial inputs – and averts an opportunity to imagine alternatives. Such an assumption also reflects a static vision of Indigenous cultures, where Indigenous people are unwilling or unable to incorporate new technologies in agricultural practices.

In the case of urban tianguis in Mexico, it is not just that a normative value is placed on the idea of “local”; it is also that the belief in tianguis as an embodiment of what is local obscures deeper engagement with many of the realities of the modern, global food system. One common assumption in the tianguis is that small vendors are also producers. While this is sometimes the case, many small stalls are primarily retailers rather than primarily producers. When I refer to one woman as a producer-vendor in a conversation with another tianguista – I had admired her stand of stacked black *zapote* fruits and farm eggs – the other tianguista narrows her eyes and shakes her head at me as if to say, ‘How naïve.’ “You can’t listen to everything they tell you. We can’t be producers,” she tells me. “The quantities we deal in are just too great.” It dawns on me then, that Magdalena is from a town outside of Etla in the arid Central Valleys, but many of the fruits she sells

are grown in tropical areas. One would easily assume that the other tianguista herself, who sells stacks of heirloom tomatoes and squash seeds, were a small producer of all these native crops. Yet, as a tianguista for most of her life and never a farmer, her own supply chains extend outside the state, albeit with some direct relationships with the families of farmers. Another vegetable seller, who appears in several of the marketgoers' photos as an example of tianguis producers, grows some vegetables and herbs. But to have a more diverse vegetable stand, she complements her own produce with what she can buy from wholesalers at the Central de Abastos more cheaply. Vendors know that customers prefer the idea of buying food directly from farmers, so they sometimes present themselves as such even when it is not the case. But the tantalizing idea of farm-to-table, of direct producer-consumer relationships, aside from being an unrealistic proposition in many cases, undervalues the more invisible labor of food production outside of fields or kitchens. The labor of tianguistas – including selecting, hauling, culling, packaging, weighing, washing, displaying, setting up and breaking down stalls, sharing knowledge with clients, negotiating with vendors' associations and municipal officials, and 'adding value' to foods in myriad ways (boiling chayote, jarring honey, removing fava beans from pods, de-thorning cactus, roasting seeds, etc.) – makes possible urban, neighborhood access to huge varieties of culturally desirable foods *and* allows many farmers far from cities to spend more time farming and less time engaging in the labor of marketing. Thus, to contemplate food sovereignty at the urban scale, I suggest that such intermediaries warrant greater theorization.

While marketgoers can often recognize the origins of their products, they also frequently assume they are eating local when it is not the case. Criollo meat from the state of Oaxaca, for example, is difficult to come by. Marketgoers appreciate the freshness of the meat at the tianguis, which is hung up in an open air display. They much prefer this meat to what they describe as the gray-tinted, plastic-wrapped, refrigerated meat of supermarkets – the refrigeration, in particular, making them doubt its freshness. In reality, the production processes of the animals for both retail formats are similar. One butcher, in the business for over fifty years, described the massive transition that the meat industry has undergone. When he was a young adult, he would visit the *pueblos* around the state to buy cattle, bring a few animals back to a stable in the city, and butcher an animal immediately before selling. Meat was consumed on special occasions rather than daily. Today, he says, people in Oaxaca hardly raise animals, except for their own occasional consumption related to festivities in their *pueblos*. When I ask where you can get grass-fed beef today, he answers:

It's that you just can't get that anymore. From anywhere. Sometimes they give [the animals] a little bit of grass, but very little. The rest is all feed...People just aren't raising animals anymore. In the valleys, the Sierra, there aren't any cattle. It used to be, you could go to any pueblo, anywhere you'd find two, three, five animals people wanted to sell. [Now] they say that it's not worth it because [buyers] want it cheap. And it's cold in the Sierra and [cattle that puts on weight fast] can't handle it. Only criollo cattle, they can handle more. They can handle the heat, the cold, water. They can even handle earthquakes. But the thing is, for that animal to be ready to butcher, you have to wait a long time, like five years, and it doesn't have

as much meat, but it's very delicious. Since it's been growing for a long time, it acquires a taste that is very delicious.

I offer these vignettes not to expose the guile of market vendors nor to suggest that because market vendors are often intermediaries, or that crops are sometimes grown with agro-chemicals, that shopping in them is plainly *not* a practice of food sovereignty. Tianguis are, indeed, partly producer-centered markets, connecting urban spaces with the diverse character of their surrounding regions. They are community centers and social spaces. They inspire a sense of what is 'ours' in a globalized food system, a celebration of regional cultural and agricultural diversity in the face of monoculture of unknown origins, and a sense of community and gathering.

Even though customers and activists appear to over-assume the 'localness' of tianguis products while sometimes attaching unrealistic normative values to the concept, the notion of local serves as a sort of short-hand for what urban-dwellers know about their region: they know that Indigenous people and campesinos often possess much of their land in communal landholdings, thus owning at least some of the means of production; they know something about the agricultural and cultural biodiversity of their state and what products come from which regions; they know that money spent on these vendors supports poor people (often in economic situations similar to their own); and they know that money spent at a tianguis will likely circulate locally. While there is plenty of room for fine-tuning this knowledge, it is this context that helps explain why marketgoers and food activists appeal to the tianguis as an enactment of food sovereignty.

Conclusion

Despite a process of racialized marginalization of Indigenous and campesino producer-vendors during a period of urban modernization, tianguis have prevailed because of their centrality to urban foodways, in particular, their role in the cultural and social reproduction of cities. I have argued that tianguis survive, in part, because people experience them as an exercise in food sovereignty. In Mexico, struggles for sovereignty necessarily engage notions of territory, autonomy and self-determination. The meanings attributed to tianguis by the activists who affirm them during the alleged *desabasto*, the cooks who reclaim and redefine Indigeneity through foodways, the Mujer Nueva collective members who herald them as spaces of knowledge-sharing and community-building, and the other marketgoers who insist on their role in supporting a local food system that fulfills the needs of working-class consumers, all help to locate the tianguis symbolically within a resistance to colonial and imperial imposition.

While food sovereignty literature has often focused on small-scale farming (Martínez-Torres & Rosset 2010; Li 2015; Bernstein 2015), homing in on a case of food distribution demonstrates the importance of principles of food sovereignty among urban popular classes in the global South. As weekly markets, tianguis temporarily redistribute urban space (rather than permanently privatizing it) and further a vision of equity in the food system that expands access to land, food, and other resources to marginalized groups from cities and countryside. However, aside from a temporary redistribution of particular urban spaces, the case also demonstrates how this urban Indigenous foodway derives

legitimacy from daily provisioning practices, offering an example from which to imagine food sovereignty without depending exclusively on fixed, bounded notions of space (Trauger 2014; Daigle 2019).

Finally, grounding the concept of food sovereignty in practice allows for the identification of a number of contradictions for its realization at the urban scale, contributing to an analysis of how the various goals of the movement struggle to find compatibility (Agarwal 2014; Li 2015). First, food sovereignty imagined at an urban scale must ensure accessibility to culturally significant foods for urban consumers without destroying the natural systems on which their production is based. Accessibility in the form of low prices requires subsidies from elsewhere, necessitating the imagination of beyond-capitalist alternatives if labor and nature are not to be the source of those subsidies. Second, the increasingly standardized agriculture and livestock practices identified by a now extensive body of critical agri-food scholarship (See, for example, Sanderson 1986; Bonnano et al. 1994; Boyd and Watts 1997; Barndt 1999; Bonano and Constance 2001) are alive and well in Mexico and find shelf space in contemporary urban tianguis. Rather than obscuring the pressures of capitalism, state policies, and climate change behind an ideal of farmers' markets, the enactment of food sovereignty in cities must entail honest conversations that can spark more congruent practices. Third, food sovereignty scholarship must theorize the small-time intermediaries who both add value to food in largely invisible ways and make neighborhood access possible, ultimately cutting down on the local 'food miles' involved in vehicle-dependent urban food procurement. Rather than simply seeking to eliminate this rung on the food chain, I

suggest a need to recognize the labor that produces food systems at the urban scale, which I address in the following chapter.

Chapter 4. Tianguista family-based labor and livelihood strategies

Introduction

For several months in 2013, tianguistas from Calicanto camped out on the land earmarked for the construction of a shopping mall, its anchor store a Walmart. But vendors were not there to protest the coming competition. Instead, they constituted an act of self-defense in the most basic sense. Through the grapevine, vendors had heard that one of the stipulations of Walmart was for the municipality to shut down the tianguis, which had opened in 1980. It is easy to scoff at the nerve of a company that has regularly raised the bar for unfairly shutting out competition – particularly well-known for selling below cost to push competitors out of business (Boudreaux 1996; Boyd 1997; Brunn 2006). One also might wonder why – when corporate retailers enjoy both the goodwill of governing officials and deep pockets for investing in mass advertising and cost-cutting technologies – they would be threatened by a weekly, neighborhood tianguis. Walmart's well-known cutthroat competitive tactics aside (Lichtenstein 2005; Merriman et al. 2012), I suggest that the store's fear of the tianguis is not unwarranted. There are two main reasons. The first is that tianguistas have the possibility to undercut competition because of their ability to rely on self-exploitation via pooled family labor (Chayanov 1925/1986). The second is that tianguistas are organized, regularly producing the city in their image and according to their needs via a sort of insurgent urbanism.

I examine both of these factors in turn: the nature of household level labor arrangements and livelihood strategies are the topic of this chapter, while tianguista organizing

strategies are the subject of the next. It bears mention that the previous chapters have not centered on the voices and lived experiences of everyday tianguis vendors. The admirers of these markets—from conquistadors to tourists to regular urban shoppers—wander through a maze of colors, fragrances and tastes. They are taken by the array of products on display, the aesthetic, sensual, tactile experience of market-going. In the accounts we have reviewed, sorely missing is an ‘insider’s perspective’ of the lives of vendors. This omission includes anthropological accounts (De la Fuente and Malinowski 1982; Scott and Diskin 1976; Beals 1975; Waterbury 1976), which remain preoccupied by the regional organizational structure of the markets, product supply chains, and the occupational and class dynamics within them, attained through observation at the marketplace rather than deeper interactions with vendors.

Yet the survival of the markets in the face of fierce competition owes much to vendors themselves. The deep engagement with vendors via observation in tianguis, in-depth interviews and visits to farms, homes and wholesale markets that is the basis of this chapter reveals that vendors have agency in two respects: they personally confront adverse circumstances through their own hard work and that of their families, and they join vendor organizations that work to secure access to public space by many means. With regard to the former, I suggest that tianguistas depend on a strategy of relying on unpaid family labor; family members can be called upon to work longer hours and difficult shifts when necessary without expecting additional compensation. Moreover, the logic of labor organized at the household level is not profit-maximizing but rather, generally focused on reproducing the business at present levels and on sufficiently

meeting the (somewhat elastic) needs of family members. Thus, the collection of small family businesses that make up a tianguis can largely operate without profits, forgoing the basic mandate of corporate retailers. These tendencies, uncovered in the work of Alexander Vasilevich Chayanov in his studies of the peasant farming economy in early 20th century Russia, largely hold for the spectrum of vendor types in contemporary tianguis – including peasant farmer-vendors, non-farming producer-vendors (producers of value-added food products), and those who are more strictly retailers. While Chayanov considered the household as the preferred unit of analysis to understand the persistence of peasant farms, he did not consider inter-family dynamics—an issue raised by later Chayanovian scholars of agrarian political economy (Friedmann 1978). This chapter draws on the insights of feminist scholars of women’s work and social reproduction (de la Rocha 2001; Lind 2005; Bezanson and Luxton 2006; Benería & Permanyer 2012; Buechler 2014; Meehann and Strauss 2015) to give special attention to the specific tasks women undertake, including both paid and unpaid work. I further consider this “life’s work” (Mitchell et al. 2004) in relation to women’s consumption. The present study reveals that women, especially mothers, are those for whom self-exploitation is greatest: they endure the greatest levels of drudgery for the least reward. While tianguistas report that earnings are distributed over household needs determined by adult heads of household, adult women work longer hours in tianguis-related work and take on more additional socially-reproductive work than adult men. Children who are old enough to work are also drawn into household self-exploitation; their unpaid substantial contributions are considered obligations in exchange for parents’ covering their costs of living.

Along with pooled family labor, the tianguis is further sustained by a number of subsidies³⁹. The most important of these are the remittances sent from migrants. These are used for building and improving homes, buying a car or truck, securing permits for tianguis sales spots, and purchasing land and/or inputs for agricultural production. Most of these investments double as productive and socially reproductive. Homes shelter family members and provide the cooking and packing space for tianguis products and warehouse merchandise. Vehicles transport children to school and merchandise to the tianguis. Agricultural land subsidizes subsistence and provides income. Another important subsidy that applies in some cases are the communal land arrangements that allow members of Indigenous communities or ejidos to farm or build their homes on land to which they have pre-existing rights but for which they do not have to pay. Urban public space is unevenly subsidized by the municipal government, which often provides free permits at the onset of a new tianguis; thus, some tianguis stalls benefit from this free space for selling their merchandise. However, vendors later commoditize these permits, which represent a significant expense and barrier to entry for new tianguistas; the substantial permit payment must be subsidized from another source. Finally, the federal government also provides a conditional cash-transfer program⁴⁰ to low-income families

³⁹ I use 'subsidies' here to refer to resources from outside the tianguis that support its operation – either as investment to start or maintain the business, or as investment in resources that reduce the income tianguis have to provide to cover household expenses. These are not necessarily or primarily public subsidies.

⁴⁰ A version of this federal program has been implemented under several different names. For 12 years under the PAN it was called Oportunidades; under the PRI it was Progres, then Prospera; López Obrador is again reworking it.

with children in school. These resources that tianguistas use to operate their businesses do not have to be paid for from, or paid back by, tianguis earnings. And in the end, the main beneficiaries of family self-exploitation, and these various subsidies, are consumers, who enjoy low prices.

Though tianguis labor arrangements, together with the subsidies on which their operation depends, help explain how they are able to stay in business amidst increasing competition, several less-economistic factors are also relevant. A deeply engrained ideal of owning one's own business as well as the ability of tianguistas to combine socially reproductive and productive labor further supports an understanding of why tianguis livelihoods are worth the sometimes exhausting and extensive efforts of families.

Double-edged competition

Degradation of work among tianguistas has been documented elsewhere in Mexico in relation both to the intense competition of corporate retailers and an ever-expanding informal sector (Denham and Tilly 2013, 2015). In Oaxaca, vendors likewise pointed to both sources of competition. Most saw sales dropping decidedly as new retailers opened near their tianguis, while vendors at the vast and sprawling Central de Abastos pointed to other vendors as their main source of competition. Long-time vendors consistently noted a steady drop in sales over the last decades, which they attribute in large part to the expansion of the major chains. When asked about the decline she described, a fruit seller, who began selling at the market when it first opened twenty-five years earlier, said, "I think it's because so many big stores opened nearby. Two blocks away we have an Oxxo

and the Macroplaza [Walmart and shopping mall]. Before we didn't have any of that.”

Another vendor highlighted the advertising capacity of the corporations:

It really is competition. Unfortunately, people go because they see an ad for a sale, but then they buy more things. It's the hook. 'You know, such and such thing is two for one.' That's where the competition begins. They advertise something cheap, even if it's low quality. And people say, 'That's really cheap.' They go to the store in search of the sale item and even if they don't like it, they're already at the store. They don't just say, 'I didn't like it so I'm leaving.' That's the trap. So yes, sales have really gone down since they started opening all the stores.

Vendors who began selling recently don't have the same point of reference, but note the difference when protestors temporarily shut down the supermarkets. A newcomer to the market noted how his clue to the competition posed by the corporate retailers was when stores were forcibly closed by teachers' union protests: “Well, when [the teachers] block the Walmart, we really sell in the tianguis! Everybody that day sold so much.” Recalling one particular temporary store shut-down, his wife added:

So, so much. I had lots of new customers saying, 'Oh, this is bee pollen? I didn't know what that was.' And another saying, 'worm salt? I had never tried it.' That day I sold out of everything early. I know it sounds selfish, but I thought, 'I wish [the protestors] would shut down the store like that every day!'

Tianguis vendors at the Central de Abastos highlighted the competition they face from both ends: expansion of large chains on one end, and the growing number of ambulantes on the other. More vendors are constantly moving into new urban spaces, sometimes in the streets surrounding established markets. Known as the oldest living “founder” of the Central de Abastos because she was among the first group of women to accept the move from the town center, Severiana said that the period when market vendors sold well (“*chulito*”) is over. This, she tells a newspaper reporter, is because “now there are so many of us” and “our need is so great” (Zavala 2017a). Severiana perceived her main competition as the huge number of vendors in and around the market where she works, which has continued to grow she began selling. Carmelina, who sells produce at Calicanto in addition to several tianguis at the Central de Abastos, described how she saw vendors working longer and longer hours – even sleeping in market stalls rather than returning home to rest. She also described how campesinos find themselves obliged to both sell their produce wholesale, then buy from other producers to sell retail as well:

It used to be where we sell on Tuesdays [the tianguis at the Central de Abastos], the people from Zimatlán and Ayoquezco [pueblos in the Central Valleys] finished selling and went home. Now that’s not the case. Now they stay [at the market] and sleep, then buy more the next day.” Before, they would sell by the box. They finished selling their boxes and they’d go. Now that’s not the case. They sell by the box or by the *kilo* [wholesale or retail]. Then they buy more for the next day [to stay and sell]. So that’s more competition.

These vignettes offer a sense of the context in which tianguistas operate.

This chapter opens with an explanation of how tianguis vendors exercise agency at the household level to stay in business amidst these dual pressures. I outline the basic theory of a peasant economy put forth by Chayanov, a leading authority on agricultural economics in Russia in the early 1900s, then identify the importance of examining intra-family dynamics to understand the nature of self-exploitation as it affects individual members. To demonstrate how Chayanovian principles play out in the tianguis context of contemporary Mexico, I delve into the lives and livelihood strategies of tianguista families, adding attention to both intra-family labor distribution and the subsidy arrangements described above.

Before proceeding, I note that within tianguis there are a variety of labor arrangements, including wage labor. A handful of large fruit stalls have as many as six employees. Some who at first glance seem to be small-time producer-vendors, such as young men selling *mamey* fruit from small, mobile carts, are actually day laborers for a larger fruit wholesaler. Likewise, some family-run stalls selling prepared food employ someone to help with sales, often referred to as a *muchacha/o*. However, the vast majority of tianguis stalls are run by families working primarily or exclusively with other family members. Thus, in this chapter, I focus on how families work together, including by depending on the unpaid work of members and incorporating socially reproductive activities into market life.

The Theory of Peasant Economy

In his work, Chayanov builds on a tradition of rural studies in Russia that followed the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 (Thorner 1986). He argued that to explain how family farms were able to compete with capitalist farms, one had to understand the structure and logic of the family farm – which could not be studied using the same concepts applied to capitalist enterprises. He opens *The Theory of Peasant Economy* by saying:

It has been customary to think about all economic phenomena exclusively in terms of a capitalist economy. All concepts - rent, capital, price etc. are formed in a framework of an economy based on wage labor and seeking to maximize profits. All other (non-capitalist) types of economic life are regarded as insignificant or dying out; they are, at any rate, considered to have no influence on the basic issues of the modern economy and, therefore, are of no theoretical interest (1925/1986, 1).

In his studies and observations of rural Russia, it was clear that not only were family farms *not* disappearing as fast as prevailing economic theory would have predicted – they were also often able to outcompete capitalist farms. To understand how this was possible, he suggested that the family economy needed to be understood on its own terms. He premised his argument on the basic formula used to analyze the profitability of capitalist firms. If a firm makes a gross annual income (after deducting outlays for wages, materials, upkeep, and rent) that is equal to what might have been made if the fixed and circulating capital were instead invested at prevailing national interest rates, the firm is

considered profitable. According to the economist, “all calculations of theoretical economics start with this formula, explicitly or tacitly. Since these are all functionally interdependent, all elements have to be present - price, capital, wages, interest, rent” (Chayanov 1925/1986, 4). That is, because they are determined reciprocally, in the absence of one of these – wages, in the case of peasant families – it became impossible to establish the remaining three (Thorner 1986). No interest on capital could be calculated, and peasant behavior could not be accounted for in terms of the theory of the four main factors of production.

Chayanov analyzed the family farm as a single unit, and argued that the annual product minus expenditures offered a single return to family activity that could not be broken down into wages or other factor payments. He held that even if categories of price and capital are present (for example, the system of peasant and artisan family labor units held together economically by monetary and exchange processes), “we shall still find the structure of such an economy lies outside the conceptual systems of an economics adapted to capitalist society” (Chayanov 1925/1986, 5).

The concept he developed to analyze the economics of the family farm is one that has since been picked up and applied to contemporary agriculture in vastly different contexts: an analysis of the balance between consumer satisfaction based on family needs and what has been translated as the ‘drudgery’ or ‘irksomeness’ of labor. The household determines this equilibrium – its degree of what Chayanov called ‘self-exploitation’ – by roughly calculating how it can satisfy family needs up to the point that additional burdens

of labor no longer feel worthwhile. Each additional unit of income can be considered from the perspective of its significance for consumption and from that of the labor used to produce it (Chayanov 1925/1986). As long as the family estimates that the drudgery of the additional work is lower than the significance of the family consumption needs, then the family will work harder (more intensively or more extensively). Once equilibrium is reached, working harder is no longer attractive because it is easier to forgo additional fruits of labor than to endure harder work. Chayanov considers the qualitative nature of satisfying household consumption needs based on whether or not income is sufficient to meet these or not, and by how much. Because needs themselves are elastic, he argued that this calculation does not have to be exact (Chayanov 1925/1986). He also showed that the balance is a subjective calculation depending on family demographics, especially the ages and number of family members. Standard of living, moreover, as a cultural question “of custom and habit...determines the extent of consumption claims and, thus the exertion of labor power” (Chayanov 1925/1986, 12). While he sometimes refers to the family economy as the “nonwage family economic unit,” he argues that his theory held even when peasant farms hired labor or took off-season wage jobs. Their goals remained the same: not to turn a profit, but to better satisfy family needs. Ultimately, he demonstrates that the peasants predicted to disappear entirely could actually compete with capitalist farms because they could work longer hours, sell at lower prices, and obtain no net surplus for many years – conditions that would cause a capitalist farm to go under (Thorner 1986, p. xix). Importantly, he recognizes that family farms exist within, and not in isolation from, the capitalist economy, revealing, in the words of translator and editor

Teodor Shanin (1986), both “multiplicity of forms and multiplicities of types of independence.”

The first English translation of *The Theory of Peasant Economy* was published in 1966, at a time when linear notions of modernization in development theory, which posited industrialization and prosperity for all, confronted, instead, a reality of increasing wealth gaps; a wave of peasant revolutions had also sparked new interest in peasants as political actors (Shanin 1986). Chayanov’s work thus laid the foundation for scholars interested in understanding the nature of capitalist development in agriculture – particularly why agriculture sometimes follows a different trajectory than industry and the political implications of those differences. Along with the reflections and analyses of Marx (1867/1936), Lenin (1901/1961) and Kautsky (1899/1988), his work on the so-called ‘agrarian question’ became one of the formative themes of contemporary critical agri-food studies (See, for example, Mann and Dickinson 1978; Goodman, Sorj and Wilkinson 1987; Mann 1990; Buttel et al. 1990; McMichael 1997; Whatmore 2002; Kloppenburg 2005). Contemporary theorists of agrarian political economy have used his theory of self-exploitation to understand uneven capitalist development in modern agriculture (Friedmann 1978, 1981; Banaji 1980; Guthman 2004; Jarosz 2008; Martínez-Torres 2008; Galt 2013; Ekers et al. 2016). Friedmann (1981) found that even small commodity producers in the U.S. followed elements of peasant logic, where they “dispense with the category of profit as a precondition for their reproduction and replace the inflexibility of the wage with the flexible costs of personal consumption” (17). Scholars of Mexican peasants also find resonance in Chayanov’s work, arguing that the

Mexican peasantry similarly failed to fully give way to agriculture based on proletariat labor (Aguado López 1993; Altieri and Toledo 1999); highlighting the importance of the household as a unit of analysis and the unification of different kinds of economic activities (Rendón and Martínez 1983); and noting persistent maize production even in the peri-urban context and in the wake of NAFTA, which was predicted to eliminate the peasantry (Eakin et al. 2015).

Teodor Shanin (1986) suggests that Chayanovian theory also has implications beyond the peasantry:

Theoretically the analysis of modes of incorporation by a dominant political economy is in increasing need of being supplemented by the parallel study of modes of non-incorporation operating in the worlds we live in. It is against this context that Chayanov's analysis of alternative and complementary economies, of family labor, of the non-monetarized calculus of choices...—an analysis “from below” attempting to relate structure to choice—will have to find its future possible echo and uses. So will the method of exploring models of alternative realities and rationales (24).

The tianguis itself – that is, the marketplace – is principally a capitalist entity, with vendors seeking exchange value from customers for products they have purchased or produced. Indeed, Beals (1976) thought that the Oaxacan markets exemplified economists' concept of perfect competition – with many competitors selling similar

products and exercising little ability to control prices. However, the labor structure that sustains the tianguis is primarily based on non-wage family labor rather than individual wage labor. Thus, I posit here that Chayanov's analysis can be extended beyond farming and adapted to examine other sectors of the agri-food system. In particular, an analysis of pooled family labor and self-exploitation help explain the persistence of the tianguis in Mexico in the face of highly capitalized competition. For a capitalist firm to remain in business, it must reproduce labor, the means of production, and profits. A non-capitalist enterprise can survive by reproducing the first two. Corporate retailers constantly reduce overhead (especially labor) costs by investing profits in machines—from grocery carts to self-service check-out to information systems and vehicles that facilitate inventory stocking. While these companies can reinvest capital into such technologies, as well as mass advertising and expansion into new territories, individual tianguista families can persist without profits. Tianguistas can ask more of their family members and reign in consumption when necessary. Thus, this labor-intensive, low consumption model premised on self-exploitation offers a particular competitive advantage over the profit-seeking mandate of corporations. Clearly, it is not only peasants who can intensify their work in exchange for the equivalent of below-market wages. The small family businesses that make up the tianguis generally have what Chayanov called “reserves of resistance” including the ability to under-consume or fail to meet the basic needs of household members when facing low commodity prices (Mardsen 1988) in order to prioritize holding onto some of the means of production (in this case, the urban land that make sales possible). Scholars have also noted a tendency for households to undervalue their own labor (Errington and Gasson 1994). Others question the application of the idea of

profit-maximizing individuals in light of alternative priorities and values (Gibson-Graham 1997; Harvey 1999).

In what follows, I consider three types of tianguis vendors in the context of their family livelihood strategies. First, I describe a family of campesino-vendors that grows vegetables for both the wholesale market and the tianguis. Then, I turn to a non-farming producer-vendor, who makes the maize-based products that she sells at the tianguis and in small corner stores. Third, I examine the case of a family whose focus is primarily on retail, purchasing fruits and vegetables at the wholesale market and selling them at the tianguis⁴¹. My approach to understanding the labor of these tianguistas is through “thick description” (Geertz 1994) of family livelihood strategies. Thus, we travel beyond the borders of the tianguis, through farms and wholesale markets, into household workshops and kitchens, and as far as the United States. This journey helps contextualize the nature of family labor and consumption as well as tianguistas’ own explanations of their choices and experiences.

⁴¹ These three vendor types constitute the bulk of tianguistas. However, I note that there are many exceptions and even these categories blur. Farmer-vendors sometimes buy a part of their merchandise wholesale to supplement what they grow. Other producer-vendors who are not farmers prepare part of what they sell to supplement their wholesale-to-retail business. Some work every day of the week at a tianguis while others work only one day, deriving the rest of their livelihood from other labor. Furthermore, there are a number of additional labor arrangements present at the tianguis. I mentioned wage labor, and anecdotal evidence suggests that men are paid more than women for the same work. A small handful of vendors sell products from companies that operate on a pyramid scheme. Catalog sales are also quite common. Vendors who operate a regular fruit and vegetable stall might have a small side business in which they show customers products in a catalog such as perfumes, shoes, jewelry or clothing. They allow customers to buy these on zero-interest credit; the companies to which the catalog’s products belong thus benefit from the relations of trust and allow their sellers to bear risks. Notwithstanding this diversity, for the purposes of the present study I consider only the family-run model that makes up the great majority of tianguis labor arrangements.

The comparison helps demonstrate similarities across subsectors of the tianguis. As we will see, the primary type of labor arrangement in each case is pooled family labor. In all of these families, we see the ability to extend working hours and forgo paying family members a wage; expenditures are instead determined by male and/or female heads of household who aim to provide for other members according to their priorities. Women, the face of the tianguis, are also those whose labor is stretched the farthest for the least individual reward. The types of subsidies that support continued tianguis activity vary in these cases, but remittances provide the most significant source of investment and safety net. Depending on the demographics of the family unit, being able to care for children onsite (rather than pay for daycare) often plays an important role in their chosen occupation. Such a decision is both economically motivated and a question of preference for keeping children with family members. Aside from childcare, tianguistas ‘save’ by undertaking certain activities during tianguis hours that alternative employment would typically require them to complete outside of work: running errands, shopping or trading, and eating. They realize these activities during lulls in sales or by dividing productive and socially reproductive tasks among family members.

Tianguistas evaluate the success of their business not in terms of profits, which are optional—they have no mandate, and, indeed, limited possibility to expand their business. They feel that owning their own market stall is, in itself, a sign of success, independent of how well they do, because it is the basis for achieving independence in

covering household needs, especially to '*sacar adelante a su familia*' (to help their family get ahead), a priority typically framed in terms of helping children get through school.

Tianguis stalls can operate over long periods of time with no profits; they must only sustain family members and produce enough to cover the costs of continued operation (mainly associated with restocking and transporting goods). Growth, when it emerges as a possibility, is typically constrained by the number of adult family members able to oversee market stalls, and second, by the ability to secure more access to street space via commoditized permits. Tianguis are often one part of a broader family livelihood strategy, supplemented by or supplementing food production for consumption, sales of products in other venues (from wholesale to door-to-door), and local and migrant wage labor. In all cases, vendors have little possibility of setting prices; they must stay close to an established market price that they have no control over. For many products, the price varies by season and can drop unexpectedly. So maintaining competitive prices requires pooled family labor at the equivalent of below-going-rate wages. It also requires the ability to depend on the "stretching" of this labor pool by sometimes demanding more hours and unattractive shifts or requiring a tightening of household consumption.

Eufalia⁴², *campesina-tianguista*

Eufalia's is a busy stall, and noisy. Right next door are the pirated CDs and DVDs, advertising themselves loudly. Over the noise, Eufalia is fast and friendly. She sells baby

⁴² All vendors' names are pseudonyms

squash, tomatoes, potatoes, cilantro, epazote, green beans, cabbage, sweet corn, broccoli, mustard greens, swiss chard, cactus, chayote, spinach, watercress, and radishes. She's a newcomer to the tianguis but already has regular customers who crowd around the stall, calling out their orders. A little hand holding a tomato sticks up through the vegetable boxes. Eufalia's five-year-old daughter has joined her and is exploring under the crates, ignoring occasional exasperated admonishment from her mother. Eufalia gives prices and sacks up the orders, cutting off carrot greens or radish leaves upon customers' request. Her older sister, who lives in town and cleans houses on other days, helps her.

Eufalia went to bed late and rose early to pick, wash, bundle, and box vegetables from her farm for her stall; in the wee hours of the morning, she stopped by the Central de Abastos to purchase wholesale all of the vegetables they don't grow. She can't take a break until early afternoon when the pace slows. Then, she and her sister buy empanadas and a coconut drink from a neighboring stall; they eat between customers. At the end of the day, around six in the evening, they sweep up all the vegetable waste to take to their farm animals. When he has time, her husband comes to pick them up in his truck; otherwise they take two buses to get home.

This is a day in the life at the tianguis. But behind Eufalia is a whole-family enterprise of growers, pickers, animal raisers, wholesalers, buyers, builders, child care providers, and cooks (with most members playing multiple roles). Eufalia sums it up: "*Somos*

campesinos, pues.” To understand what goes into this small vegetable stand and how it fits into an overall livelihood strategy that combines farming for subsistence with wholesaling, retailing, and U.S.-based wage labor, it is necessary to examine at least a generation’s worth of family labor.

As a young adult, Eufalia’s father left their pueblo in the Mixteca to work in the U.S. He had experience with agri-business farming because, when he was a child, he had worked as a seasonal farmworker in Sinaloa and Sonora. For years, when crossing back and forth was easier, he did seasonal agricultural work in California. In 1979, from savings from those trips, he bought the land they live on today, a four-hour drive from his home town and thirty minutes outside Oaxaca City. He missed the bracero program and couldn’t make it to the U.S. during the immigration amnesty of 1986 (*yo estuve de mojado*⁴³, he tells me) but by the age of twenty-two, he arrived in North Carolina, where he did yardwork for nearly six years. His responsibility was clear to him: “The one who goes has to send money back to his family, for the children and everything.”

In North Carolina, he was eventually able to buy a trailer and live in it with his son and later his brother. Their experience was typical of many Oaxacan migrant workers: hard physical labor, long hours, no benefits, fear of any run-in with police that could lead to deportation, struggles to communicate in English with their boss. But from abroad, he was able to cover the basic living costs of his family – including his wife and eight

⁴³ Undocumented. *Mojado* literally translates to the derogatory term ‘wetback’.

children and his parents – and save to invest in their future. He purchased a plot of land closer to Oaxaca City where his family lived in a makeshift shelter made of bamboo-like reeds called *carrizo* that they cut from the banks of a nearby river. Over the next twenty-five years, with help from remittances from other family members, they saved enough to build a cement house with a living room and several bedrooms adjacent to an outdoor covered dining and cooking area. Armando made these investments with several goals in mind: he wished to get his family out of their pueblo where opportunities for schooling were limited and set them up to both produce their own staples and sell in the markets. He planted a small nopal grove, the cactuses now looming overhead (Figure 4.1). They are shaded by avocado trees planted at the perimeter of the grove. As well as a place to live, they use the land Armando bought (together with adjacent rented plots) to produce all of the maize and beans they eat in a year, a variety of fruits and quelites [wild or semi-cultivated greens], and vegetable cash crops. They both sell and eat all of these crops. They use the courtyard and house to eat and sleep, store grains, and prepare vegetables for market (Figure 4.2). All of these investments – the subsidies on which Eufalia’s tianguis business are eventually based – double as productive and socially reproductive.

Figure 4.1. Nopal grove

Figure 4.2. Sacks of maize stored in courtyard kitchen (Photos by author)

If he had stayed in his pueblo in the Mixteca, where children have to walk two hours to get to school, Armando imagines his kids wouldn't have had the chance to study; he only got to attend three years of primary school. His parents still live there, though, and he makes the five hour drive every few months to take care of the house, tend to some of the fruit trees he has growing there, and bring back wood for cooking.

Back in Oaxaca, most days are market days for someone in Eufalia's family. Armando sells three days a week in the tianguis in Esquipulas, Guayo, and one in the Central de Abastos. Her husband, Ildefonso, sells two nights a week at the wholesale market at the Central. On Wednesdays, Ildefonso spends all day getting ready for the night's wholesale market while Armando prepares for the morning's tianguis. Everyone pitches in. All day long, most of the family picks green beans and baby squash in the fields near their home to take to the wholesale market that night. They also pick smaller amounts of other

vegetables for the tianguis, like cactus, radishes, guaje pods and the greens growing in and around the fields such as *hierba mora*, *quintoniles* and purslane.

As we walk to the fields, we pass the guaje tree for which Oaxaca was named, its branches full of long purple pods with tiny green edible seeds. We stop at a guava tree to collect a bunch in our shirts. Large squash grows rampant near the house. Eufalia's five-year old daughter follows close by. Her favorite season is the rainy season, and she lights up as she talks about collecting *chicatanas*, the winged ants that fall from the sky by the thousands at the first rain. They collect them and throw them onto the comal, then eat roasted or in a salsa. The whole family loves grasshoppers and hunts them in the early morning when the corn is young, fields are wet, and the bugs are sleepy.

In the morning, the family focuses on harvesting, hauling, and washing the round, green baby squash, or *calabacita*, as well as picking green beans. In the afternoon, they finish picking, selecting, and bagging green beans. Green beans are a new crop for the family. Ildefonso learned how to grow them the previous year from a man at the wholesale market. He has two varieties: one that grows on a tall vine and one that grows closer to the ground. He also grows two varieties of baby squash, one they call *cuarentena* and another, *criollo*; the latter, by their assessment takes longer but is tastier. A tarp offers some shade to the people selecting vegetables and some napping puppies. Even though the land is just a ten-minute walk from the house, Eufalia has made a fire and boiled

some wild greens and potatoes for lunch. The mother dog eats a raw squash, then a potato.

Two *paisanos* of Ildefonso – Chinantec men from his hometown – wash the freshly picked beans while two women sort through a big pile of green beans and select the straightest ones, filling a couple of big paint buckets with these. Anything with spots gets thrown out. The bent or U-shaped green beans still go inside the wholesale bag but they don't go on top. When the bags are stuffed, Eufalia or her niece close them with a plastic string, lacing it so that there is a window that allows the green beans to be viewed by would-be buyers. Customers are particular about this, and won't buy if they spot a single bad bean. Some customers, they say, cut a hole into the sack to inspect it more fully. Ildefonso doesn't want to sell anything bad because he knows customers won't come back if he does. Just like in the tianguis, relationships and trust are important in the wholesale market to foster long-term customers. They load up twelve big bags of green beans and eighty-five wooden crates of baby squash, each nearly brimming over, covered on top with newspaper to protect them.

Sometimes Ildefonso hires the *paisanos* helping out that day or day laborers from the nearby town. But more often than not, it's his family that does this work. "There are times when you have to harvest, and you need people, you know? To harvest. Sometimes I can get people, and when I can't, we get everyone in the family and, *a cortar, pues* ['let's pick, then']. [Even] if there aren't [day laborers], the fruit can't stay on the vine any more days because it starts growing and loses its price." The family works all day

long picking, washing, packing (Figures 4.3, 4.4) – there’s no other choice if they don’t want to let good produce go bad. They finish at eight at night when Ildefonso rushes off to the wholesale market. He splits the gas with his neighbor, Mariano, who fills half the truck with cucumbers. Mariano grows cucumbers and tomatoes in greenhouses that he built with savings from seven years of construction work in Los Angeles and a loan from his brother, who was still in the U.S.

Figure 4.3 Sorting, washing green beans

Figure 4.4 Packing squash for wholesale (Photos by author)

Ildefonso speeds. If you don’t make it to market by nine at night, you get left out, even though he’s paid for a permit and sales don’t really get going until 3am. That’s when things get fast and furious. This wholesale market is an open-air, dirt-floor lot on the Atoyac riverbank where producers sell from their trucks (Figure 4.5). The Central de Abastos building complex is across the street.

Figure 4.5. Tianguistas shop at wholesale night market (Photo by author)

The first few hours, until around 11pm, are fairly relaxed. Sellers, mostly men, chat with each other. Buyers start strolling through, asking prices. Buyers are tianguistas or people with daily market stalls at the Central. “Barato barato!” Ildefonso says, when asked. A buyer who passes by in his truck tells him that the green beans were very expensive, that he’d just gotten some last week for 250. Ildefonso was asking 400 but told me he hoped to get 350. Ildefonso tells the buyer that his are high quality: “First harvest,” he tells them. The crop he sells that night are from the first of three harvests that can be had from the green bean plant. After three harvests, you pull up all the plants, burn, then rotate crops. He planned to plant cucumbers there next. As a small-scale farmer competing with big agro-business, he had to be strategic about what he farmed, concentrating on labor intensive vegetables. He wouldn’t grow broccoli. “*No nos conviene*⁴⁴,” he said. “The

⁴⁴ It’s not in our interest.

*poblanos*⁴⁵ who bring in vegetables by the trailer-full, can undersell us.” That’s why his family focuses on growing what they can sell at the going rate: cactus paddles, radishes, cilantro, squash, and green beans. They buy broccoli and other vegetables for their tianguis stalls from the poblanos.

Ildefonso thought the current going rate – around 350 for a 35-kilo bag of beans of his quality – was a good price. “When it’s cheap, a bag goes for around 100,” he told me. On the other hand, he hoped to get fifty pesos per box of squash, which he thought was low, even for March. (A month later, the going price dropped to a mere five pesos per crate, which, Eufalia pointed out, is the price of the crate itself. Some farmers harvested to avoid an even deeper loss, but they sold the same quantity without the box.) Pricing happens, in part, in the wholesale market itself. There is no price collusion, says Ildefonso. That would be impossible. Vendors eye the market for an idea of the competition to set their prices. They look around and see how much of each product is coming in each week. Then they decide whether they’re going to have to offer at a lower price. If the market floods with green beans one day, they know they are going to have to start lower. Sales get going at three in the morning, and slow down around eight or nine, but some days they can be there until noon. The goal is to drive home empty-handed. Some bargaining is mandatory. “*Quien no da precio, regresa con su mercancía*” – anyone who doesn’t offer a low price goes home with their merchandise, says Ildefonso.

⁴⁵ Literally, people from Puebla, the state bordering Oaxaca to the north, but shorthand for anyone transporting goods grown on large agro-industrial farms. The poblanos have a different spot in the Central – they’re not allowed to be in the same space as the Oaxacan producer wholesale market.

Retailers looking for the lowest prices, including the lowest quality products rejected by the earlier birds, go in the morning. The best products go in the wee hours, while the less desirable (or surplus) go later and/or for cheaper.

Like most farmers around the world, they work within a high degree of uncertainty. When they plant, they don't really know what they'll make on their crops at harvest – it's all a rough approximation. There are good seasons and bad seasons, and they must sell whether prices are low or high. For two months out of the year, Ildefonso has no product to take to the wholesale market at all. That night at the wholesale market, he did well. He sold out and went home with nearly 8,000 pesos [375 USD⁴⁶] in his pocket. Still, deducting his costs then spreading the earnings over the hundreds of hours of family labor that made those sales possible would still produce wages for those involved far below the going rate.

More often than not, farmers bear the brunt of fluctuations in price and other disasters affecting crops. In 2017, a flood that immediately followed a high-magnitude earthquake wiped out one harvest. Government officials, Mariano says: “didn't even come. How are they going to support campesinos? Only when they're asking for votes...Not even our friends remembered to visit us then. Oh well, we like the labors of the countryside because what else are we going to do? I, at least, didn't study. And actually, I like

⁴⁶ The exchange rate fluctuated during the period under study. All conversions are rounded estimates for the time period referenced. From 2017-April 2020, the exchange rate fluctuated from 18-24 Mexican pesos to the U.S. dollar.

working in the fields.” But he is having a rough time of it. He lost over two thousand dollars in the flood – more than a fifth of what he hoped to earn that year. He worked seven days a week in construction in the U.S., but still said, “I got spoiled in Los Angeles. Here it’s difficult because you start from zero.” At both the wholesale market and the tianguis, prices vary even over the course of a single day; vendors sell at-cost or even below-cost when it’s getting late. (And, notably, when tianguistas say “at-cost” for purchased items, they mean the wholesale price, without factoring in their own time, labor, or transportation costs).

Costs for farmers and vendors alike, on the other hand, are steadily increasing. Eufalia’s family rents three patches of farmland with irrigation at varying prices. They can’t afford to leave land fallow, but they do practice crop rotation. Gasoline is their most significant expense, representing 1,500 pesos per week [67 USD]. Fertilizers and pesticides, which they use reluctantly, is their other big expense. Ildefonso walks me through the various brands of agro-chemicals they use. “All that comes from your country, doesn’t it?” he asks me. “Nothing here can be produced without them.” Mariano describes the technological treadmill (Cochrane 1958; Kloppenburg 2005; Weis 2007) on which they find themselves:

The land isn’t the same anymore because it gets addicted to these fertilizers.

Because it used to be accustomed to organics, you know. But when you start to apply fertilizers, whether granulated or soluble, the land gives so much more, double the production. But if you stop using the fertilizers, the production goes

down because it doesn't...the soil becomes acidic and we have to apply other kinds of liquids to deal with the salinity. Everything that the fertilizer leaves behind. We have to use insecticides, too. Because sometimes there are worms that eat the root of the plant. Now everywhere, all the land here [in the valleys] you have to apply insecticides. The land is really contaminated. So many infestations. And in this heat they develop fast.

Despite the costs, neither of the farmers would ever take out a loan from the bank because of the soaring interest rates; neither has a bank account. Ildefonso adds, "You can never get out from under a bank. I just go baby step by baby step." Now twenty-six years old, Ildefonso started his work in the wholesale sector at the Central de Abastos when he was fifteen, unloading fruit trucks. That's where he met Eufalia, who worked at her parents' market stall. From the time she was seven, she worked whenever she wasn't studying. After she finished middle school, her parents told her that they couldn't help her with any more schooling. So she began to work every day at the market, from seven in the morning until six at night. She was never paid a wage for any of the work she did; instead her labor was considered a family obligation. While Eufalia was at the market stall, Ildefonso worked at the fruit bodega. On Wednesday nights around 8 pm, the fruit trucks would arrive, and he'd start unloading until 2 am. The 26-hour shift with only one hour of sleep made it a rough job:

They give you just one hour to sleep, then you have to wake up and start selling. At 3 am you wake up and start selling. You keep going until 10 the next night.

Everyone is sleep-deprived. That's why, in the Central, workers use a lot of drugs. To stick it out. Workers like me, we get so tired and sometimes can't handle the exhaustion. Because the boss is there yelling at you.

He didn't use drugs himself, but his brother, who worked with him, developed a cocaine addiction. He would get off work Fridays at ten at night, have Saturday off, then start the same shift again on Sunday night. He started earning 700 [approx. 35 USD] pesos per week, but by the end of his ten-year stint was earning 2000 [approx. 90-100 USD]. He had reached the top of the wage ladder: "More than 2000, nobody pays."

As a farmer, he's doing a little better, and he has a big extended family that pitches in to make ends meet. On the nights that Ildefonso rushes off to the wholesale market, Eufalia and her family are back at home preparing for the next day's tianguis. In the courtyard where they sit on stools or on the dirt floor, there are fruit trees: orange, mango, *zapote negro*, mandarin, grapefruit, lima, lime and *limón de chiche* – a citrus fruit used on altars during Day of the Dead. Wooden crates are stacked in one corner, sacks of maize in another, and some sheep dung for fertilizer in another. In the middle of the courtyard, which is also the family's cooking space, they've dug a well. Armando harvests mandarins and limes to take to the tianguis. At least seven people work to get all of the produce ready, including Eufalia, her father and mother, her niece, a sister-in-law and four children recently returned from North Carolina while their mother cares for an ailing parent. Most of them have been picking since 7:30 that morning; the kids joined when they weren't in school. Josué, the twelve year-old, says he prefers cutting baby squash

over green beans because his back hurts less. Born and raised in the urban U.S., they haven't done farm work before but are now adept at the tasks at hand that evening (Figure 4.6). The fourteen-year old girl sits with most of the other adults around a vat of cactus, quickly taking out the prickly bits of each nopal, while trying to speak some Mixteco with her grandmother (Figure 4.7). Nine-year old Vanessa shells peas and chats with me in English about how she misses chicken fingers and her favorite books while I bundle guajes with Eufalia's sister and father. (They won't eat the wild greens we eat, Eufalia laments). Most of the adults had been harvesting for twelve hours; after they finish boxing and bagging everything for the tianguis, they will have worked sixteen hours. Ildefonso, who also started at 6:30 in the morning, will arrive as late as noon the next day, having put in a 32-hour shift.

Figure 4.6 Bundling radishes in preparation for the tianguis

Figure 4.7 De-thorning cactus paddles in preparation for the tianguis (Photos by author)

Eufalia's mother, Bonifacia, doesn't harvest all day. She has lost an eye due to diabetes-related complications, but she still takes care of much of the farmwork and cooking. In

the afternoon, she and her daughter are sitting on an empty sack next to a pile of dried corn, using their thumbs to remove the kernels from each ear – the first step necessary to make tortillas. A pot of beans is on the fire, fueled by wood that Armando brings from his pueblo; she throws the corn cobs, *olotes*, into the fire to get it started. Turkey chicks flock around her, pecking at kernels. Bonifacia has a good hand for breeding native turkeys, *guajolotes*. The family sells full-grown, live turkeys at the Central de Abastos for two hundred pesos. Sometimes the family sells their turkeys' and hens' eggs for three or four pesos each and buy factory-farmed eggs, at two pesos each, for their own consumption. Though her sugar intake is restricted, Bonifacia sneaks a mango when nobody's looking. In the late afternoon, she curls up on the empty sack of corn for a nap. Her daughters finish up the cooking.

Eufalia's in-laws, campesinos in the Chinantec region of the northern mountains, are also suffering ailing health. They farm maize, beans, chilies and squash using a fire-fallow cultivation system that dominates agriculture practice in their semi-tropical forestlands, but Ildefonso's mother visits the city frequently for treatments for rheumatoid arthritis. Ildefonso and Eufalia pay for her treatments.

When asking Eufalia, Armando or Ildefonso about how they evaluate their businesses, they focus on sufficiency rather than profits. Their mode of conceptualizing sufficiency is captured in the oft-repeated phrase *salir adelante*. Roughly translated as "to get ahead," the phrase refers to an active effort to achieve higher standards of living and greater

access to opportunities, often over a generation. In it is the hope that one's children will be better off than their parents. People wish to *sacar adelante a los hijos* or *a la familia*, often by their own initiatives – including owning a business or migrating. What about getting a job at one of the big stores? I ask the farmers, as they rest under the tarp in the fields. “Nooooo,” answers one, “I certainly wouldn't. I don't know, it's just that one has dreams of getting ahead by one's own means, you know?” And, “what would it pay?” interjects another, “Here we can make a little more, to *salir adelante*.”

Material manifestations of one's ability to *salir adelante* include a sturdier house, perhaps a vehicle, and children who have achieved higher levels of education than their parents. Armando tells me, “When my kids were kids, they used to have to walk to school. Now we can drive them, and that's something.” These are the most widely recognized symbols of achievement, though expectations for standard of living, as Chayanov pointed out, are culturally constructed. For example, the idea of eating out (aside from a cheap *tianguis* lunch while working), falls outside this family's desires for a proper standard of living; Guille's sister told me it would never occur to any of them to stop in the plaza for a *nieve* [ice cream], a leisure activity popular among the urban working-class. The indoor plumbing now common in the city, likewise, strikes them as superfluous. Around the corner from their home lies a porcelain toilet surrounded by and filled with squash vines. “It was a toilet that the government donated. They made the tank and everything, but what we use here are bathrooms that are made just by digging a big hole in the ground,” says Ildefonso. “No one ever used it,” his niece added.

Ideas about what constitutes well-being, in turn, determine how hard people are willing to work. “Tuesdays, we rest,” Guille tells me. But she backtracks, “Well, we wash the clothes and clean the house and work on the farm. But there’s no market that day.” Many tianguistas ask the same rhetorical question, when I ask what day they take off (the verb in Spanish, *descansar*, literally meaning ‘to rest’): “What rest?” On the days that they don’t go to the tianguis, they attend to a long list of other housework and prepare for the next market day. Every day they are busy, and every member of the family works. Since they have little influence over the price at either the wholesale market or tianguis, they must keep prices at the going rate even when it is low. They can do this by relying on unwaged labor of family members who ask of themselves harder and longer labor hours or by reducing household consumption. And while everyone works hard, the men take breaks while the women – with the exception of the very sick and old – are always in motion.

The labor that makes their tianguis stall and wholesale marketing possible is primarily unwaged. Children are never paid, and family members are all expected to contribute to the tasks at hand. In some cases, money changes hand at below-market rates; low wages are accepted based on community or family ties. Eufalia gives her older sister “a little something” for helping her sell, but, she clarifies, certainly not the going-rate of 150 pesos [7 USD] per day that she would be obliged to pay someone outside of the family. Ildefonso likes working with fellow Chinantecs from his pueblo for many reasons. They all grew up working hard in the rugged, steep mountain fields of their village, so he can count on their work ethic. They speak the same language, and there is built-in trust; and, he pays them

less than the local day laborers. Since they live and eat with his family, he thinks the low wage is justified. They accept this arrangement for similar reasons – some may have little knowledge about or connection to the labor market of the Central Valleys, and thus, prefer to supplement their mainly subsistence income in their village with cash from someone they know and trust.

Earnings are pooled by couple, and four couples live in their immediate household, as well as a single adult sister and a sister-in-law whose husband is in the U.S. Each couple or individual is responsible for their own school-age children and personal expenses. Eufalia's sister-in-law, the one recently returned from the U.S. with four children, reminds me of the high costs of required uniforms, gym clothes, shoes, books, and enrollment fees. "Public schools in Mexico are expensive," she says. "Not like the U.S." The amount of money they have to earn as a family is less, however, than non-campesino tianguis vendors or renters. They own the land and house where they live and most of the land they farm. They produce the maize and beans that provide for year-round consumption. No one pays rent and no one pays anyone else for the food they all produce and eat together. Lunch often includes a bowl of beans, an avocado and handmade tortillas – all from their harvest – and an *agua de mandarina*, a mango for desert. On the table, there is also likely to be a three-liter bottle of coke, a big jar of mayonnaise and creamer to go with powdered coffee – the last, a habit picked up by those who have been in the U.S. For these purchased foods, they loosely take turns buying.

Priority expenditures include medical expenses, school fees and maintaining the farm and their market stalls. Purchased foods are optional. Some family members have cell phones, but having calling credit is often not a high priority. Aside from these expenses, the family members dispose of very little income, buying almost nothing else. Eufalia knows, for example, that she needs new clothing but when her niece asks her if she wants to check out the *ropa americana* a neighbor is selling – used clothes spread out in a patio – she declines, shrugging, “I don’t have money for that.” When Eufalia was a child, she remembers it was her mother that would consume the least, eating last and forgoing things she needed the longest. Still, they made sure she got through middle school, more than twice the years of schooling of either of her parents. Ildefonso describes farm life as *muy castigado*—punished. But they like the work anyway, he says. And they find continuity with the subsistence farm work they all grew up doing in their respective villages since they were children. They’ve met the needs of a large family and are committed to a vision of “getting ahead” by incorporating the labor of many family and community members.

Eufalia’s family’s story illustrates several dimensions of household self-exploitation (and exploitation) behind the tianguis. First, her family’s tianguis business is overwhelmingly based on non-wage household labor. All members of Eufalia’s family contribute to the tianguis. Some adults receive a below-market wage – exploitation justified on the basis of family or community ties – for working on the farm or at the tianguis stall. Family members are all expected to work much longer hours and sometimes endure more difficult labor conditions than would be legally permitted in formal employment. Of the family members subjected to self-exploitation, women’s labor is particularly extended because women are

responsible for most child-rearing, cooking, and cleaning activities, which are ongoing and intensified on their “day off”. Women also underconsume first, forgoing more needs for longer. As campesinos, such underconsumption is sometimes required because of the constant precarity that farming confronts – between droughts, floods, and drastic price fluctuations, income is quite difficult to predict. At the same time, producing much of their food for consumption offsets expenses that would otherwise be indispensable. Her family’s livelihood strategy also clarifies the subsidies on which their tianguis business is based: her father’s wage labor in the U.S. was necessary to purchase some of the means of production and social reproduction necessary to operate a tianguis business: land for growing for consumption and sale, a truck for distributing, permits for sales space, a home for living and food processing. Tianguis vendors can operate at cost, with earnings covering minimal levels of the family’s social reproduction but without the need to pay back a loan, make rent, or turn a profit.

Benita, tianguis *tortillera*

Figure 4.8. Tlayuda-making

Benita walks through the cemetery with a bunch of marigold flowers and a bottle of mezcal, filling tiny plastic cups and placing them on the oldest tombs, the ones with weeds growing around whose engravings are difficult to make out. She leaves a flower, too. “There are people who forget their dead. But they don’t realize that tomorrow they’ll be here, too,” she tells her children. Generations of her family are buried there, but she makes a special effort for her grandmother, aunt, brother, cousin, and her husband’s father and grandparents. On their tombs, she has placed large bouquets of flowers, bread, fruit, a bottle of beer and another of mezcal, and a cigarette. It’s eleven at night and the cemetery has filled up with other families doing the same. Brass bands and nortño singers offer to play songs to the ghosts – *los difuntitos* – three songs for 100 pesos. Benita has brought a USB and little speaker instead. She sets up her music on her own relatives’ gravestones, where her living family sits around sharing food and drink by

candlelight. “Why pay when we can play them songs for free? The people [buried] here would rather eat.”

She stays into the morning, but then it’s time to get back to work. During the Days of the Dead, people are filling their kitchens and altars, and sales are good. Benita is a tortilla-maker, from a long line of *tortilleras*. “[In Zapotec] our town means *pueblo de la tortilla*, something like that,” she tells me. Her parents spoke Zapotec, and she understands some. The sign at the town’s entrance reads, “Yatareni (Gueta Hrini) ‘tortilla [is our] blood’.”

Benita works every day of the week making tortillas, tlayudas and tostadas – the difference being the amount of time on the comal, which gives this basic staple textures varying from soft (blandas/tortillas) to tough and chewy (tlayudas) to crunchy (tostadas). She stands over a large clay comal with long firewood sticking out from below, four tostadas at a time in the making (Figure 4.8). She presses out balls of dough with an iron tortilla press lined with plastic and gingerly drapes them over the flat pan, flips them when the bubbles appear. “My mother made them by hand,” she tells me. “No tortilla press, just pressed them out between two pieces of plastic.” When they are sufficiently cooked, she places them in homemade metal racks that allow them to get crunchier without burning. Benita’s space is based on the same technologies her mother used – many of which originate in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. She bought the round clay plates themselves from potters from Atzompa, another village in the valley specialized in clayware. Her son helped her build the oven that heats the plates from mud and bricks.

The radio is on all the time, their main source of entertainment while working. Neighbors stop by, too. The *carnicera*, a neighbor who raises and slaughters her own animals, stops by selling dried meat. Around her town, people are always knocking on doors, selling what they've made. "Here [in Yatareni] there are people who make *tejate*⁴⁷, people who make *nicoatole*⁴⁸, people who sell *atole* in the mornings. Tejate, chiles rellenos, it all comes to the door." One neighbor stops by with some instructions about feeding her chickens. She laughs because I have so much ash in my hair.

In the same long, smoky room, enclosed by corrugated metal walls and a cinderblock base, there are three other comales. Sixteen-year old Agustina, Benita's oldest daughter, works on another one. It's Wednesday. "Today is our day of rest," she tells me, while standing over the hot stove making tlayudas. "When we work a *bulto* – 12 kilos – we light all four." Often, she pays a neighbor to help. Her husband knows how to make tortillas, too. He helps, "sometimes, when he's not feeling lazy." When he doesn't want to work, she says, "it's better if he takes his moto-taxi out." The moto-taxi is his own, which he bought with money saved from his years in the U.S. and savings from Benita's tortilla business. It offers him some freedom, but earnings are limited by the rules of neighboring taxi associations; he can offer rides only in the immediate vicinity of Yatareni. "Today it's just me and my daughter making tortillas," Benita says. "That's why it's like a rest day because we'll finish [in the afternoon] and then we just wash

⁴⁷ Traditional beverage of the Central Valleys made with maize, cacao, rosita de cacao, and mamey seeds

⁴⁸ Maize-based pudding

dishes and do laundry, but we think of it as our rest day.” She spends rest days filling short orders and washing the laundry for her family of seven. Sometimes she makes tamales or empanadas to complement her tortilla sales.

Benita has experience holding down the family fort. Her father has been in Poughkeepsie, New York for twenty-five years, and her younger brother worked there too, but died in a car accident a few years back. In the early 2000s, her husband moved to New Jersey, and stayed for ten years, while she raised their first two children alone. “I imagine you missed each other,” I say. She shrugs. “When one is very poor...,” she trails off. “He sent money to build the rooms.” Before, she tells me, they just had some corrugated metal walls, and not really a house. Now they have several rooms with cement walls. The land however, they have owned for generations, part of her grandmother’s birthright for belonging to the community. Thus, her living and workspace was subsidized via membership in a community governed by *usos y costumbres*⁴⁹. They have never paid rent. They share it with three other families; a total of 19 people on around 800 square meters. The cement rooms were built with remittances sent by her husband, and with his savings he purchased the moto-taxi that now helps sustain his family. The bulk of their income, though, comes from Benita’s tortillas; she must also occasionally subsidize the moto-taxi’s expensive repairs. Meanwhile, Benita raised children as a single mother, enlisting their help making and selling tortillas once they were old enough.

⁴⁹ Autonomous forms of Indigenous governance

Figure 4.9. Tortillera with daughter

The youngest of her five children, Alexa, is three years old. She hovers around her mother's comal, occasionally asking to be picked up; her mother offers her bits of tortilla instead because the tortillas will burn if she takes a break (Figure 4.9). Two other young boys – five and six – come in from school mid-morning. One asks for help with his homework. Another places his half-eaten sandwich on the comal to heat up as a snack. Even the young ones lend a hand in their mother's tortilla business. Tortilla-making begins the night before, when maize is boiled with lime for three hours. First thing in the morning, Benita washes the maize with water and drains it, then asks her young boys to carry it in buckets to the mill, half a block away. There the nixtamal is ground, and they bring her back the dough. She lights the comal with leftover wood purchased from a nearby sawmill, and her little girl adds logs to the fire as she makes tortillas. The middle

son “is our cook,” she tells me. Her oldest daughter makes tortillas all day long, then starts a shift at a neighborhood pizzeria at six in the evening. Making tlayudas with her mother is a family obligation, Benita says, but Agustina can keep the cash from her pizza gig. Agustina finished secondary school, but says she prefers working to studying.

Benita’s own mother used to tell her, “You learned to make tortillas so you have what you need to eat [referring to making money as well as literally, eating]. If you don’t do it, that’s on you.” She pauses because her daughter wants to be held. “But one thing is to learn to make them,” Benita says. “Another is to learn to sell them.”

Fortunately for Benita, her mother also taught her how to sell. She grew up on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, in the eastern part of the state, where her mother sold fruits and vegetables in the daily market of Juchitán. “School wasn’t so obligatory then,” she says. So her mother put her to work. She had a fixed market stall, but her job was to walk through the aisles and outside the market, sometimes accompanied by other children doing the same.

I bagged tomatoes and limes and walked around offering them to people. We couldn’t just stay in the market stall because there you sell very slowly. Next week comes and what’s old has to go so that what’s new can come in. We used to sell tomato, and the part that was smooshed or bruised we’d cut off with a knife, and the half that was good we’d put in a big spoon, a *cucharón*. And we’d sell a big pile [of tomato bits] for three pesos. [Adults] would tell us: “Go sell the

machucadito,” [the bruised parts] and we’d walk around offering in the street or on the pier too.

Aside from tomato and lime, they’d take onion, lettuce, yellow apples from the mountains, and quince. She liked selling outside because, “We escaped my mom for a little while to play.”

When her mother brought her children back to her home town of Yatareni, she started making *tlayudas* for a living, just as she had as a young girl. Before she married, Benita sold the *tlayudas* she and her mother would make at the Central de Abastos. After marriage, her husband didn’t want people thinking that he couldn’t support his wife, so he forbade her from selling outside the house. So she made tortillas at home, and other family members went to sell them at the market. “How did you convince him to let you sell?” I ask. “It was easy,” she replies, “He went to the U.S. We just didn’t tell him.”

After her husband migrated, she approached the tianguis as her best option to maintain her family. For nineteen years, mostly as a single mother, Benita made ends meet by selling at a different tianguis in a different part of the city every day of the week. A woman who had a permit to sell dairy products lent Benita a little edge of her spot. When her children got old enough, she sent one of them with tortillas to sell while making more at home, then joined them in the afternoon. When the dairy vendor sold her permits, she sought out alternatives, selling most days in the Central de Abastos. Today, she only sells in one. On Sundays, she pays five pesos to sell directly to consumers at the Calicanto

tianguis in Santa Lucia, a thirty-minute walk from her home. She doesn't want to sell in any other market because she thinks she wouldn't be well-received. Other tortilleras are territorial. "They'd say, 'You don't sell here, what are you doing here?' and they run me out of the tianguis. Their leaders defend them." She's seen how this happens.

Aside from the Calicanto tianguis, Benita sells her tlayudas door to door and at three stores in the same neighborhood. She even ships them to Salina Cruz, in the isthmus, to be sold at a store there. Her tlayudas travel in a vegetable truck that leaves from the Central de Abastos. A man picks them up from the truck and sells them in his store. The shopkeeper discovered her tlayudas when he bought a box at one of the neighborhood stores where she sells, then got in touch with her to arrange shipping for sales in his own store.

Tlayuda prices do, indeed, vary across the city, but she has little control over the price at the market where she sells. At the oldest daily market in the city, tortilleras are organized in a union, and sell their tlayudas at five pesos, nearly double what Benita can sell for in Santa Lucía. She has to compete with several other tortilla sellers, who are not organized, and must maintain prices accessible to a low-income neighborhood. She wants to raise the price, but her customers complain. "When I try to sell seven tlayudas for 20 pesos [USD 0.90], customers ask me, 'isn't the price two pesos [0.09 USD] each?' Then they'll say, 'that's how much [other tortilleras] sell them for.'" In the absence of price-setting, Benita's goal is simply to sell as many tlayudas as she can – to sell out of her daily production. She has sized up the competition and realized that more vendors sell in the

morning, but don't bring enough tortillas to last for the entire day, so she takes advantage of the afternoon crowd. Benita sells from eleven to six, while her daughter makes more tlayudas at home, then joins her at three to sell the rest. She also competes on quality, appealing to the preference for tortillas from *puro maíz*, even among many poor consumers. Some of her competition tries to cut prices by mixing into their dough the cheaper, dried, industrially-produced corn flour marketed under the brand-name Maseca.

In order to keep customers happy, she has been experimenting with tostadas flavored with nopal, chepil, epazote and garlic. When she gets these special requests, she experiments.

I ask myself, 'How would those be made?' [When we first got a request] we had no idea. But I try to make them just like the normal ones, just milled with different ingredients. I start experimenting. If it comes out right, then I keep doing it. I say that because sometimes there are parts that don't come out right, so we can't sell them. First we have to experiment, eat them ourselves and if they taste good we can sell them. But if they don't taste good, why would we sell them? Nobody makes flavors like this. People here make normal tortillas, tlayudas, blanditas, but no one has tasted those flavors so people don't know how to make them.

She hands me a bite of a tasty garlic one. "I don't like the nopal [tostadas]," she tells me. "I feel like nopal loses its flavor when mixed with the dough. But epazote is more aromatic so the dough has more flavor." Though it is clearly more work to make these

short-order specialty varieties, she currently charges the same price for them. “If we see that they sell well, maybe we can raise the price a little later.”

Notably, the immediate competition for Benita are her fellow tortilleras in the same market. However, she also cites “the big stores like the [Walmart at the] Macroplaza” as a source of reduced sales. For people willing to accept, or even who prefer, the industrial substitute, the big stores sell machine-made tortillas and tostadas.

Benita’s expenses in making tortillas are as follows. A truckload of scrap wood – three tons – delivered to her door from nearby sawmills – costs 1,500 pesos, and lasts her one month. She buys all her maize in the Central de Abastos – white, yellow and black, spending roughly 9,000 pesos per month on twenty-four *bultos*, or twelve-kilo bags, for a total of around 290 kilos per month. She pays 7.5 pesos per kilo for white corn from Sinaloa and 11.25 per kilo for the black corn grown locally—though she uses much more white and only makes blue corn tortillas on the day of the Santa Lucía tianguis, where some customers prefer them. She always buys with the same wholesaler at the Central de Abastos, who she met there many years ago, when he delivered door to door in her town, explaining:

There are other vendors, sometimes cheaper ones, but what happens? When you start cooking the corn, all the bits float to the top: [pieces of] *olote* (cob) and *totomoxtle* (husk). The seeds come mixed with all that. The maize I buy is clean, it doesn’t have any garbage. There are times that people sprinkle a powder so that

the insects don't get to it. And the powder isn't harmful, but what happens is that when you put the maize to cook in the water, it gets very white and I don't like that. The nixtamal cooks, and I think that the corn soaks it up as it cooks. So that's why I buy with the same person.

Occasionally when she can't go to the Central she buys from a woman who sells it at a store in the pueblo. There are other middlemen who buy maize in Oaxacan villages, then resell it, but she says it's too expensive. "All our earnings would be eaten up by the difference." She spends 600 pesos per month on lime, sold for 40 pesos per kilo. She uses a half kilo per day in her nixtamal. Then, there are regular trips to the Central de Abastos, which, between taxis and buses (the latter they take when they are not hauling maize or tlayudas), total more than 300 pesos per week. She pays her neighbor, who sometimes helps her make tlayudas, between 100 and 150 pesos per day. Most months, she makes more than 12,000 tlayudas, selling roughly half at two pesos each and another half at three pesos each.

It seems to me that Benita underestimates the amount of time she works. Aside from her "rest day" that isn't, she describes her usual work day as "starting late, around seven or eight, then finishing around six." Yet, she is reporting only time spent pressing dough and spreading tortillas out over the comal. After she is done with that (or several times during the course of the day), she or someone in her family must deliver. Then she must prepare the nixtamal for the following day. Aside from that, Benita says that three or four days a

week, she starts making tortillas at six am and finishes after midnight. She has never turned down an order, no matter how tired she is.

When Benita calculates her income, she always reports sales rather than net gain. “Look, with this small batch that you see me making now, I just made 150 tlayudas, 70 tostadas. The little that I’m making right now are 500 or 600 pesos (22-27 USD).” She compares this to the pithy wage paid at stores – a mere 120 to 200 pesos per day (5.50-9.85 USD). When pressed, however, she admits that these sales require an investment of at least half of what she has earned. That’s 300 pesos in a day (14 USD), she says, much more than she would expect from a wage job. Though her daughter is working alongside her, she does not mention needing to divide that profit over two workers. Just as she worked for her mother without pay, she expects her daughter to work for the benefit of the family.

Benita can keep costs low because she depends on the unpaid labor of all of her family members, one who makes tortillas full-time, another who makes them part-time, small children who run to the mill or throw a log on a fire, in addition to an older son and daughter who can help her with cooking, cleaning, and washing for the household. From her earnings, she does not have to pay rent, and some of her transportation costs are reduced by her husband’s moto-taxi (who can drive to deliver her products) or by selling at places within walking distance. She puts her own consumption needs last, and when she buys a new item of clothing for herself, she often uses the informal consignment system at the tianguis where she pays a fellow vendor “whatever she can” each week

toward something she has purchased. Her family's consumption is also slightly subsidized by a government cash-transfer program aimed at keeping children in school.

Still, she sometimes needs a loan to tide her expenses over. Sometimes her buyer from Salina Cruz can't pay her the same day, leaving her without money to buy supplies for the next day's production. To deal with this situation, she and her daughter sought out a *caja de ahorro* – a group of women (who did not previously know each other), who contribute ten percent of the total of the total loan they will take out, and take turns receiving the money and repaying at a low interest rate. She now makes a monthly payment on the loan she took out. She does not have a bank account, but makes these payments in cash each month.

After all expenses are factored in, Benita thinks she still makes more than she would in the jobs that are accessible to her: cleaning houses, working in a commercial kitchen as a cleaner or cook, or related domestic labor. In truth, when all is said and done, she has earned roughly 18,000 pesos (net) per month (roughly 850 USD) for around 700 hours of family labor hours, amounting to around 25 pesos per labor hour: the same rate that she might expect to earn at a wage job that paid 200 pesos per day for 48 hours per week. However, her favorable comparison is tied to two factors: a feeling of control over her own labor power (i.e. self-exploitation is better than exploitation, as explained below) and, the ability to extend herself beyond a schedule she might be assigned in a wage job or where a weekly wage is fixed. As a tortillera, she can work longer hours and more days of the week, and enlist the labor of other family members. Thus, her family's total

earnings are, indeed, much greater than if she worked a wage job. And, in her line of work, she is able to forgo paying for childcare.

There is a daycare in her community but she has never taken her children. This is an enormous advantage, in her view.

The other reason [I prefer selling tortillas] is that my children are little and there's no one else to take care of them. Right now my [oldest] son isn't working and he went to pick one kid up at the elementary school and the other at pre-school, and I stay with her [the three-year old daughter]. But if I were working [employed], I'd have to find someone to take care of her. I'd have to put her in daycare and I'd spend everything I earn on the daycare. So in this case, it's better that I take care of her myself.

Not only does the marketplace itself allow women to keep their children close, the back-end, home-based work that produces many of its wares offers an opportunity to forgo paid childcare.

Still, she wants a different life for her children. "What I want is for my children to go to school and look for a job, so they won't be like me...Because it's a lot of work. It's really tiring...I say that they should study and look for a job they want to do, but not work in the tortilla [business]. Because I tell them, the tortilla is really tiring and, with time, it finishes off your lungs." We were together in the tianguis one Sunday when a former

tortilla vendor came through following a chemotherapy treatment for lung cancer; fellow vendors gave her local fruits they hoped would help. Benita knew many women in her line of business who had suffered a similar plight.

In spite of her dreams for her children, she can't imagine doing anything else:

I wouldn't like anything else. The thing is that I—you know, why I don't want to work in anything else? Because I don't like to be told what to do or being told, "Look, that's wrong" or "Do that right." I don't like that. Some people say, "Why don't you look for a job? It will go better for you." Even the woman who comes to help me with tortillas, she works like that. She cleans houses, washes and irons clothes and works in a [commercial] kitchen, but that's not for me.

Anything else you don't like? I ask. "The salary. It's so low and a lot of work because sometimes [bosses] are very abusive. They make you do all kinds of jobs that they don't pay you for." Notably, the kinds of job alternatives available to Benita include various forms of low-wage informal domestic labor or cooking or cleaning in a commercial facility – what she calls *trabajar de la gente*. "Never, never, never, not even in my dreams. Why would I work for other people?"

The independence of her labor is a deeply-rooted value that helps explain the persistence of the tianguis beyond a basic economic explanation. She suggests that her son, who is interested in auto-mechanics, open his own body shop and "not depend on other people."

Her father was a brick maker, the other principal trade of Yatareni. She helped a little as a girl, but would like to make learn more. If she didn't have a tortilla business, she thinks she would perhaps make bricks.

Benita's family's story paints a picture similar to that of Eufalia's. It shows how thin she can spread herself—working frequent 18-hour shifts and rarely taking a break. In Chayanovian terms, her family has never reached the point when the 'drudgery' of additional work is lower than the significance of her family's consumption needs. Indeed, she has never turned down a tlayuda order. Instead, she works longer hours and enrolls more family members when necessary. Though household needs are always somewhat elastic, they maintain overall low levels of consumption, and Benita typically puts her needs last. The demographic distribution of her nuclear family means that family income must be spread over more consumption needs than is likely to be the case ten years down the road, when children are grown; present income must support three small children whose abilities to work are limited. Benita's story also demonstrates that the low earnings of the tlayuda business are acceptable because of several subsidies: access to land originally acquired through communal ties; housing built from her husband's remittances; a moto-taxi side business also achieved through remittances; and a federal cash transfer program for school children. Like Eufalia, Benita's experience underscores the importance of tianguis work to mothers primarily responsible for caring for children. While the 'savings' on childcare expenses rarely figure into their reported business calculations, these mothers highlight the importance of caring for their own children on the job (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10. Tianguista families

Hortensia, retailer (and cook) of all things criollo

“*Tlayudas o blandas?!?*” shouts the woman sitting next to Hortensia. The Santa Lucía tianguis is formed by two, long adjacent blocks, one of which is presently torn up for construction. Hortensia isn’t able to occupy her usual spot, so she has set up on the ground. She is sitting between the garlic producer, Pilar, and Silvia, who sells a soda made in Guadalajara and marketed for its health properties. The soda company operates on a pyramid scheme, and women like Silvia sell on commission. Hortensia has a wheelbarrow full of avocados, a large bucket of nopales, a pot of boiled *chayotes*, and plates of tomatoes with ridges known as kidney tomatoes. She sits on an upside-down paint bucket. It’s windy. She and two other women struggle to keep their shade structure up. The umbrella is balanced in a bucket of rocks and tied to the fence behind them. Hortensia gossips with the vendor next to her, “My god. That *sinquehacer* [person with nothing better to do],” she says about a woman who has just walked by. Silvia has bought a napkin that looks embroidered in a Oaxacan style, but Hortensia inspects it and insists that it comes from the *tienda de chinos* – stores selling products from China – and that’s why prices for everything have gone down. Her daughter embroiders napkins used for wrapping tortillas, which she sells at another market, but she doesn’t sell them at this market because the nopales she is working with stain them. The whole time she converses, she is de-thorning cactus with a knife and her leathered, worn hands. She doesn’t ask a higher price for these de-prickled cactus, but she acknowledges, “No one will buy them otherwise.” She leaves them with thorns until market day because they last longer that way.

Hortensia tells a fellow vendor, a honey seller, about how she remembers her little girl when she was a baby, how the vendor would put her in a box while she sold at the tianguis. Like Benita and Eufalia, this is what women highlighted when asked if they had considered formal employment. The honey vendor summarized what every woman seemed to mention, “I’ve never thought about looking for a job. I always say that it doesn’t matter if I sell sweets, or gum to cars at traffic lights. Why? Because of my children. I always think about my children. I don’t want to leave them alone for long periods of time. My children, since they were little, are always with me.”

Hortensia’s children are grown now, but they used to join her as well. Hortensia is one of the original tianguistas of three tianguis that were formed in the 1980s from a fruit and vegetable vendors’ association at the Central de Abastos. As the urban footprint of Oaxaca City spread outwards from the city center, vendors moved into new territories. There were only a handful at first – around fifteen, and all sold fruits and vegetables. Only a few of them are left. “Pineapple [vendor] Bertha, Mrs. Mari, Moody Martha,” Hortensia begins to list them. Some of the stalls have passed through two, even three sets of hands in the nearly forty years she has been there, and the market has expanded from fifteen stalls to over a hundred.

Hortensia sells at a tianguis every day of the week, and her daughter joins her most days. With seven children, she never felt she could take a break. At Cinco Señores and Volcanes (and when she has a proper stall at Calicanto), she sells “sweet corn cake, nice

and hot,” roasted seeds, and poblano chilies stuffed with ground meat, which she and her daughter make at home. The whole time at the tianguis, while chatting with customers and vendors, she is in motion. When she finishes de-thorning cactus, she shells peas. She cuts up corn into rounds for the customer making beef stew while suggesting a recipe. She sprinkles an ear of corn with chili for the customer having a snack at the market.

A man walks over and offers her ten pesos for a plate of three avocados that she sells for twenty—half the price of avocados anywhere in the city. “*Pues, no*,” she tells him. When he’s gone, she tells me, “It’s always the men who haggle. Men and rich people.” “Why is that?” I ask. She sighs. “Men say because they work, they know the value of a peso. But women work more! So I tell them ‘no’. And I tell them that,” replies Hortensia.

By early afternoon, she sells out of avocados. A customer is disappointed because he had asked her to save him some. “Tomorrow,” she says. “No, Tuesday. Tuesday we’ll see you. We sell in Reforma.” Then she runs out of sweet corn. “You should have brought another sack!” another man tells her. “How?” retorts Hortensia, “It’s so expensive.” He tells her of places he knows in the Central Valleys that sell for cheaper. Another woman comes over to ask the price of something, then says she’s going to go ask her husband if she can buy it. Hortensia is incensed. “Why should she have to ask her husband?” More customers want avocado. “*Ya no, mi madre*, we’re all out,” she says, with sorrow in her voice. When the day is over, a few people in the neighborhood who raise sheep come to

haul away her corn husks. The neighbors get inexpensive animal feed, and Hortensia doesn't have to haul the garbage home (Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11. Neighboring sheep-raisers fill up a bag with cornhusks leftover from Hortensia's elotes

Today, Hortensia is doing just fine. "We're poor, but we live well," she tells me. She goes to Guatemala every few years to visit the Cristo Negro – the Black Christ – who she believes cured her of an illness a few years back. She buys bouquets of flowers to put on her altar at home. Most of her children have completed some level of higher education. One is a nurse, another a middle-school teacher, another an architect. One daughter lives in Los Angeles. Some of them want her to quit the tianguis. She is sixty-six and a great-grandmother, and they think she should rest. But it's her source of income and that of one

of her daughters. “If you knew what these stalls cost me!” she tells me. She had to fight hard for her place in the tianguis, and in it, she brought up all seven of her children.

Hortensia came to Oaxaca at age six, from a rural village in the Central Valleys. Her father had left her mother, who felt she couldn’t support all of her children. Her mother, “gave me to my godparents,” where she sold clothing with them in their market stall. Then at age seven, she started selling tomatoes. “That’s why I know the market like the back of my hand. No one can fool me,” she says. The money she earned supported her four younger brothers and sisters and her mother, who didn’t want to leave the house because of shame about having been abandoned by her husband. At sixteen, Hortensia married. “I never should have done that,” she says, in retrospect.

Her present situation of relative well-being wasn’t always the case. When she married, her husband came to live with her on a little bit of land on a hillside outside Oaxaca City that belonged to an aunt, seemingly acquired by squatting – a common form of urban expansion in the region. In a well-rehearsed, self-built housing strategy that dominates the landscape of both urban and rural Oaxaca, their family’s first shelter was built of a river-reed called *carrizo*, eventually replaced by corrugated cardboard now rarely used, then corrugated metal. “If you could afford corrugated cardboard in those days, you were doing well,” she says. Her children were all born there. Eventually, they moved closer to Oaxaca City to a neighborhood that is today fully urbanized, but at the time was still cornfields. “I sold my plot of land in Santa Anita for that, but then my husband put his

name on [the newly purchased land].” They started over, building their house one room at a time.

Her husband had a job, but gave her very little money with which to raise the children. Yet he was resentful of any work Hortensia would do. “He was a typical *macho mexicano*,” she tells me – a drinker, womanizer, and partier. He spent his money on alcohol. Her children were scared of his reactions, so when they needed something, they always asked their mother. Hortensia made tortillas and sold from her home for a while, but wasn’t making ends meet. She knew the market business, and suspected she would do better in the tianguis. But her husband never wanted her to sell. He would throw her merchandise at her, hit her. “Bruised, I would go [to the tianguis to sell].” Her daughter’s husband also left her with two young daughters; thus, she found herself obliged to leave her nursing job to join her mother in the tianguis, where she could more easily raise her daughters as a single mother. As a result of these various experiences, Hortensia generally holds men in low esteem, a feeling reflected in her commentaries at the tianguis. Just a few years ago, after fifty years of marriage, she cut finally ties with her husband; she wanted to wait until her children were grown, but wishes she hadn’t. She went to a psychologist and to the priest, and now feels empowered in her decision. Now she helps other women at the market suffering similar situations of domestic abuse. “You think you can’t leave your husband [because you won’t have enough to eat]? You come to me, I’ll feed you,” she tells them. “I’ll put myself between him and you.” As described in the previous chapter, the tianguis sometimes functions as such a space of communal support and care.

Primera Etapa was the first tianguis Hortensia entered. It was Day of the Dead and their own leader had told everyone to go home because of a conflict with the established neighborhood daily market, whose vendors feared they would lose sales. Hortensia wanted to sell sugar cane and jicama and the traditional products associated with the holiday. The established market vendors put up a fight, but she stood her ground, and the tianguistas were animated by her courage. Eventually, the established vendors went away, and they were able to sell freely. “We even sold bread (*pan de muertos*) that day!” says Hortensia, to show how they were able to challenge their original permit to sell fruits and vegetables exclusively.

With that tianguis, she started selling in two more, then three more after that, to eventually sell in a tianguis every day of the week. In those early days, permits were free. She also depended on the labor of all seven of her children. Her daughter Reyna remembers happy days at the tianguis playing with her brothers and sisters and other children. She remembers how all of them helped her mom with the preparation, hauling, cooking, setting up and selling. None of them were paid. But their mother made sure they had what they needed for school and enough to eat. Today, Reyna and Hortensia divide their earnings.

When she needs a loan, which happens fairly frequently, Hortensia asks another of her daughters, the teacher, who has the most reliable salary. She would never dream of going to a bank nor does she have a bank account. One of her daughters has been in Los

Angeles for more than twenty-five years, and she has other family members there, too. They don't send money, but could be called on in a pinch. Her tianguis livelihood is based on several kinds of subsidies in the form of land: a place of residence acquired, at least initially, by squatting, and free access to public space provided by the municipalities. Thus, she pays no rent, neither for sales nor living space.

These subsidies are not free, however. She has had to "give service" by serving on tianguis committees and sometimes carve out time to defend her livelihood. She's been through six – "or maybe eight" – mayors. "All of them know me because I have made myself known." In one sit-in held to defend the tianguis against an incoming Walmart, she had to stop selling for more than a month to protest (see Chapter 5). In reference to that protest, she says, "The Macroplaza didn't get rid of us. They couldn't. Because we have a base" [referring to a grassroots organization capable of organizing]. She adds, "We eat better here, too. And you know what? There's no one to tell us what to do. We tell ourselves what to do. When you want to go to the bathroom, you go. You don't have to ask permission. Now my grandson is over there and the other one is in that little hammock." She doesn't count as a business expense the extra hours, days, and weeks she has spent negotiating to maintain access to street space and helping with the markets' internal affairs, but such efforts clearly require more energy expenditures for less returns. These are worth it to her, she says, because of the independence and flexibility the tianguis offers.

Her weekly expenses are considerable. Twice a week, she pays a taxi 70 pesos to go to the Central de Abastos. She can't take the bus because she must transport so many plastic crates. She fills the trunk and half of the taxi with crates, barely leaving room for her and her daughter. Upon return, Hortensia hires a truck, for 200 pesos, which she loads up with all the merchandise she has purchased that day. She places orders, then has one of the many young men hauling carts – *diablitos* – load up the crates and take them back to the truck (Figure 4.12). Each charges 15-25 pesos, for a total of around 100 pesos. On a given market day, she spends as much as 6,000 pesos. Since she deals in perishables, there are products that go bad, and she must factor in these losses. Still, she likes selling food. “Clothing, shoes, you only need those once in a while. Every day you have to eat.”

Figure 4.12. Loader hauls crates of fruit for tianguista

All of Hortensia's products are are criollo: kidney tomatoes and local varieties of cherry tomatoes, a basket of farm eggs, small dishes stacked with *chicozapote*, sweet corn boiled or raw, national varieties of avocado – large with smooth green skin or small and black,

eaten with their skin. “I buy by the basket, not by the crate,” she tells me. This is an old reference to buying from small producers rather than *coyotes*, or middlemen. All of her products come from the Central de Abastos, where, in reality, she buys from both producers and wholesalers, every Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Her selection, indeed, spans the nation.

Hortensia knows some of her suppliers well, and her business is based on maintaining friendly relationships with them. At the Central de Abastos, some know her by name. She’s spent three generations with the same tomato producing families. “When I was seven or eight, I met Tio Joel’s father, and he came [to the Central] with his children. Then came Tio Xiano. He died and the other came, Tio Mauro. That’s who’s still with us. And that’s where I get my tomato. They’re all from Ejutla. It’s not tomato *de caja* [crate], it’s tomato *de canasta* [basket],” she insists. Her avocados are from Morelos. “Because the producers are from there. But look, I don’t buy *de caja*. Look at this bag.” She shows me the sack, signaling her name written in a marker on the inside. She’s known the avocado producers for seven years. “It was Don Pablo and now his son Marcelino.” She orders 200 kilos per week.

“You didn’t call,” says the young man at the poultry shop. “These [eggs] are all spoken for.” Hortensia had misplaced her cell phone, so she couldn’t place orders. He knows she’s a regular customer, though, and manages to give her two of the four crates she asks for. The small room is filled with cages of chicks for sale by the dozen and full-grown

roosters, feet tied and tightly packed in cages, that can be bought for 150 pesos. “This is where I got my turkey poult that almost killed me!” She raised it at home until it grew to nearly 35 kilos; when she tried to slaughter it, she took a fall and hurt her knee. She buys her crates of “*huevos criollos*” here – typically eight crates per week, which she transfers from cardboard crates to a basket when it’s time to sell. The eggs, chickens and turkeys are all raised in rural Oaxaca, and brought in and sold at various stages of development, from egg to tiny chick to medium-sized chick to full-grown. The conditions, however, seem closer to factory-farmed than what marketgoers might call “criollo”.

In the hot season, Hortensia sells *chicozapote* that comes from near Merida on the Yucatan Peninsula (Figure 4.13). At the wholesale market, her supplier, Alex, shows me pictures of the production process. His father met the middleman, the *coyote*, he calls him, some years back. The coyote buys from producers. He sends Alex a Whatsapp message with pictures of the fruit – asking him if he wants it and how much. Alex places an order, then meets the truck that comes from Mérida at the wholesale market in Puebla. He loads his order into his own truck, then brings it back to his house where he puts an ash-like ripening agent called calcium carbide in each crate for several days. “Everything gets ripened this way,” Alex tells me. “Just pineapple and watermelon ripen on their own.” When ripe, he sells at three different markets, two in the state of Puebla, and Oaxaca’s Central de Abastos, where he rents a spot at the Tuesday tianguis from the leader for 400 pesos. Hortensia orders four crates. Another woman, also eyeing the fruit, asks how much. Alex’s wife says, “I’m offering it for 420.” When she turns away, Hortensia asks in a low voice. “How much for me?” “I’ll give it to you at 400,” the

woman replies. Hortensia takes four boxes. She doesn't drive a hard bargain, but she negotiates down a little bit.

Figure 4.13. Chicozapote at the Central de Abastos

She gets her corn from the back of a truck that's just arrived from Puebla (Figure 4.14); a couple fills enormous sacks emblazoned with a Cargill⁵⁰ logo. She buys three sacks per week, one on Tuesdays, two on Thursdays. The man loads the sacks of corn, and separates some of the husks and stalk to sell as animal feed.

⁵⁰ U.S. based global corporation and primary animal feed and grain exporter to Mexico.

Figure 4.14. White corn produced in Puebla at the Central de Abasto, Oaxaca

Hortensia is almost finished placing orders. She stops to buy a bouquet of flowers for her altar. Then she and her daughter stop to have breakfast at a market stall. A bowl of squash leaves, a tortilla and a thin cut of beef accompanied by a frothy *chocolate atole*. Then, they go back to the truck, loaded up by the men who've carted all of the crates they've bought. Home again, the truck driver helps them unload and she stores everything at her house.

That night, her daughter starts cooking. Reyna bakes sweet bread and stuffed chilies. She roasts squash seeds. She finishes well after midnight. In the early morning, Hortensia joins her, boiling a vat of corn, another of chayote.

Over a lifetime, Hortensia has rarely earned enough to invest in more than the immediate needs of her family and the items needed for the next day's market, though today the demographic pressures of her family are less than they once were. Instead of a single return to her labors spread across the needs of seven growing children, she can now keep most of her earnings for her own needs. Still, she works tirelessly, knowing that she has no savings and no retirement. She knows that as soon as she stops working, she will lose her independence—and she is determined not to. During the COVID-19 pandemic, her daughters pooled a bit of money to give to their mother so that she wouldn't have to work. "Then what did she do with it?" Reyna asks me, rhetorically. "She spent it at the wholesale market and took her goods to the tianguis like she always does." In this case, it is clear that Hortensia underestimated associated health risks, but self-exploitation in exchange for economic independence has always been a price both Hortensia and her daughter have been willing to pay. Between wholesale market visits, long days at the tianguis, and evenings cooking and preparing for the following day, the women work twelve to eighteen-hour days, seven days a week. But the tianguis has allowed both Hortensia and her daughter independence from abusive husbands and the ability to raise their children without them. They are proud of their identity as tianguistas and take pride in their business, its products, and the relationships on which it is founded. As in the case of Eufalia and Benita, a number of subsidies also make it possible to 'make do' with low income. In Hortensia's case, these came primarily in the form of free permits to sell in the streets and access to land, originally obtained through squatting, where she could raise her children, and store and prepare her merchandise. Her children's unpaid labor – and

the tianguis' ability to 'care' for them when they weren't working – helped make the business possible.

Conclusion

Though we have heard from just three families, their stories could have been replaced by dozens more. A standard script emerges from the women tianguistas irrespective of whether they are campesinas, non-agricultural producer-vendors, or more strictly retailers. Their parents were (or are) campesinos. As girls, they grew up in the markets, learning the ropes. They have very little formal education and low literacy; most of the women over forty did not complete primary school. Younger women have sometimes made it through middle school, and just a handful of youth continue to help their mothers as they take classes in a local college. Vendors are among the un-banked that dominate the global South (Sen et al. 2020) – operating their small businesses in a cash-only economy. Though women are the face and the heart of the tianguis, they have had to struggle against the machismo of their own families to defend their right to sell. They work long hours every day of the week, resting little. They occasionally confront violence in their work, reporting robberies and assault at the wholesale market. When times are particularly tough, they reduce their own consumption to make sure their children have enough to eat and what they need to carry out their schooling. They do not pay their children wages; just as they worked as girls for their own parents without pay, they expect their children to contribute their labor as a duty to their family. In addition to their own hard work and that of their families, they rely on a set of subsidies that include some combination of remittances from migrants' in the U.S.; land attained via Indigenous

rights to communal land or squatters' struggles; free permits to sell in public space; and federal government cash transfers for school-age children.

Tianguistas must compete with fellow vendors, a large and growing informal retail economy outside the tianguis system, and new corporate supermarkets. To do so, they rely on self-exploitation at the household level. Ultimately, self-exploitation implies a transfer of value (Galt 2013); in Mexican tianguis, vendors transfer value from their own households to those of their urban customers for whom prices remain low. The aggregate effect of their individual efforts is a tianguis market system that generally offers prices at or below those of wage-paying, profit-motivated corporate stores.

Of course, whose self-exploitation is greatest within the family unit is a question that Chayanov did not pose. He did not examine who performs what kinds of tasks, or how subjective decisions about family needs and expenditures are made. A long line of feminist scholars has identified the need to make visible and better account for women's work (Benería 2001; Chen et al. 2004; Benería & Permanyer 2012; de la Rocha 2001; Mitchell et al. 2004; Lind 2005; Millar 2008, 2014; Buechler 2014; Meehan and Strauss 2015). The work of what is traditionally thought of as social reproduction remains outside standard economic indicators and, often, families' own evaluation of their household economic strategies. While any number of institutional arrangements can undertake such work – including private or public sector entities (Meehan and Strauss 2015), the absence of such alternatives, together with deep-set cultural norms, means that much of such work falls to women. They face dual pressures to earn income and undertake the

uncompensated care of their families. This is particularly true for the low-income women of the tianguis who cannot outsource this labor to poorer women, as is common for Mexico's middle and upper classes. By considering women's work in and out of the tianguis, this chapter has demonstrated the differential impact of family self-exploitation on adult women and their children. Women, in particular, extend themselves in order to meet the needs of their families. They are also the first to reduce their own consumption.

This degree of self-exploitation is what it takes for tianguis to survive the modernization of food retail led by multinational supermarkets, at one end, and the continuously expanding economy of street commerce, at the other. Nonetheless, it is important to understand the tianguis not as a last resort, but as an avidly pursued livelihood strategy, especially by women. Shanin (1986) points out that "self-exploitation" does not simply refer to "excruciating labor by underfed peasants," as it has sometimes been interpreted; it also refers to social contexts that sometimes "give an edge to non-capitalist economies over capitalist forms of production in a capitalist world" (6). Given that much of the Mexican labor market can be characterized by either exploitation in under-paid wage work or self-exploitation in the non-wage/self-employed informal economy, for many vendors, the tianguis represents the high road, emblematic of the ubiquitous goal to "*salir adelante*," offering a chance to make money via access to sales space in the public way.

Tianguistas are proud of their work and the independence it has given them. Many talk about how important it is to them to own their own business, to not have a boss, to not be subject to a low wage, unreasonable orders, and the risk of being fired. This spirit of

independence is essential to the self-image of tianguistas – both a part of their identity *and* a reflection of a broader macro-economic and political understanding of the social context in which they find themselves. In their lifetimes, most have seen Mexico's currency devalued on multiple occasions in addition to various other economic crises, as well as the withdrawal of most subsidies to rural production. They know that the social safety net is insufficient to guarantee the basic needs of their families.

Tianguista families are willing to subject themselves to self-exploitation because in most cases, the alternative work available is limited to domestic labor and low-wage commercial or janitorial work. The low-wage jobs at new corporate retail stores, heralded by government officials as employment-creators, are not only undesirable; minimum educational requirements and hiring practices that favor a particular slick and youthful image also make them unattainable. Thus, for all the self-exploitation entailed, tianguis work still constitutes a livelihood worth fighting for. How that fight is carried out collectively is the subject of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5. Tianguistas (re)make the city

Introduction

Every other day for nearly two months in 2013, Agustina went to the *plantón* – a sit-in – on the land earmarked for the construction of a shopping mall and Walmart a few blocks away from several of the biggest tianguis in the area, including the one where Agustina and her mother sell their tlayudas. More than 100 vendors camped out on the land, part of which belonged to the municipality and part of which was ejidal land from Yatareni. The deals were made behind closed doors and invited a host of conflicts. One ensued over how much land corresponded to which jurisdiction and who, exactly, had signed off on converting communally-owned farmland to private commercial property. Another emerged between two workers' unions vying for construction contracts. Still a third conflict was sparked when tianguistas got wind of a promise the municipality had made to get rid of nearby tianguis in order to guarantee that the new mall would thrive. It was on this last front that Agustina found herself fighting. Her vendors' association had reacted quickly.

Led by market leader Pedro Guzmán García, Agustina and her *compañeros* occupied the land to prevent the onset of construction. Day after day, they stayed on the land. They read newspapers and embroidered and chatted about the latest news. They didn't put up tarps or signs, but their bodies on the land served as the basis from which Don Pedro, as the leader is respectfully called, could enter negotiations with the authorities. He

therefore instructed that one person from each market stall be at the sit-in every other day, so that half of all vendors would be present each day. Agustina didn't complain about missing work, though it must have been difficult for her family. She is nearly half of the family business, making and selling tlayudas alongside her mother, Benita. She was sixteen and hadn't taken part in public protests before. "It was a good feeling," she recalls. "We talked to each other. We were more united then." Negotiations took more than a month. One day, Don Pedro appeared to tell them they could all go home: the tianguis was allowed to stay. After that, construction went forward to build the mall that is today known as the Macroplaza. Tianguistas report lower sales since then, but are satisfied that, at least, they retained the right to sell.

Notwithstanding the hard work of tianguista families documented in the previous chapter, the tianguis would not continue to exist by the will and perseverance of individual vendors alone. The other indispensable factor is that tianguistas are organized.

Organizing is undertaken by leaders who represent unions, including both product-specific vendors' associations and national unions that integrate a wide spectrum of formal and informal workers. Market committees and leaders deal with day-to-day issues, while leaders assume primary responsibility for securing, sustaining, and/or expanding access to urban space. Though the unions that tianguis belong to are rarely transparent or democratic, they lay the groundwork for their continued existence in the city.

The organizational capacity of vendors is fundamental to understanding the tianguis as a livelihood strategy that is enthusiastically pursued to improve household well-being. As

mentioned, much of the Mexican economy is based on either exploitation via wage work offering income far below the cost of living or self-exploitation in the non-wage, self-employed informal economy. In this context, tianguis labor compares favorably to alternatives because it offers access to a relatively dependable place to work in public space.

I argue that the nature of vendor activism can be understood in two opposing ways⁵¹. On one hand, the tianguis exists as a form of insurgent urbanism (Hou 2010), in which subaltern groups radically redistribute urban space from the uses prescribed by modernist planners (leisure, traffic flow) in order to meet their daily material needs. Indigenous, women, urban-peripheral, rural, working-class, poor – and all combinations of these – stake their claim to the city and their right to earn their livelihoods on public land. In response to marginalization by the state, tianguistas claim urban territory through means ranging from state-sanctioned to semi-legal and confrontational.

On the other hand, and simultaneously, the ways in which claims are staked have the effect of partially commodifying public space; the leaders of vendors' associations and state officials are major beneficiaries. The relationship between union members, leaders and the state fit firmly within Mexico's long history of clientelism (Hellman 1994; Holzner 2006). Understanding how state officials and leaders particularly benefit from

⁵¹ This chapter is based on more than thirty interviews with tianguistas, two with municipal inspectors, and a selective review of the two major newspapers in Oaxaca, *Noticias* and *El Imparcial* (2013-2020). For continuity and depth, I highlight stories of the families described in the previous chapter when possible.

these patron-client dynamics clarifies how tianguis, and the informal economy of street vending more broadly, expand in spite of the projected self-image of state modernization wrapped up in the new supermarkets, malls, and mini-marts.

Thus, this chapter offers an explanation of how urban space is claimed, “owned,” and partitioned via vendor organizing and how these imaginaries are reinforced or challenged by the state. The effects of informal commodification of public space include the creation of a high barrier to entry for would-be vendors and a hierarchy of vendor-types providing differentiated rents. Commodification fuels both the expansion of tianguis into new urban territory and violence among leaders wrapped up in turf wars.

I examine the key role of organizational leaders as urban, modern ‘caciques’ – a term with colonial roots referring to Indigenous leaders who served as intermediaries between the Spanish administrators and Indigenous communities (Chance 1996; Jansen and Jiménez 2018). In practice, colonizers made every effort to manipulate existing Indigenous? leadership to create a system of indirect rule; the basic structure was later roughly reproduced by the PRI in corporatist party-booster organizations (Hellman 1994; Pansters 2005). While contemporary tianguis leaders are relatively successful in representing their vendors (rather than primarily party needs), government officials negotiate specifically with them; leaders provide rents or other favors to officials in exchange for access to urban space.

Sustaining Space

A preference for 'dialogue'

Multi-week sit-ins, road blockades, and massive marches are all commonplace in Oaxaca. Roads are blocked by various organizations – from public health workers to taxi drivers' unions to students to neighborhood groups – as often as a few times a week, causing bottlenecks that temporarily paralyze the city. The teachers' union stages annual strikes and sit-ins that involve tens of thousands of teachers occupying the zocalo and downtown streets. State workers, coalitions of women's rights groups, and Indigenous community members regularly fill the streets to publicize grievances. Demands of the state are broad-ranging, including improving salaries and working conditions, addressing the impunity of perpetrators of femicides, resolving rural land conflicts, or fixing neighborhood water infrastructure. Yet outward manifestations such as the one described at the beginning of this chapter are *not* the norm for most tianguistas of the popular neighborhood tianguis⁵². The long-lasting 2013 sit-in on the land soon to become a shopping mall represented a last recourse.

Indeed, one long-time vendor who was active in helping the leader organize the sit-in, was cagey about her involvement. At first, Hortensia refused to admit that the sit-in had even happened. Yes, the Macroplaza wanted the tianguis to disappear, she said, but to address the issue, they collected the signatures of tianguistas, then:

⁵² Activists involved in the alternative tianguis described in Chapter 3 and tianguistas with ties to the teachers' movement are more likely to be involved in such direct action.

We went directly to the municipality to dialog with the mayor. That's how we came to agreement, that when they [the mayor or his administration] needs something, we'll help him out. We also help him simply because we pay every week. This is our rent [she points to her ticket, signifying that she has paid twenty pesos to the municipal inspector]. When you take this ticket and pay, you are participating in the municipality. This gives us validity.

The municipal inspector hands out the ticket that she shows me (Figure 4.14) each market day. Vendors at Calicanto in Santa Lucía del Camino pay anywhere from five to thirty pesos, depending on the size of the stall. Hortensia pays ten pesos. The municipality provides police and garbage services (although vendors say that they are required to carry out all of their own garbage and sweep their space after packing up). Still, the municipal inspector tells me, "It's so minimal what we charge. It doesn't begin to cover our costs." There are five other tianguis in the jurisdiction of Santa Lucia del Camino municipality and more than thirty in Oaxaca's metropolitan area. It is likely that these official collections are actually sufficient to cover basic municipal services; however, it is the political capital embedded in the tianguis that better explains their persistence.

Figure 5.1. Proof of payment, municipal market fee

Party favors

The system of favors Hortensia alludes to is, in fact, the prevalent form of tianguista activism. It is especially relevant during election seasons. The strategy most commonly employed across tianguis is for market leaders to negotiate with politicians, especially candidates expected to win. Vendors are called on to serve snacks at candidates' events or attend marches in their favor, in exchange for pledged support of the tianguis. Such events are typically obligations imposed by the market's leader rather than reflections of an individual vendor's commitment to the candidate. As in other sectors, there is often a strong relationship with the PRI, and some of the organizations that vendors belong to were created by the PRI to begin with. However, parties in Oaxaca have varied in the last decade (as compared to a previous-century of exclusive PRI-rule). Accordingly, tianguis leaders sometimes enter into negotiations with candidates from other parties and take advantage of rivalries. Monse, an independent street vendor, described her own political position in

terms of narrowly defined interests related to access to public space, which also broadly reflects the behavior of leaders:

I'm going to tell you something. When they ask me what party I'm from, [I ask], "What party is winning? The PRI? I'm from the PRI." [I ask] "What party are you from? From the PAN? The PAN is winning?" "Okay, I'm with the PAN." Why? Because if I'm a Priista, the Panista isn't going to give me anything, because I was a Priista. If I'm a Priista and the PAN wins, it's a revolution, there's no way [I will get anything].

I ask her if she would now say that she's with Morena, the party in power in the federal government under the leadership of López Obrador, also in power in Oaxaca City. "When it's in my best interest, that's what I'll say. When someone from Morena says, "We're going to give out [vending] places [in the public way]." While Monse has sold in tianguis in the past, she now sells independently in the downtown streets, making her situation somewhat more precarious and complicated than that of market vendors.

Notwithstanding a generally shared distrust of politicians, tianguista affiliations and sentiments straddle the political spectrum. When asked what kind of tianguis organizing she had been asked to take part in, a tianguista at Llano Park, and one of the few that I met who was actively involved in social movements in Oaxaca, responded:

[The leaders] never asked us to participate in anything, but a lot of time leaders would take other vendors to PRI activities. They already had us pegged for people in the movement, activists, so they didn't invite us. But for example, during Murat's campaign [for state governor], they held an event, I think it was a dinner. I'm not sure what the event was exactly but everybody was chattering on about it. I wasn't invited but I still had to make a donation. Later you find out all about it. All the gossip spreads fast. You see another tianguista change their profile photo [on Facebook] to one with the governor.

Such events were common across markets. Belén, a grasshopper seller explains, "When the municipality asks the leader to organize a march or something like that, we go along with them. For example, to support a [candidate for] mayor, something like that. We go hand out juice or fruit." Hibiscus seller Mago adds, "When politicians are campaigning, we have to go. Sometimes you don't even know [who the candidate is] but you say, well, you have to go, and we go. Because we need the [market] space. So you have to go." Carmen, a lifelong fruit vendor who sells in tianguis six days a week, said that as a tianguista she was asked to attend such events two or three times a year. "[The market leaders] usually don't tell us [what the event is]. They just say, 'You know what? We are going to such and such place.' And they bring the music. They don't really tell us anything." "The music?" I ask. "Yes," Carmen replies. "It's like a party. They bring sweets. They ask us to go to *hacer bulto*, to make it look like a lot of people are at the event." I ask her if she enjoys these events, and she says, "Sure. We have a good time. We went to one recently during Holy Week – they had *chiles rellenos*, sandwiches, *tejate*, ice cream."

As a matter of assuring their continued existence, or, on some occasions, expanding access to public space, tianguistas obey the leader when asked to participate in campaign and other events, recognizing this as a not-too-unpleasant obligation of their membership in the tianguis. The clientelistic organizations that represent many tianguis have certainly contributed to the PRI's century-long rule in Mexico. Yet, it is important to mention that these organizations cannot be reduced to or primarily characterized as "vote banks" (Sarmiento et al. 2016). Clearly, the act of participating in campaign events gives vendors more exposure to a particular candidate, often at events intended to be fun – including food, drinks and t-shirts. They may personally meet a candidate, which may encourage them to vote for that person, as in the case of the person who posted pictures on Facebook of their meeting with the future governor. However, no tianguista I spoke with admitted to being persuaded as such. Tianguistas did not say they were asked to vote for one candidate in particular, and often responded to the question with disdain. "The vote is free and secret," many repeated. "If you want to vote, you vote. If not, you don't. The [leaders] don't make us vote. Everyone is free to vote for whoever she wants." In fact, a general disillusionment with government – perhaps now a symptom of Mexican society at large – was present across the tianguis, and disgust with government was palpable. When asked what the government might do to support the tianguis, a tianguista shrugged, "Maybe they help the big chain stores, but not us." She repeated what many others had said: "Candidates from all the parties stop by. We just smile and accept their pamphlets. None of them do anything." Indeed, during an election year, campaign materials from every party litter the

tables of each market stall. The main goal of tianguistas is simply to exist – not ask for any additional support.

Confrontational tactics as a last resort

Aside from organizing on behalf of specific markets with claims to specific public spaces, the unions that most vendors belong to organize their own events to make demands on behalf of fellow workers from other sectors. The number and diversity of sectors represented by the national unions that represent tianguis make them a force to be reckoned with. As one produce seller said, “They’ll tell us, ‘We need you to go to, say, Plaza de la Danza. Because some other people have a problem and we have to support them.’ Because we are from the same union.” Leaders’ demands that tianguistas show up for union events and candidates a few times a year struck most as reasonable.

Yet, by and large, vendors from the popular tianguis found more outright forms of protest distasteful, partly perhaps due to the frequent smear campaigns carried out by the state against social movement organizing. One vendor says that she has no time for marches. “If you miss a day [of work], that day, what do you eat? You know who holds marches? People who cash a check every two weeks, from the government.”

Still, there are moments when the system of favors breaks down. Tianguistas then find themselves obliged to take to the streets—in protest. They hold marches and public manifestations when their access to public space is directly threatened and all other means

are exhausted. In these cases, they represent their message in terms of their own need and the dignity of their labor. Signs at one protest read, “We only want to earn the daily bread of our children,” or “Mr. Governor, let us work. Don’t take away the sustenance of our children,” evoking a symbol of the most basic of human needs. Sometimes they appeal to gender-based stereotypes (what Butler 1990 calls “strategic essentialism”), with signs that read, “We are single mothers, widows and elderly, but very hard-working.” Or simply, “We don’t have money. Just let us work. Let us sell (See Figure 5.2).”

Figure 5.2 Ambulantes protest (Source: “Solo queremos trabajar,” 2017)

In 2018, the biggest tianguis protest in Oaxaca City happened over the forced relocation from the favorable, central location at Llano Park to an area much farther from the city center. Held in the largest plaza in Oaxaca’s historic center, the tianguis at the Llano was also Oaxaca’s most lucrative. In their campaign to conserve their access, vendors chose a

conciliatory tone, emphasizing the services or products of the tianguis. During one march, the leaders told newspaper reporters, “The intention [of the march to the municipal office], besides bringing gifts of samples of our products to workers at the municipality, was to put forth some demands and needs of tianguistas.” The march was described by leaders as a “courtesy visit” and a “chance to get together with the mayor.” When the mayor didn’t appear to meet with them, they displayed the gifts on the plaza in front of the municipal palace (Zavala 2017b).

They became more confrontational over time. In the case of the ‘march of gifts’, the tianguistas were unsuccessful in preserving their space. By the end of the year, the municipality forcibly moved them to a much less desirable location outside the city center to the east. Police in riot gear surrounded the plaza the night before and piles of dirt were dumped on the pathways where tianguistas would normally set up – seemingly as a precaution in case tianguistas made it through the police barrier. Clearly, the municipality knew and feared the organizing capabilities of the tianguistas and expected that their attitude towards the change would not be as friendly as it was during the previous encounter. One reporting article noted that the relocation is part of a “reordering plan that the municipality aims to implement to clean the historic center of ambulantes” (Ignacio 2017). The municipality won that battle. However, it’s not clear who will have the last word. In 2019, one of the four organizations of tianguistas at the Llano tried, again, to set up market stalls in the plaza in the middle of the night. In response, “agents of the municipal, state police and even the Mexican army” were sent to guard the zone and protect the public officials who reportedly came to dialog with vendors (Escamilla 2019).

Holding onto public space, as this section has demonstrated, requires a multi-pronged strategy: negotiations when possible, facilitated through political favors, and direct action when other means fail.

Staking claims

Moving in with modern caciques

So far, this chapter has dealt with vendor strategies for *conserving* public land already established as a marketplace. First, of course, claims must be laid. To understand how land is occupied in the first place, as well as how occupation is sustained, we must take a moment to examine the pivotal role played by market leaders. Market leaders occupy a role akin to that of *caciques* – originally a term applied by colonial administrations to leaders of Indigenous communities who served as intermediaries and, often, agents, of colonial indirect rule (Chance 1996). Caciques dominate by controlling the flow of economic and political resources that members of a given community cannot freely access (Hernández Rodríguez 1998, 2015). Luisa Paré, writing on Mexican caciquismo in the 1970s, understands the role of rural caciques in the context of dependency theory and internal colonialism, where caciques extract and retain surplus value from peasants (Paré 1972). In spite of their parasitic potential, scholars warn against an overly simplified normative assumption about caciques, who may enjoy legitimacy among constituents (Pansters 2005). Their own activities may vary between community-serving and self-serving; they may compromise community interests to those of public officials for personal gain, but they

must also maintain legitimacy among their constituents (Zárate 2005). Notwithstanding the degree of member consent, caciques are a paradigmatic actor in what Pansters (2018) calls Mexico's prevailing "informal order." Caciques operate through personalistic mediation, informal connections with public officials, ruling party leaders, and police; they facilitate reciprocity based on personal relationships (Pansters 2018). They must effectively move in different societal domains, including those enabling access to means of violence (ibid.)

Just as cacique power was historically based on the control of rural land, modern caciques make urban space a source of power (Maldonado 2005). Market leadership is established not through a democratic decision-making process, but through the leaders' ability to lay claim to public space. And the leaders credited with establishing this control are often leaders for life. Usually already backed by an organization or vendors' union, leaders negotiate with a politician to set aside street space or a plaza and permit a group of vendors. For most tianguis in the Oaxacan metropolitan area, territorial claims were laid many decades ago. Don Pedro, the general secretary of the Union of Producers and Sellers of Flowers, Fruits and Vegetables, established three new tianguis in Oaxaca in the 1980s, including that of Santa Lucia, by organizing vendors at the Central de Abastos who sold on an open-air strip known as the Corralón (roughly translated in this context as farmyard or warehouse). The tianguis at the Corralón was Tuesdays and Fridays only, and vendors at the time were transitioning from primarily farming to primarily retailing. They were settling closer to the city, and they needed more space from which to sell their products.

In light of the rapid urban expansion of Oaxaca City, Don Pedro was successful in negotiating with two mayors to allow the creation of three new neighborhood tianguis – on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. While vendors are not privy to the insides of these negotiations, they report that original permits were for only around fifteen vendors – the same ones in each market – who were to sell fruits and vegetables exclusively. They received their permits free of cost, aside from the expectation of political support for PRI candidates and elected officials. In exchange for his securing vendor livelihoods, Don Pedro would charge a daily fee. Though no one knows exactly how leaders' collections are spent, they expect that he uses some of this money for further organizing, another part to pay (off) local government officials, and another part as compensation for his own efforts. Hortensia, a produce seller in Santa Lucia, remains loyal to Don Pedro. Other, newer members of the tianguis may want a new leader, she tells me. But the people who started the tianguis are loyal, "Because he helped us in so many ways. He distinguished us. He put us before his family, and for that, we have to be grateful."

When it is not possible to negotiate with politicians before occupying a new space (or the probability of success is low), leaders sometimes organize vendors to occupy public space without permits. The newspapers – often sympathetic with the perspective of the state – call this *paracaidismo* (a word referring to a phenomenon of metaphorical parachuters or skydivers), a term also applied to groups squatting on peri-urban land and building informal settlements. The word gives the impression that these land-seekers (for housing or vending) fall out of the sky – out of nowhere. Strategically, leaders find that it is much more difficult for government officials to get rid of vendors or squatters once they are there than it is to

deny access in the first place. Indeed, though the methods used for claiming public space are varied, they often mirror those used by squatters' organizations to claim land for urban development (Madrid Vázquez 2013; Holzner 2006). In the already crowded and highly coveted urban space of Oaxaca City, would-be vendors sometimes use a strategy referred to as *estrategia hormiga* – the ant strategy. In this case, a handful of vendors begin to occupy a space and, week by week, more vendors show up. The idea is that a few vendors can go practically unnoticed; by the time more show up, neighbors may perceive the vendors as an almost natural part of the landscape and governing officials may not catch on until vendors are well-established. Of course, neither of these strategies always work as vendors' organizations hope, but they are well-rehearsed and sometimes successful.

Tianguis leaders are vital to the mobilization of any of these strategies. They exemplify modern caciques by the ways in which they derive power and retain legitimacy through control over urban space.

The “lotification” of public space

Once a large swath of space has been claimed, the leader draws up individual spaces. In some urban tianguis, these divisions are marked with short, painted lines perpendicular to the street, with the space between lines indicating the number of meters ‘owned’ by a *placero*, or permitted vendor. In public parks, plazas, and many streets, no lines are drawn but the system holds. While the first people to occupy new space often obtain their permits for free, an immediate commodification process begins. Original vendors can sell permits

to would-be vendors, which can, in turn, be bought and sold many times at prices corresponding to rising market value. Explains a tianguista working out of the city's largest plazas:

When we started selling [at the tianguis], it was already lot-ified, you could say. Like each person had already bought a space but I don't know who they bought it from. So it's imaginarily divided, with two meters belonging to each tianguista. I worked at a stall for four years that belonged to a man who had already bought it. So we just paid rent to the leader of the group that his stall belonged to.

In established tianguis, vendors struggle to secure these permits. Permits themselves are expensive, running from some 20,000 to 100,000 pesos (roughly 900-4,500 USD) for two square meters for a permit to sell one day in a single weekly market; the price depends on how coveted the market. With each sale, the leader takes a cut. For many vendors these prices are prohibitive. But getting hold of a permit is difficult even with cash in hand. First, relatively few permits are for sale at any given time. When a permit is available, the current permitted owner and the buyer negotiate the price, but sales must be approved by the leader – who must in turn reckon with the complaints of other existing vendors. Each vendor has registered a particular product assortment and is not allowed to bring products outside of this list; a permit includes not only the measurements of the allotted space but also specifies what she may sell. Ildefonso explains how he bought the permit to his wife's vegetable stall:

What we did there is negotiate the price with the owner of the space. The owner wanted 25,000. “No,” I tell him. “I can give you X amount.” Then he said, well, “Give me 20,000 so I can give 2,000 to the leaders.” So the stall owner gets 18,000. The rest is, you could say, a fund for the leaders. For example, when they need to paint the lines that designate spaces. I mean, it’s an excuse. Say you spend 500 painting lines, then the rest they divide amongst themselves [the various leaders of a single market].

The same market stall owner also offered him a spot in Llano Park. “But do you know how much he wanted? 40,000 (1800 USD)! He said it was because you sell a lot there.” He acknowledged that you might sell more, and that he and his wife want to buy more permits to sell the vegetables they produce, but he had heard about high leaders’ fees and fines. “Your truck isn’t unloaded by dawn? That’s a fine. The metal poles of your stall aren’t painted white. Another fine. It’s easy to pay 200 pesos just in fines!”

Privately traded permits are the first way that public space is commodified, a process mediated by market leaders. On top of this initial outlay, vendors usually also pay rent – a daily fee paid directly to the leaders for opening one’s market stall. This rent is in addition to the fee charged by the municipality. Like municipal inspectors, leaders make their rounds daily to charge these rents. In some markets, leaders charge a single fee on their own behalf and that of the municipality; in these markets an unspecified part goes to the municipality.

While the permitting system covers permanent vendors, a secondary, rent-only system applies to vendors without a permit. A quarter to a half of vendors in a tianguis on a given day are known as ambulantes. Ambulantes are not – as the term might lead one to believe – vendors who move through the markets while selling. Instead, the word refers to vendors who sell in stationary spots that change each week. Ambulantes are the least privileged of vendors in several respects. They often have less for sale, limited by the amount they can carry, frequently on public transportation. Some carry small amounts of produce from their own harvest: bunches of cilantro and limes from the Central Valleys or apples, quince and bread from the Sierra. Some spread their wares out on straw mats called petates rather than tables. They tend to be poorer than their permitted counterparts, and they must struggle more to access sales space. One ambulante explains:

Getting a space at a tianguis [as an ambulante] is complicated. Because if they don't know you, they get rid of you. They throw you out. There are places where there are leaders, markets where there are organizations, or where there are groups that lead – a committee, it's called. You arrive [looking for a spot] and other vendors say, 'Look, talk to one of them [the leaders].' And they say yes or no. Because you can't bring products that other vendors are already selling.

He and his wife and children arrive at 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning to secure a spot. As producers of a fairly original product line including honey, pollen, worm salt and grasshoppers, they are rarely turned away. Vendors selling more common products face more difficulties. A vegetable seller said she wouldn't want to sell as an ambulante because

of the difficulty of arranging a spot with the leaders. “Leaders might say, ‘Sure, set up there. Just give me so much [money].’ But then other sellers of the same product will complain because they don’t want more vendors selling products similar to theirs. The tianguis are very coveted, *muy peleados*. It’s hard to get in. So sometimes just paying a lot of money [for a permit] is the only way...” Once an empty spot is identified, ambulantes pay the leader directly – and not the owner of the permit, who does not have the right to rent.

Some vendors, such as Benita, work as ambulantes their entire lives, never able to save enough to secure a permit. She has negotiated with a tamale vendor, who sells at one corner of a meat stall, to occupy her space after she leaves. Tamales by morning, tlayudas in the afternoon. Many ambulante spaces transform in similar fashion. Still, she has to always ask permission from the leader. “When we arrive at the market, we find a spot that’s not occupied [whose permitted vendor did not come to sell]. Then we ask the man [leader], what’s his name? [for permission to sell].” She pays five pesos to the municipality to sell.

Both ambulantes and placenteros have widely accepted the prevailing system in which the street is partitioned off into space that can be owned and rented. Some ambulantes are saving up in the hopes of buying a permit while others find the permit cost prohibitive of any such aspiration. All pay their weekly quotas to the leaders and the municipality, recognizing that some kind of exclusionary mechanism seems to be required given that in

Oaxaca, there are typically many more would-be vendors than space for them – a phenomenon that has the possibility to drive down the sales prices for everyone.

Leaders also charge fees for a range of different kinds of services. While securing and maintaining access to public space is their most fundamental role, leaders also help resolve disputes between vendors, negotiate with politicians, and coordinate public relations – such as taking up a collection for the annual neighborhood patron saint celebration. When vendors find that the rents and fees are reasonable and in accordance with leaders’ services, they are willing to pay. “It’s like a *cargo*,” said Eufalia, explaining the role of the leader in her tianguis using a term common to the *usos y costumbres* system governing much of Indigenous and rural Oaxaca⁵³. She believed that these tasks comprised a duty that had been assigned to a particular person responsible for serving his constituents. Others respected leaders’ services, but more tentatively. “Supposedly,” began Agustina, “the leader offers protection, so that the little bit that we earn isn’t stolen. Or, let’s say that we want something. There used to be water spouts only every half block in the market, and we didn’t have enough water to wash the vegetables. That’s what the leader helped with.”

Though not deeply resentful of leaders’ fees, other vendors were less confident that the services provided were worth what they paid. When asked what leaders do with the rents they charge, many shrugged, and said, “It’s just for him. For his pockets.” Sometimes tianguistas do not feel represented by their leader, expressing uncertainty about the service

⁵³ *Cargos* are obligatory, unpaid service roles, usually assigned by the community assembly for a year at a time, ranging from security guard to mayor.

provided in exchange for the often substantial fees charged. In some cases, vendors are concerned with the lack of real representation, where leaders do not seem to be standing up to municipal inspectors. Benita highlighted the unfairness of lack of leadership during municipal confiscations.

I don't know if you saw last Sunday. It happened with an *abuelita* who was selling clay piggybanks. She didn't want to pay and what happened was the police came and took all her merchandise. The woman told them she couldn't pay and so the inspector got stubborn and called the police who took all the old lady's merchandise... The leader was there, he saw and didn't do anything. He should say, "Yes, she'll pay but if she doesn't have money now, wait for her to sell, then she'll pay..." She went to the municipality to try to get her products back, so that she would have something to eat [after making sales]. The leader should help people, not screw them over.

According to many vendors, once confiscated merchandise is in the municipality, it stays there. "They never give it back," says Monse. In this case, it is likely that the woman was unable to pay either the leader's *ambulante* fee or the municipal tax. Thus the leader did not step in to defend her. Confiscations are still a somewhat common practice, but in another era, they were rampant. Vendors remember police throwing a farmer's sole basket of produce into the street. The best leaders are remembered to have taken care of their members. One vendor told a story of a leader who would ask a street vendor the

value of her produce that had been confiscated or destroyed and compensate her accordingly.

Sitting in the back of the truck filled with green beans, at the wholesale night market, Ildefonso, tells me he is reasonably satisfied with his leader. The market leader secured some land along the riverbanks just south of the Central Supply markets, and arranged for it to be reserved for Oaxacan vendors exclusively. The service that Ildefonso said he most valued, however, was that the organization sprayed down the dirt floor on the patch of land where the market was held to prevent dust and dirt from flying around. The CTM charges twenty pesos per week, which he said, “is nothing because it’s a real service to us.” Ildefonso also pays the leader thirty pesos each market day for electricity and someone to sweep up after the farmers go home. Additionally, each farmer pays a monthly fee of 100 pesos. Given that there are more than 200 farmers in the bi-weekly night market, even a quick calculation makes clear that the money that changes hands far exceeds the cost of the services allegedly being paid for. Still, the farmers didn’t find these fees abusive; moreover, they knew who they were dealing with.

That’s because another promise made by the leader of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM) was that the organization would carry out protests and engage in violence on behalf of members. Ildefonso paid his one-time permit fee of 3,000 pesos – which does not include a guaranteed spot in the wholesale market but does include the right to contend for a spot on a first come, first serve basis – and was told that his fee meant that:

When there are problems, when there are blockades, they have their own people to do those things. The CTM does road blocks and all of that kind of thing. So they've told us, "We're not going to call you to go block a road. We have our own people who will do it." People they pay to do that.

Another farmer chimes in as he puts crates of cucumber on display, adding his interpretation of what he remembers being told:

I think that if they want to burn buses or have someone beat up or killed, they just make a phone call. Threaten them, kill someone so that the government will pay attention. Because we have meetings, and that's what the leaders have told us. "You guys don't worry. You pay your 3,000 pesos and you have no reason to get into trouble."

The organization boasts paid thugs to do any dirty work, as well as paid protestors to stage protests, allegedly so that vendors do not have to take time out of their farming and wholesaling to defend their spaces.

In sum, the partial commodification of public space forged by leaders and subsequently reified by vendors has multiple effects. It works to create a barrier to entry against otherwise vast competition – a central goal of many trades' unions. In doing so, it creates classes of vendors, where permitted vendors who 'own' a few meters of street space enjoy greater security than their ambulante counterparts. The commodification system also

results in hefty profits for market leaders, spawning competition that sometimes erupts in violence.

Turf wars

A neighbor came upstairs with the newspaper clippings she had been saving for me. A street vendor for over fifty years, she is concerned about the rise of violence. “These are all the leaders that have been murdered the past few years,” she points to the page. *Imparcial* has published the names and faces of murdered leaders over the past ten years; some thirty faces cover the page. I know a few of them. Bety Cariño and Jyri Jaakkola are there, two activists killed in 2010 when delivering supplies to an Indigenous community that had recently declared its municipality autonomous from the state government. “Some of these are activists,” I tell her, “Murdered by paramilitaries.” She shrugs. In a context in which state repression against organizers is frequent and often gravely misrepresented in mainstream media, it is difficult to ascertain the specificities of the assassinations of so many organizational leaders. Still, the competition for territory in urban space unfolding between unions was confirmed by many vendors. Many of the faces on the page of the newspaper are leaders of such organizations. And in the few years I have spent following events unfolding in and around the tianguis, at least a half dozen union leaders along with some of their associates and family members, have been harmed or murdered.

As public space has become an increasingly hot commodity, turf wars have followed. The organization that the farmers of the wholesale market discussed above is one of the

oldest and largest labor unions in Mexico. Despite its leftist origins, the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos has long-served as a strong-arm apparatus of the PRI, reliably supporting the repression of independent unions and any movement challenging party leadership (La Botz 1992). More recently in Oaxaca, the shady dealings of organizational leaders have become apparent as rivalries unfold between competing groups.

In March 2018, the leader of the Confederation of Mexican Workers, the largest organization representing *tianguistas* in Oaxaca – along with many other informal sector workers – was murdered in Oaxaca City. The first line of the newspaper story alludes to the perception of organized crime within the organization: “Wilfrido Sánchez Cruz, former mayor of Santa Cruz Amilpas and brother of Marcos Sánchez, former Secretary of Finance of the Confederation of Workers of Mexico, in prison for organized crime, was murdered this afternoon...behind the Macroplaza in Santa Lucía del Camino” (Cuitláhuac, 2018).

Then, on June 2, 2019, less than two years after my first trip to the farmers’ wholesale market on the riverbank, CTM and market leader René Hernández, was murdered on site. All the vendors had been asked to do *tequio*⁵⁴, planting trees along the river and graveling the land where they sold to deal with dust and mud issues. Busy that day with another engagement, Ildefonso dropped off two bags of cement in lieu of providing labor time. Shortly after he left, at ten in the morning, a car of *sicarios* – hit men – drove up to the site where all of the farmers were working and shot and killed Hernández and one of his

⁵⁴ Mandatory unpaid labor for a community project; the term comes from one of the pillars of Indigenous government in Oaxaca; the term is also commonly used in Oaxaca outside of rural communities.

bodyguards. The leader had faced a series of violent attacks. He and his wife were attacked in 2014; his wife was killed. In 2018, “after having recovered the land along the Atoyac riverbanks” four of his union members were shot by hitmen on motorcycles, and a minor died (Pérez 2019).

After René Hernández was murdered, Ildefonso’s group started selling on the other side of the river at an abandoned plywood factory. “They won’t get to sell there long,” Eufalia tells me. “There’s a deal in the works to sell it to Chedraui [multinational supermarket].”

Even a year later, the riverbanks are guarded by state police. As we drive by in a truck loaded up with merchandise, another tianguista, Margarita, recounts the story. “Just imagine, there he was planting trees and right there in front of all of his people [members of his organization].” It’s not clear who the assassins were, though the newspapers mention two rival groups that emerged on the scene more recently – Libertad and 14 de Junio. I am suspicious of this explanation, given that state police have stood guard ever since; no other organization has moved in to claim the territory.

Of course, it’s not just tianguistas and wholesalers whose membership these organizations compete for. Many other workers are also part of these umbrella organizations. Rivalries for licenses to drive taxis are particularly contentious; these, in turn, affect the ways that people can move around the city and region. The boundaries drawn by rival organizations have particular implications for tianguistas and street vendors who often depend on taxis to transport their wares. Benita, the *tortillera* who

once used her husband's mototaxi to deliver her tlayudas, can no longer do so. A few years back, she was stopped by a member of Libertad, another national organization amassing many informal workers. "You can't sell here unless you belong to an organization," the man told her, "You have to either belong to the CTM [Confederation of Mexican Workers] or Libertad." She protested, "Why should I have to belong to an organization to sell tortillas door-to-door? What would that give me?" "Protection," the Libertad member answered. "Protection from what?" she recalls responding. "Later the other union will come after me and what will that one protect me from? I'm better off on my own." That day, her son was driving the moto-taxi. The member of Libertad, now joined by other members of the organization, confiscated the vehicle. Benita and her son got out of their moto-taxi and watched as the Libertad drove it away. Later, her son was permitted to recover it by paying the organization a fine.

She went to the municipality with her grievances. There, "They basically told me no, because the CTM doesn't want it, Libertad doesn't want it [for her to sell *tlayudas* by moto-taxi]. Because they don't want other taxis entering their territory," Benita tells me. She recalls the administrator telling her, "You're not going to get through. You want to sell your tortilla, you'll have to walk." She now walks with her tlayudas, quadrupling the time it takes her to make her deliveries.

Tianguis leaders and the state

Clearly, some government officials benefit from the existence of these organizations and their leaders. Officially, the state agenda involves promoting corporate chain retailers while "cleaning" streets or "recovering" public space from tianguistas and other street

vendors. However, this agenda clashes with the extra-official practices of sanctioning informal retail reviewed in this chapter. Tianguistas offer a source of unreported revenue to some government officials, which changes hands in secret. They provide bodies to make sponsored events seem popular. They constitute an important voting bloc. Furthermore, the system of *cacique*-style leadership allows the government some control over market activities without having to provide as many official regulators. State officials can either distance themselves from the affairs of leaders or pretend to do so. As one market inspector told me:

I don't know if [vendors] pay the leader or not. I stay out of it...I don't know if they have meetings. There's just the leader's committee. I really don't know much about the leader. We just introduced ourselves and he introduced me to the vendors and then we got started. If he charges [vendors], if he doesn't charge, if they give him money, if they don't, even if I see him, if I see him sitting, [I say] "Good morning, Don Pedro" and I continue [working my way through the market stalls to charge the municipal fee]. I don't get involved in the [internal operations of the] tianguis.

At the street-level of government, many municipal inspectors are, however, complicit with expanding rather than restricting the informal economy. Josefina, who comes from the Sierra with blackberries and figs to sell on street corners, moves between several spots to avoid the authorities. "But they always find me." They don't offer her a ticket – a practice no longer common in the city center, where vendors instead pay annually for

their permits. Instead, they ask her for a bribe to turn a blind eye. “Give me a little something. I haven’t had breakfast yet,” they tell her. They don’t name a price, but if she tries to offer less than fifty pesos, they tell her, “No, señora, that’s not enough [for my breakfast].”

At higher levels of government, it is more difficult to trace which palms are greased.

Payments can go both ways: government officials under pressure to clear a particular space may pay off leaders to convince their constituents to relocate. They also may pay leaders to ask their constituents to refrain from protesting a public works project not in their best interest. Leaders, for their part, must pay government officials who have enough power in government to limit repressive operations against vendors. Thus, enough actors within the state apparatus benefit from street vendors that internal private interests take precedent over the ‘public good’ as it is portrayed in newspapers.

Ultimately, tianguis and street vendors more broadly persist because state officials are not uniformly interested in dismantling the informal economy, despite claims to the contrary.

Thus, much of state activity towards street vendors can be regarded as performative—staging actions that communicate a particular worldview without the intention of bringing about professed material changes. Officials’ strategies to constrain vendors – including forced relocation, census-taking, negotiated temporary removals, police blockades to prevent access to public space, and the confiscation of goods – are all temporary, but well-rehearsed actions that satisfy some constituents while performing state power.

Politicians blame the ultimate failure of these actions on their predecessors, who, they

say, gave out too many permits. Indeed, the practice of handing out permits or negotiating tacit agreements in exchange for political favors has led to a steady expansion of vendors in public space—though no politician publicly admits complicity.

Over more than a decade, each mayor who comes to office relies on the same discourse: their immediate predecessor created a monster, and they are left to deal with it. This political cartoon (Figure 5.3) summarizes newspapers' persistent critique of inept politicians. The vendor featured aggressively hawks a necklace while the departing mayor's thought bubble reads, "The good thing is, I'm out of here. I'm leaving you my mess." The cartoon highlights the complicity of local authorities, the transference of the 'problem' of street commerce over generations of mayors, and implies the inauthenticity of vendors (in this case selling an "original amber" necklace tagged "made in China"). Its caption describes ambulantes as "mafias," and reports that they "have protection from social organizations and are tolerated by the capital's leader."

Figure 5.3. Cartoon blaming mayor for informal commerce (Goméz 2018)

In contrast to their operation during a long history of one-party rule, leaders today can take advantage of political party rivalries. But they can also fail to ally themselves with the proper party. As administrations change – and, in more recent years, political parties – leaders fall in and out of favor with new government officials. Don Pedro, the leader of Calicanto and other tianguis around the city, was arrested on extortion charges in a federal police operation in 2011, along with five other leaders in the Central de Abastos. The newspaper article reports that these “extortionists” were demanding money from market vendors, and threatening to damage their stalls if payments were not made (“Detienen a cinco,” 2011).

In truth, market leaders almost always charge vendors; their fees constitute a long-standing and well-known practice in Mexico. The implicit threat that leaders make is to

withdraw a vendor's right to sell upon failure to pay, rather than to damage a stall. Thus, the event reported here reflects underlying political tensions. The state government was, at the time, under a coalition-party that included the PAN, which had recently defeated the PRI for the first-time at the state level. The PAN had won the presidency for a second consecutive term. The arrest makes clear that existing leadership structures were being shaken up. All the leaders were released with charges dropped; they continue to lead nearly a decade later.

In this panorama of numerous powerful vendor associations together with party competition, vendors' unions may also turn on a politician who is no longer serving their interests. One inspector at the Central de Abastos tianguis had to leave our interview early because the union known as Frente Popular 14 de Junio was "giving them hell." In 2015, the same vendors' association accused a congressman of first having sold their organization spaces in a plaza known as Parque del Amor, then of re-selling them to another organization (Ortiz, David 2015). They occupied the park and posted a sign reading "Hugo Jarquín is a traitor." A vendor interviewed in the article said, "We helped him so that he would triumph in the past elections to be a federal representative, and now he comes to take away what we have earned with so much struggle." In the same protest, vendors further accuse members of the administration of paying corrupt market leaders (presumably excluding their own organization's leaders) to not protest what was to be Oaxaca's first Bus Rapid Transit line. The congressman in question, Hugo Jarquín, is Oaxaca's mayor in 2020, a Morena politician whose administration has seen a further expansion of street vending in the city.

Ultimately, the state and municipal government are involved in two contradictory initiatives. Officials weaken individual vendors by decreasing their income through competition from corporate retailers at the same time as they permit or otherwise allow an ever-expanding number of street vendors. Union leaders negotiate with public officials, providing some officials with some benefits. Yet they also behave independently—and increasingly so, since other parties have entered the political scene. Indeed, their main source of revenue is the daily collections they take up with all tianguis members, whose own income depends on access to public space in places that facilitate sales. When possible, leaders wish to maintain good relations with government officials, negotiating the types of exchange described above. However, when access to public space is threatened, they often organize in favor of their constituency.

Vendor tactics to challenge corrupt leaders and subvert spatial commodification

While many vendors agree that violence and corruption have gotten out of hand in recent years, they themselves provide some of the checks and balances in a partly black-boxed system of the commodification of public space. When leaders are no longer perceived to represent their interests or abuse their power, tianguistas sometimes organize to oust them; ambulantes can also move to a tianguis that offers a better deal. One ambulante reported:

At the Llano there are four or five leaders who are all ambitious and false. I started going when, what was his name, Roberto [was a leader], one who was later

killed. I went to sell one day, with my two little pots of tamales and corn and how much do you think he charged me for my two little pots? 50 pesos! And this was 15 years ago. I told him, “I’m sorry, but I’m leaving. I won’t sell here.” And I went home selling out of my little cart. I finished and didn’t pay anything, and then I stopped going. Three years ago I started again but he was long gone by then.

Others shared similar stories of leaders being replaced over high fees. One tells me, “There used to be a leader there [in Santa Lucia] who charged twenty pesos per person even if you were already the owner of the stall. And if you didn’t pay it, he tried to kick you out of the market. [Vendors] got rid of him because he was abusing [privileges]. Twenty pesos is a lot of money to just give away to someone who’s making his rounds [to charge the rent] without supporting us.”

Campaigns to replace leaders, however, are not always successful. This vendor described the transition she witnessed in her market, which accompanied a change in government. When the PRI took back control of the state government, the CTM found renewed government backing and impunity, using these to demand control.

There are many groups [in my tianguis]. I don’t know how many but a lot. Each one has a certain number of members. We were affiliated with one, who collected rent and paid the municipality. How much the leader charges depends on the leader. We were with one who charged fifty pesos. There are some who charge 200. It

depends a lot on the leader and if you're in a space that is organized or not. Our leader never wanted to be a leader, but my understanding is that a new group formed out of a bigger one, so they wouldn't have to pay such a high fee...He was a nice guy, but then [rivals] beat him up and now he doesn't have any members. The leaders who beat him up took away his members. ...It was a free-for-all for a little while. People would tell you, 'occupy this spot'. The imaginary lot system broke down. Then a new group controlled the [section of] the tianguis. [New leaders said], "This section belongs to...," and they introduced themselves as if they belonged to the CTM. But who knows if they do or not. To me they looked more like narcos than anything else. So it's not a very pleasant topic, is it?

In her market, a rival tried to move in and claim control, first by beating up the leader, then by inviting new people to occupy previously 'owned' space. While lot rights often last for the life of the market, occasionally these imaginary urban territorial controls confront backlash. In this story, the CTM ends up with control, but when tianguistas reach a breaking point, they organize to install a new leader.

There are also subtler tactics to subvert the leaders' rents. Hortensia, for her part, used to have the responsibility of doing rounds to charge vendors on behalf of one of the leaders. To vendors she knew were struggling, she turned a blind eye. "I'm not going to charge you," she would whisper, "Here, give me a bill and I'll give it back to you. I'll pretend I'm giving you change so no one will suspect." While the leader trusted her with the

assignment, she found a way for her personal values to trump the established system of rents.

Vendors also engage in regular gestures of reciprocity. Later, some of those vendors that Hortensia had helped remembered her. She showed up to a new tianguis where many of them sold with “four buckets of avocado, five of strawberries, a pot of boiled chayote, and two baskets of flowers. And they didn’t charge me anything [to share space]!” She recalls them telling her, “You were good to us when we needed a hand.” They offered her a small spot to sell, squeezed between a few friendly vendors. The man who sold *tacos de cazuela* handed her a plate of tacos, while another gave her some *chicharrón* in salsa.

As the above example shows, tianguistas find creative ways to share space. Yolanda sits before a basket of bright green *chiles de agua* – the only crop she sells – yelling out to passers-by, “*Zapotes! Lleve usted zapotes*⁵⁵!” She has pulled up a bucket and settled at one edge of Mago’s stall. A long-time vendor selling regional fruits, Mago has given her permission to share her space in exchange for helping her sell. So instead of primarily advertising her own products, Yolanda advertises Mago’s. Meanwhile, Yolanda’s father walks through the market selling his braided garlic. He is nearly ninety and hard of hearing; he also speaks mainly Zapotec, making it difficult for him when Spanish-speaking vendors try to make small talk. They are from the main garlic-producing town of the Central Valleys, a community where they also produce milpa for their own

⁵⁵ Take/buy zapote fruit.

consumption along with other cash crops in small quantities. Her father pays the lowest of the ambulante fees for walking in the aisles, while Yolanda has negotiated with Mago to avoid paying in exchange for offering a service.

On the other side of the market, Cynthia bags Margarita's corn. "We always help each other," she tells me. Margarita has lent her a corner of her spot with no formal requests. Cynthia helps her bag vegetables out of a sense of reciprocity. Such arrangements are quite commonplace and allow cash-poor ambulantes to avoid the leader's fee by squeezing themselves into an edge of the two square meters of a permitted vendor. They still have to pay the municipal tax, but they avoid leaders' fees. Margarita hands Cynthia and two other vendors some ears of corn to eat while they sell. The four of them, all sitting on turned-over buckets or a sack on the ground, exchange stories, laughing.

The small gestures described in this section show how vendors can practice reciprocity and sharing to subtly subvert the limitations of commodified space, in addition to taking direct action to change leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that tianguis survive by using a range of organizing tactics to claim and reshape urban space. These include creative, surreptitious, counter-hegemonic tactics that resist a particular ideal of modernist planning and re-claim public space for the livelihood uses of subaltern classes. Such 'insurgent urbanism' transforms social relations

such to re-make the city for the ‘invisible periphery’ (Sandler 2020). However, this chapter also tempers the celebratory tones sometimes found in literature on such alternative urbanism by analyzing how space claimed originally through political struggle and negotiation is subsequently commodified.

While scholars recognize the capacity of vendors to employ an array of tactics to defend their aim to make a living in public space (Cross & Karides 2007; Leon Salazar 2010; Jiménez 2012; Simone 2013; Crossa 2016), they often consider these efforts as undertaken in opposition to the state and capital (Cross & Morales 2007; Crossa 2012; Mendiola García 2017). This chapter has shown how vendor organizing can actually further the work of capital, partially enclosing and privatizing space for the profits of rent-seeking leaders and state officials. It coincides with scholarship on urban informality that proposes the state as a *producer* of informality, given its authority to delegitimize the activities of the popular classes, even as it participates in and structures these same activities (Roy & AlSayaad 2003; Roy 2009; Ghertner 2011; AlSayaad & Eom 2019). It further underscores the needs to take seriously forms of exploitation within urban informal sectors, including the collusion of state officials with leaders whose profits depend on vendors’ precarious access to public space. I have compared these leaders, who mediate between vendors and the state, to the caciques of colonial and modern Mexico.

While these leaders and their organizations are rarely democratic, and vendors themselves are often critical of self-interested leaders, tianguistas are also grateful to

them for defending their livelihoods. They recognize that the survival of tianguis as an urban fixture in Mexico owes much to their work. One vendor acknowledged, “While the leader is there, they won’t be able to get rid of us. He has to fight for us. If inspectors arrive and ask us to leave, they won’t be able to because they’ll have to talk to the leader.” An examination of tianguista organizing, then, has offered a case where insurgent urbanism, as employed by vendors, can effectively redistribute urban space in radical ways *without* (as it is alleged to do) wholly disrupting the “business as usual of contemporary capitalist cities” (Sandler 2020, p. 86; Hou 2010, 2020).

Conclusion

Figure 6.1 Children play at the market exhibition, Museo Infantil de Oaxaca (Photo by Oaxaca MIO)

At the children's museum in Oaxaca City's old train station, children frenetically throw on embroidered aprons and tend the stalls of papier-mâché fruits and vegetables, passing baskets for their young clients to fill, weighing the produce on an old metal scale, announcing prices (Figure 6.1). "This parcel of flavors is entirely dedicated to the markets of Mexico and their culture," one of the exhibit's signs reads. The exhibit teaches children about the renowned Zapotec artist Rufino Tamayo, whose works of art were inspired by market life, especially the time he spent as a child selling fruits and vegetables at an aunt's market stall. The exhibit's wall text tells us that "Market life is part of our city's culture. They are a hugely important (*importantísima*) part of Mexican

heritage.” The exhibit celebrates the markets as the “most alive and diverse” places in the country, where each region displays its own special cultural traditions, where the ingredients of all the traditional dishes can be found. “What are our city’s most important markets?” one sign asks. “What flavors can you find in a Oaxacan market?” “What can you feel, smell, see, taste, or hear?”

That market life is put forth as a teaching moment about the region’s heritage by a museum sponsored by the city’s wealthiest family stands at odds with decades of marginalization of the tianguis by elites and the state, but it also resonates with a popular movement to reaffirm market culture as central to urban culture. The tension between elite visions of urban progress and popular demands for livelihoods is at the heart of the previous chapters.

By reviewing native language texts, colonial narratives, popular art, and mid-20th century newspapers, I have shown that while tianguis were once the vital and undisputed source of urban food provisioning in Mexico, the state and local elites began to depict them as antithetical to a modern city in the 1970s. I have argued that during this period, the tianguis was actively “informalized” and removed from Oaxaca’s city center as part of a racialized project built on earlier precedents to exclude Indigenous people from the colonial city. Increasing car ownership in the city’s wealthy circles allowed for the revival of these colonial-era spatial hierarchies; urban elites could support market relocation to the periphery without forgoing access to its supplies. In what transpired, streets with hundreds of years of use as temporary markets were reclaimed by the

automobile as the worthier use of public space. And the tianguis, not the automobile, were promptly blamed for the city's traffic problems. Accordingly, tianguis were portrayed as counter to modernity and progress. Moreover, newspapers depicted tianguis as anti-hygienic and a barrier to increasing tourism – positioning the tianguis in direct opposition to the economic progress of the city. All of these markers of modernity (cars, cleanliness, capital accumulation) were contrasted with the primarily Indigenous people of the countryside who came into the city each week, often on foot or by donkey, to sell their wares.

I have aimed to show that, in contrast to agri-food studies scholars who depict global South supermarketization as limited to the neoliberal period, the roots of the phenomenon may be much deeper. By drawing inspiration from postcolonial urbanism to examine patterns of race-based spatial exclusion dating back to the establishment of the colony, I have described how this process to explicitly delegitimize or informalize the tianguis laid the groundwork for the so-called 'supermarket revolution' (Reardon et al. 2003) that would come several decades later. Thus, the informalization of the tianguis predates supermarketization, but is part of the same process of elite-led urban modernization.

With the deck seemingly stacked against it, I have asked how the tianguis have managed to remain so central to urban culture. Indeed, not only did the original Saturday tianguis survive even after its banishment from the city center, the regional model of weekly markets was reproduced across the quickly growing metropolitan area. Today tianguis continue to reconfigure the streets, temporarily challenging their prescribed role in

facilitating vehicular circulation in the modern, capitalist city. As an “ephemeral, mobile space that lights up and is extinguished in a day,” in the words of one customer, tianguis temporarily, but regularly, claim streets to provide food and other goods in ways that serve the interests of subaltern groups. Drawing on ethnographic research in Oaxaca City’s tianguis, I have demonstrated three main sources of their endurance: their vital role in reproducing urban food cultures; the tianguistas’ self-exploitative family labor strategies that underpin their competitive prices; and, the ongoing organizing of tianguistas to secure and conserve access to public space. Here, I revisit each of these briefly.

First, tianguis survive because they reproduce local culture rooted in attachment to Indigenous and popular foodways and local interpretations of public space. While scholarship in postcolonial urbanism or urban informality that focuses on street vending occasionally acknowledges the relevance of low-cost, conveniently located foods to the urban poor (Bhowmik 2005; Chen & Skinner 2014), it tends to dig no deeper. Yet because of the way food practices are enlisted as markers of distinction between groups, contemporary battles over urban foodways offer specific insights into dynamics of race, ethnicity, class and gender as they manifest in public space. Drawing on insights of literature on Indigenous foodways and food sovereignty, this study takes seriously the idea of the tianguis as an urban, Indigenous foodway.

I argue that tianguis remain popular today, in part, because they are strongly associated with the values of food sovereignty: the right to access healthy, culturally appropriate

foods produced in ecologically sound ways that center local producers, distributors and consumers of foods rather than corporations or global markets⁵⁶. For marketgoers, tianguis affirm cultural and agro-biological diversity and provide culturally relevant food in ways that serve the needs of subaltern groups. They enable the livelihoods of many small-scale farmers – facilitating their continued control over Indigenous, ejidal, and communal lands – and they claim urban space for a broad sector of Indigenous and popular classes to use in ways that run counter to modernist, car-centric prescriptions. Tianguis provide a living for many working-class people while simultaneously functioning as social spaces of dialogue and care.

As an enactment of food sovereignty, the tianguis achieves its legitimacy not from any formal ‘sovereign’ or state power, but from the decentralized, continually renewed daily practices of many families. Given that the concept of sovereignty put forth by the nation-state – dependent on fixed, bounded notions of territory – has often been used as a spatial strategy to exclude Indigenous people, this case contributes to an understanding of multiple bases of Indigenous food sovereignties, where self-determination is not exclusively defined by state-granted entitlements (Trauger 2014; Gupta 2015; Grey and Patel 2015; Daigle 2019).

Because the historical dispossession of Indigenous foodways has long been an elite form of attacking Indigenous communities and knowledges (Pilcher 1998; Earle 2012), food

⁵⁶ Definition from the Nyéléni Declaration (2007)

sovereignty, in the context of Indigenous foodways, also provides a framework for thinking about decolonization (Grey and Patel 2015). In the case of the tianguis, marginalization by the state has resulted in a shift in the political significance of tianguis-going, captured in counterhegemonic appropriations of the tianguis as an ideal. For activists, the regeneration of Indigenous food practices embedded in the tianguis actually shapes notions of self-determination and decolonization. Tianguis present a space to reaffirm an Indigenous identity based in lived experiences of contemporary Indigenous people, rather than a strict reading of the past (Simpson 2013), where tianguis as Indigenous foodway is at once rooted in notions of tradition and innovation, a place where customs are reproduced and a place of “people’s science,” where new foods and knowledge are invented and disseminated. Contextualizing tianguis in this way lets us see that Indigenous food sovereignty is about much more than food – it is also enlisted to affirm heritages, counter discrimination, and re-claim urban space as Indigenous space.

As an existing aspirational practice of food sovereignty, my study has also revealed a number of challenges for achieving the values of the movement. These point to a need for greater reflection on the widespread assumption of links between ethnicity, scale and particular types of farming practices. They also clarify the need to interrogate the subsidies on which ‘cheap food’ is based, and suggest more serious theorization of the oft-excluded category of food system ‘intermediaries’.

To this end, I have documented the ways in which vendors pool family labor to make possible the maintenance and resurgence of the Indigenous foodways embodied in the

tianguis. I have drawn on Chayanov's theory of peasant economy to show how vendors resort to family-based self-exploitation to survive amidst corporate retail expansion on one hand, and an ever-expanding sector of less formal vendors on the other. To stay afloat, families can enlist more unpaid members in tianguis labor and work longer hours; they can reduce their consumption to survive on low incomes. Unlike corporate retailers, they have no profit mandate. Instead, income from pooled family labor is generally limited to reproducing their own families' basic needs and restocking market stalls. Moreover, the tianguis as a livelihood strategy to minimally cover basic needs actually depends on a variety of subsidies—resources not paid for, or paid back, by tianguis labor. This account suggests that the Chayanovian analysis of peasant household economies, which has been used widely by critical agri-food studies scholars to study agrarian economic diversity, can also be useful for considering the uneven development of capitalism in sectors of the food system beyond agriculture and in the informal economy more broadly.

Integral to the analysis of the family unit is the idea of meeting different kinds of needs – both income-earning activities and non-income earning activities. Drawing on work in feminist economic geography and social reproduction (Benería & Roldán 2001; de la Rocha 2001; Mitchell et al. 2004; Lind 2005; Millar 2014; Buechler 2014; Meehan and Strauss 2015), I have argued that self-exploitation at the household level is greatest for mothers, who extend themselves most in both productive and socially reproductive labors and put their own material needs last. My analysis has aimed to demonstrate how ethnographic study that is attentive to social reproduction can help account for the differential impacts of household self-exploitation.

While the uneven development of capitalism is often thought of structurally, there are other, less wholly economic motives that also play a role. In-depth immersion in the daily routines of vendors illuminates culturally-embedded ideals that bolster an account of tianguista persistence. The dreams of tianguistas to “*sacarse adelante por sus propios medios*” – a phrase capturing a deep-rooted desire to ‘get ahead’ by dictating the use of one’s own labor – shapes the identities of tianguistas. Contextualized within the political economy as it manifests in the everyday lives of people struggling to get by, that aspiration also reflects a shared sense of precarity. People understand that most wage labor (informal or formal) is poorly paid and vulnerable to the economic crises that regularly sweep the country. They know that they cannot count on the state to step in with services to ease these hardships. They have experienced a series of currency devaluations and witnessed many scandals of political corruption. Thus, people place a premium on owning one’s own business, even when earnings may be low and labor output high. This broad view helps clarify why tianguis persist when household microeconomic analysis might predict otherwise.

However, a focus on self-exploitation can obscure the fact that the tianguis is a hotly pursued livelihood strategy, especially by women. Tianguistas consistently report that their work compares favorably to alternative employment that might be available to them. To understand how this is so, I have turned to tianguistas’ strategies to secure access to the public space that makes their livelihoods viable.

While elites treat public space as if they alone possess the right to determine how it should be used, tianguistas fiercely challenge their prescriptions. Instead, tianguistas redistribute urban space to serve the livelihood needs of many marginalized groups, using tactics that range from negotiation to direct action. While these actions constitute a form of insurgent urbanism (Hou 2010) on one hand, I have shown that the internal structure of the organizing harks back to caciquismo, where most decision-making power is held by an individual leader who negotiates on behalf of his or her constituents vis-à-vis the state, seeking personal gains from both parties. After these leaders claim a swath of public space for and with vendors, they oversee a process of commodification, where plots of streets and plazas are rented and sold. In and around the Central de Abasto, where tianguis are held most days of the week, one newspaper article reports that “there’s not room for a single additional stall: every space has been sold – the aisles, planters, sidewalks, bathrooms, streets, esplanades, etc. (Ortiz & García 2015).” Moreover, as urban space becomes increasingly valuable, leaders of unions vie for territory not only with the government but also with each other, imbuing market and city life with regular incidents of violence. Through an analysis of the contradictions embedded in tianguis organizing, I have underlined the importance of critically analyzing how variations of bottom-up, grassroots, DIY, tactical, guerrilla, informal, and insurgent urbanisms (Hou 2010; Lydon and Garcia 2015; Shall 2019; Finn & Douglas 2019; Di Bella 2020) can, in some ways, frustrate their mission to act as counter-hegemonic spatial practice. Even though scores of women, Indigenous, campesino, mestizo, poor and working-class people (in all combinations) owe their livelihoods to the redistribution of public space that

results from vendor organizing, market leaders, and the state officials with whom they negotiate, appear to be the major beneficiaries of public space-turned-commodity.

Except as represented in newspapers and by tianguistas and municipal inspectors, the voices of government officials are largely absent in this dissertation. Integrating their perspectives is central to future research. The original question that gave rise to this dissertation emerged as Walmart swept through Mexico – entering in the 1990s with the liberalization of foreign direct investment and rising to become the country’s top private sector employers in a little over a decade. But this backdrop of supermarket competition is only part of the picture. Tianguistas must also vie with an ever-expanding informal sector. And while new supermarket openings are celebrated as a feather in the hat of governing officials, the vast informal retail economy that is reportedly the headache of each incoming administration is just as much the result of state policy. The state development model has, in fact, never managed to create sufficient formal sector employment to accommodate the exodus of migrants from the countryside. In this sense, it is the failure of this model that leads people to accept, even seek, precarious livelihoods in street vending. But politicians also permit many of these vendors (officially or extra-officially), perhaps in tacit recognition of the failures of their own economic development model or because they, too, profit when they cut deals with leaders. This apparent complicity is the subject of future investigation.

Rather than eschew the tianguis publicly, while privately contributing to their expansion, politicians would do well to take stock of what tianguis offer their constituents: how

important they are culturally, how much people care about them, and how much – and how many – people depend on them for their livelihoods. At the same time, engaging the contradictions embedded in contemporary tianguis, state officials – along with activists, eaters, farmers, and tianguistas – might begin to imagine how this centuries-old urban institution could thrive, rather than merely survive, in the modern city.

As similar struggles unfold on urban landscapes across the global South, this study reminds us to recognize the ways in which urban food systems are entangled in dynamics that are about much more than food. Wrapped up in them are moments of dispossession and resistance, notions of sovereignty and self-determination, connections to place and identity, and ongoing encounters that determine who has the right to imagine, shape, and belong in in urban spaces.

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Appendix A. Summary of Methods, Data Analysis and Observation, Interview, and Focus Group Guides

Method	Place, Source, or Number of participants
Neighborhood tianguis observation - primary	Calicanto in Santa Lucía del Camino Oaxaca
Neighborhood tianguis observation - comparative	El Llano/Polideportivo; Cinco Iglesia de los Pobres (Reforma); El Llano (later moved to el Polideportivo/Calle de Derechos Humanos); Volcanes; Primera Etapa; Infonavit; Atzompa; and several held on different days of the week at the city's Central de Abasto.
Alternative tianguis observation	Tianguis Popular Mujer Nueva; El Pochote Mercado Orgánico; La Cosecha Mercado Orgánico; Tianguis Truequero; Tianguis de Productorxs Autogestivxs
Semi-structured interviews – activists	7 interviews
Semi-structured interviews – vendors	52 total focused interviews with 39 people; hundreds of short conversations/mini-interviews
Semi-structured interviews – municipal inspectors	2 interviews
Home/farm/workshop/wholesale markets with tianguistas	6 interviews
Photovoice Project and focus group with marketgoers in Calicanto	10 participants
Focus group – marketgoers	5 participants
Newspaper review, historical	Carteles del Sur, El Imparcial (January 1977-March 1979). Archives of Hemeroteca Pública de Oaxaca Nestor Sánchez Hernández.
Newspaper review, contemporary	Noticias, El Imparcial, Quadratin, El Tucán, El Universal (2010-2019) Digital searches using terms: tianguis, ambulantes, comercio informal, comercio callejero, mercados indígenas, supermercados, Walmart, Chedraui, Soriana
State archive review, Tianguis y Mercados section	1900-1950 (end date of state archive) Archivo Estatal de Oaxaca
Review of maps, plans, images	Casa de la Ciudad archive

Figure A1. Summary of Methods

Explanation of research design. This research design relied on a variety of qualitative methods given that the research question has multiple dimensions and in order to ensure the validity of the findings (Crang & Cook 2007). Multiple methods were used to gather data both in order to address various dimensions of the project and layere to permit triangulation (Singleton & Straits 2010) and the reliance on in-depth interviews, ongoing observation in a variety of settings and archival work allowed for “thick description”

(Geertz 1994), providing a deep contextual understanding to make interpretation possible.

The interview numbers selected for each group reflect my estimate of how many interviews were necessary to reach saturation – when new data no longer shed new light on the research topic (Glaser and Strauss 2017). I recruited interviewees through snowball and purposive sampling (Patton 2015). Activists, some of whom were also friends and colleagues, helped me identify fellow activists to interview; I recruited vendors by talking to them about the project while they worked in the tianguis and asking them to identify fellow long-term vendors.

Most interviews lasted around one hour, but ranged between 40 minutes and 3.5 hours. I conducted multiple interviews with a dozen vendors, and shorter follow-ups with many others to clarify questions arising after transcriptions or to ask them to expand upon a particular issue or comment on a current event. Original interview questions were quite open-ended. Below, I include the interview guides for each interview category, along with a tianguis observation guide and the Photovoice focus group outline. I elicited answers to almost all of the questions in the interview guides, but also asked many follow-up questions relevant to the experience of a given interviewee.

In the Photovoice project, also called ‘auto-visual elicitation’ or autophotography (Crang & Cook 2007; Pauwels 2015), I asked marketgoers to take pictures that would answer the questions: “Why do you shop here?”; “What do you like about the market?”; and, “What do you not like about the market?” Immediately after pictures were taken, I downloaded

them onto a computer and showed them as a slideshow to all participants at once in an audio-recorded focus group (Morgan 1997), eliciting both comments that describe the photos' content and interpretive responses that reflect on what is left out (Pauwels 2015). I accessed these customers through vendors who I had established relationships with and compensated them for their time. This method helped capture an insider's perspective of market-going beyond what I could observe myself. The questions were intentionally quite open-ended, and serve to fuel the subsequent focus group discussion. I held an additional focus group (Morgan 1997) with five shoppers at different tianguis through the city, also identified through snowball sampling.

Summary of data analysis. With the help of a research assistant, I transcribed field notes and audio recordings. I imported these transcriptions into MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software, along with images of newspaper clippings from the 1970s archives; contemporary newspaper articles saved as image or Word files; my own photographs from tianguis and related observation of urban streetscapes; marketgoers' photographs from a Photovoice project; images and articles from activist social media, blogs, etc.; and images of historical maps, plans and tianguis photography. I used MAXQDA to organize data and code according to emerging themes, using a mostly abductive approach to fine-grain the initially broad categories I had selected beforehand deductively based on my literature review and a preliminary review of contemporary Oaxacan newspapers. Then I came back to these sub-codes to group and analyze them according to emerging themes and theories that I was developing. As an example: I started with the broad coding categories, "Market removal history" and "Vendor

organizing strategies,” to flag relevant historical newspaper articles. Then, emerging from the content of these articles, I added, “elite-led campaign” with the subcodes “hygiene,” “tourism,” “stalling,” and “traffic.” Returning to the literature on postcolonial urbanism allowed me to return to these subcodes to more analytically organize the data, with new categories such as “priorities of modernity”; “vision for the city”; “racial euphemism”. Many of these codes, both the specific themes emerging from the data and the analytical categories I used to understand them became sections of the dissertation; following Crang & Cook’s (2007) approach of “writing through codes” (158).

Observation in tianguis guide

General

Name of tianguis

Location

Use of street/plaza/public space

Days/hours of operation

Surrounding neighborhood characteristics

Approximate number of market stands

Number of market stands that sell food

Number of stalls that sell prepared food

Draw plan of market – number of blocks, stalls, etc.

Proximity of competitors – fixed public markets, supermarkets, Abastos

Market assortment

List of food products sold.

Regional origin of food?

Probable scale of production?

Food native to region

Foods not sold in supermarkets?

Non-food products sold

Prices of food products

Vendor characteristics

Organization of stands, including any hierarchy – access to better stands, larger tables vs. floor space. Relation with race/gender?

Ethnicity, gender, age, origin of vendors

Transportation used by vendors

Labor organization per stall – Families? Paid assistants? Single stalls?

Set-up, clean-up

Customer characteristics and customer-vendor interactions

How do customers and vendors interact?

What do they buy?

What do they do besides shop for food?

Individuals vs. families/groups

Do they linger in the street to chat?

Do they buy prepared food or drink?

How is street/plaza space used?

Any haggling, bartering or loan requests/offers?

Supplier characteristics (when possible to observe)

Supplier relations – delivery of products, negotiation of prices

Origin, gender, ethnicity of suppliers

Internal organization (obtained through observation and informal conversations as well as formal interviews)

How is the committee formed? What positions exist? Are these elected?

Rotational?

Responsibilities of committee members

Decision-making mechanisms. Voting? Majority rules?

Modes of consulting other vendors?

Hierarchies?

Due structure – who pays what and to whom?

Salient issues discussed in meetings

Demands and challenges discussed

Proposals to deal with challenges

Current relationships with government officials. How do they understand changes in their relationship with local government in recent years/decades?

Forms of representing their interests before the municipal and state officials (which officials, from which dependencies?) Do these officials ever visit the market?

How do they perceive their relationship and degree of influence?

What kind of cross-market organizing or coalitions exist

What actions outside the market do members participate in or have they participated in?

Is tianguis access to existing space (streets or plazas) contested? Why? By whom?

Actions/discourse to defend access to this space?

Photo activity focus group questions

Each customer selected will take photos to represent their responses to the questions: *Why do you shop here? What do you like about the market? What do you not like about the market?*

(Immediately following this activity, I downloaded these photos and present to participants in a slideshow eliciting comments that describe and interpret photos content.)

The questions I will ask will depend on the content of the photo, but some general questions include:

(To the group) *What do you think this photographer wants to represent with this photo? What else do you see? What is left out?*

(To the person who took the photo): *Are these perspectives similar to what you had in mind? Can you describe what you meant to capture in this photo? What would you like to have photographed that you didn't?*

I drew out general themes from the discussion to seek confirmation, contradiction, convergence, and divergence and develop a sense of participants' background.

Additional questions include:

¿Qué tipos de alimentos se encuentran en el tianguis que no encuentran en otros lados?

-What types of food are found in the tianguis that aren't found elsewhere?

¿Estos alimentos tienen algún significado o valor cultural especial?

-Do these foods have any special cultural significance or value?

¿Qué saben de estos alimentos? ¿Saben de dónde vienen o algo sobre sus formas de producción?

-What do you know about these foods? Do you know about where they come from or how they are produced?

¿De niña/joven, su familia compraba en este tianguis? ¿O dónde compraba su dispensa?

-Did your family shop in this tianguis when you were young? Or where did they buy their food?

¿Qué ha cambiado con los tianguis desde cuando era joven? (Su tipo de mercancía, ubicación, tamaño, # de clientes, etc.).

-What has changed about tianguis since you were young? (For example, products sold, location, size, popularity, etc.)

¿Por qué eligen comprar en tianguis? ¿Dónde más compran alimentos y por qué?

-Why do you choose to shop at a tianguis? Where else do you shop for food? Why?

¿Qué porcentaje de tu dispensa semanal aproxima que compra en el tianguis?

¿Dónde compra otra parte de su dispensa? What percentage of your weekly food

purchases do you buy in a tianguis? Where do you buy the other part of your food?

¿Conocen a los vendedores? ¿Normalmente compran con los mismos? ¿Por qué?

-Do you know the vendors? Do you usually frequent the same vendors? Why?

¿Hay vendedores que aceptan trueque o que fían?

-Are there vendors that trade (for other goods) or that sell on credit?

¿Qué más hace cuando viene? ¿Para a comer? ¿Platica con vecinos?

-What else do you do when you come? Do you have something to drink or eat?

Chat with neighbors?

¿Qué distingue un tianguis de un mercado público? De un súper?

-What distinguishes a tianguis from a public market? From a supermarket?

¿Cree que los tianguis forman parte de la tradición indígena? ¿Oaxaqueña?

¿Mexicana? ¿Por qué? ¿O por qué no?

-Do you think tianguis are part of an Indigenous tradition? Oaxacan tradition?

Mexican tradition? Why or why not?

¿Qué políticas públicas cree que dañan a los tianguis? ¿Cuáles los benefician?

-What public policies do you think harm tianguis? What policies benefit them?

¿Qué cree que los tianguis tienen que ver con el desarrollo económico de la ciudad? ¿Los supermercados? ¿Por qué?

-What role do you think tianguis play in the city's economic development? What about supermarkets? Why?

Interviews with tianguis activists

¿Cómo definirías un tianguis? ¿En qué consiste?

-How would you define a tianguis? What does a tianguis consist of?

¿Cuál es la historia del tianguis en México?

-What is the history of the tianguis in Mexico?

¿En qué sentido crees que el tianguis es algo particular a México, comparado con otros países?

-In what sense do you think the tianguis is unique to Mexico?

¿Cómo comparas un tianguis con un supermercado? ¿Con un mercado público?

-How do you compare a tianguis with a supermarket? With a public market?

¿A qué sirven los tianguis actuales? ¿A quiénes benefician?

-What is the use of today's tianguis? Who benefits from them?

¿Qué tipos de tianguis existen en México?

-What types of tianguis exist in Mexico?

¿Qué tipo de tianguis estás tratando de promover? ¿Cómo fue que te involucraste en eso? ¿Por qué?

-What type of tianguis are you trying to promote? How did you get involved? Why?

¿Qué retos enfrentan los tianguis hoy en día?

-What challenges do tianguis face today?

¿Cómo describirías la visión del estado y del municipio en términos de provisión de alimentos?

-How would you describe the visions of the state and municipality in terms of food provision?

¿Cómo describiría su visión para el desarrollo económico?

-How would you describe their visión for economic development?

¿Cuáles políticas promueven para hacer esa visión una realidad?

-Which policies do they promote to make that vision a reality?

¿A quiénes ves beneficiado por estas políticas?

-Who do you see benefitted by those policies?

¿Qué políticas públicas ayudarían a los tianguis? ¿Cuáles los perjudican?

-What public policies would help tianguis? Which ones harm them?

¿Por qué crees que los consumidores elegirían visitar un tianguis en vez de ir al súper? ¿O al revés?

Why do you think that consumers would choose to shop at a tianguis instead of a supermarket? Or why might they prefer a supermarket over a tianguis?

¿Cómo describirías las diferencias entre los alimentos disponibles en un tianguis y un súper?

-How would you describe the differences in food available at tianguis vs. the supermarket?

¿Cómo compararías los precios?

-How would you compare prices?

¿Hay alimentos a la venta en los tianguis tienen algún significado cultural especial?

-Do you think there is food for sale at the tianguis with any special cultural significance?

¿Por qué cree que es importante que sobreviva el sistema de tianguis en Oaxaca?

¿En México?

-Why do you think it's important the survival of the tianguis is important in Oaxaca? In Mexico?

Question guide for interviews with vendors

Historial personal/laboral

(Note name, gender, age)

¿De dónde viene usted?

-Where are you from?

¿Dónde vive ahora?

-Where do you live now?

¿Qué tiempo tiene trabajando en tianguis?

-How long have you been working in the tianguis?

¿Cómo empezó a trabajar en tianguis?

-How did you start working in the tianguis?

¿Ha tenido otro tipo de trabajo?

-Have you had other kinds of work?

¿Es su propio puesto o trabaja para alguien?

-Are you self-employed or do you work for someone else?

¿En cuántos tianguis trabajan? ¿Cuáles?

-How many tianguis do you work in? Which ones?

¿Cuántos días trabaja en tianguis?

-How many days do you work in the tianguis?

¿Tiene otro empleo además?

-Do you have another job besides your tianguis work?

¿Quiénes trabaja con usted? (¿Familiares?)

-Who works with you? Family members?

¿Alguien más le ayuda?

-Who else helps you?

¿Tiene familiares que trabajan en otros tianguis o que antes trabajaban en tianguis?

-Do you have family members that work in other tianguis or that used to work in tianguis?

¿A qué se dedican otros familiares suyos?

-What do other family members do for a living?

¿Si no hubiera tianguis, qué trabajo cree que encontraría?

-If there were no tianguis, what kind of work do you think you would find?

¿Le gusta el trabajo de tianguis? ¿Qué es lo que más le gusta? ¿Lo que menos le gusta?

-Do you like work in the tianguis? What do you like the most? The least?

Cadena de abastecimiento/ Supply chain

¿Qué productos vende?

-What products do you sell?

¿De dónde los surte? (Abastos, familiares, producción propia, etc.)

-Where do you get them? (Abastos, family members, own production, etc.)

¿Algún producto es de producción suya o familiar?

-Do you or any of your family members produce any of the products you sell?
 ¿Cómo trae su mercancía al tianguis? (¿Tiene auto o toma camión o taxi?)
 -How do you transport your merchandise to the tianguis? (Do you have a car, take the bus or a taxi)
 ¿Cambia su surtido en el transcurso del año? ¿Por ejemplo, con días festivos o temporada de calor/lluvia, etc.?
 -Do your products vary over the course of the year? For example, during holidays or the hot or rainy season?
 (Si su surtido viene del Mercado de Abastos) ¿Siempre compra de la misma persona? ¿De qué pueblo, región o país proviene su producto?
 -Do you always buy from the same supplier? Where are his/her products from?
 ¿Usted va a buscar proveedores o a veces le vienen a buscar?
 -Do you seek out suppliers or do they seek you out?
 ¿Cómo conoció a su(s) proveedor(es)?
 -How did you meet your suppliers?
 ¿Cómo llegan a un acuerdo del precio?
 -How do you negotiate prices?

Sobre la historia y administración del tianguis

¿Cuántos años tiene este tianguis?
 -How long has this tianguis existed?
 ¿Siempre ha estado en este lugar o se ha tenido que mover en algún momento?
 -Has it always been here or has it been moved at some point?
 ¿Cómo fue el proceso de conseguir permiso para poner su puesto?
 -What was the process of getting a permit for your stand like?
 ¿Tiene que pagar alguna cuota semanal?
 -Do you have to pay a weekly fee?
 ¿En todos los tianguis se paga igual (el permiso y la cuota) o depende del tianguis? ¿En cuál tianguis se vende mejor?
 -Does the permit and weekly fee the same in all the tianguis? In which tianguis are sales the best?
 ¿Cómo se administra?
 -How is the tianguis administrated?
 ¿Cuáles son las responsabilidades y actividades del comité directivo o líder?
 -What are the responsibilities and activities of the directive committee or leader?
 ¿Participa o ha participado en el comité directivo?
 -Do you participate or have you participated in the directive committee?
 ¿Qué más se podría hacer para apoyar o mejorar las condiciones del tianguis?
 -What else could the directive committee do to support vendors or improve tianguis conditions?
 ¿Además de vender, cuáles son sus otras responsabilidades, como, por ejemplo, participar en reuniones u otras actividades? ¿Qué tipo de actividades, cooperaciones? ¿Quién las decide?
 -Besides selling, what are other responsibilities do you have, such as, for example, participating in meetings or other activities? What kind of activities, donations?

Who determines these?

¿El líder tiene buena relación con el municipio?

-Does the leader have a good relationship with the municipality?

¿Con quienes en el municipio trabajan?

-Who does s/he work with in the municipality?

¿En época de elección, vienen candidatos a hacer campaña?

-During election time, do politicians campaign in the market?

¿Forman parte de un sindicato o asociación? ¿Cómo se llama? ¿Qué hace el sindicato?

-Do you form part of a union or vendors' association? What is it called? What does it do?

¿En cuales actividades del sindicato ha participado? (Marchas, reuniones con funcionarios públicos, etc.)

-What union activities have you participated in?

¿Cuáles son las políticas públicas que más les afectan?

-What are the public policies that affect market vendors the most?

¿Cuáles son los principales retos que enfrenta usted como vendedor?

-What are the main challenges that you face as a vendor?

¿Cuáles son los principales retos que enfrenta el tianguis?

-What are the main challenges that the tianguis faces?

¿Qué podría hacer el municipio para beneficiarles?

-What could the municipality do to benefit them?

¿Cuáles son los mejores aspectos de este tianguis?

-What are the best aspects of this tianguis?

¿Este tianguis tiene relación a otros tianguis a través del comité?

-Does this tianguis have a relationship with other tianguis through the directive committee?

¿Cómo se decide dónde queda cada puesto? ¿Por qué algunas personas tienen mesas grandes y otras venden desde un petate en el piso?

-How are decisions made about who gets which selling space? Why do some people have larger tables and others a small space on the ground?

Relaciones entre vendedores y vecinos

¿Cómo describiría la dinámica interna del tianguis? ¿Se llevan bien los vendedores?

-How would you describe the internal dynamic of the tianguis? Do vendors get along?

¿Cómo describiría la dinámica entre el tianguis y los vecinos? ¿Hay quejas de los vecinos? (sobre..?)

-How would you describe the dynamic between tianguis and neighbors? Do neighbors complain? (About?)

¿Cómo se resuelven disputas entre vendedores? ¿Entre vendedores y vecinos? How are disputes resolved among vendors? Between vendors and neighbors?

Clientes

- ¿Conoce a sus clientes? ¿Suelen llegar los mismos cada semana o varía?
Do you know your customers? Do the same customers tend to come each week or does it vary?
- ¿De dónde vienen la mayoría de sus clientes?
-Where are the majority of your customers from?
- ¿Qué transporte usa la mayoría de sus clientes para llegar al tianguis?
-How do most get to the market?
- ¿Por qué cree que sus clientes vienen al tianguis?
-Why do you think that your customers come to the tianguis?
- ¿Qué hacen además de comprar alimentos?
-What do they do besides buy food?
- ¿Qué pueden comprar aquí que no pueden comprar en otro lugar?
-What can they buy here that they can't buy elsewhere?
- ¿En qué época del año se vende mejor?
-What season of the year do you sell the best?

Competencia

- ¿Dónde más cree que sus clientes compran alimentos además del tianguis?
-Where else do you think your customers shop besides the tianguis?
- ¿Desde dónde viene su competencia más fuerte?
-What do you think is your main source of competition?
- ¿En los tianguis dónde mejor venden, cuáles son sus ventajas?
-In the tianguis where sales are the best, what do you think their advantages are?
- ¿Cree que los precios son mejores en los tianguis o en los mercados?
-Do you think prices in tianguis are better than at the markets?
- ¿Cree que los precios son mejores en los tianguis o en los abarrotes?
¿Supermercados?
-Do you think prices are better in tianguis than in mom and pops? Supermarkets?
- ¿Ha notado más competencia desde que hayan establecido muchos supermercados en Oaxaca o sigue igual?
-Have you noticed more competition since the establishment of supermarkets in Oaxaca?
- ¿Qué años han tenido ventas más bajas? ¿Altas?
-What years have you had low sales? High sales?

Interview guide for municipal inspectors/government officials

This interview guide varies depending on the official and scope of influence; because I ultimately interviewed only one mayor candidate and two municipal inspectors, this guide will also serve future research intended to deepen the representation of state and municipal agenda(s). General questions include:

- ¿Para el desarrollo urbano, cuales son los factores más importantes que hay que considerar?
- With respect to urban development, what do you think are the most important factors?
- ¿Para usted, cuáles son sus prioridades para el desarrollo económico estatal/municipal?
- In your opinión, what are the state/municipal priorities for economic development?
- ¿Cuándo el estado/municipio toma decisiones respecto a la posibilidad de dar permiso a un nuevo supermercado en Oaxaca, cuales son los factores más importantes que informan esta decisión?
- When the state/municipality makes decisions about the possibility of permitting a new supermarket, what factors inform that decision?
- En años recientes, parece que hay cada vez más supermercados. Parece que el supermercado ya forma parte de la estrategia estatal y municipal del desarrollo. ¿En qué sentido cree que un supermercado beneficia a los ciudadanos?
- In what sense do you think supermarkets benefit citizens?
- ¿En qué sentido beneficia al gobierno? ¿Cuál es el procedimiento para establecer un supermercado nuevo? ¿Es necesario modificar la zonificación?
- In what sense do you think they benefit the government? What are the procedures to create a new supermarket? Do zoning regulations need to be modified?
- ¿Cree usted que los mercados públicos también forman parte de la visión municipal/estatal de desarrollo económico? ¿En qué sentido? ¿Y los tianguis?
- Do you think that public markets also form part of the state/municipal visión for economic development? In what sense? What about tianguis?
- En términos de salud, ¿dónde cree que puede encontrar alimentos más sanos? ¿En abarrotes, tianguis, mercados o supermercados? Y ¿en cuál encontraría alimentos menos sanos?
- In terms of health, where do you think you can find the healthiest foods? In mom and pops, tianguis, markets or supermarkets? Where do you think the least healthy foods are found?
- ¿En cuál de estos se encontraría más productos regionales? ¿Más baratos?
- In which of these do you think you would find more local and regional products? Where would you find the cheapest products?
- ¿Cuál es el procedimiento para registrar un tianguis nuevo?
- What are the procedures to found/register a new tianguis?
- ¿Qué tipo de ingresos recibe el municipio de un tianguis?
- What kind of income does the municipality receive from a tianguis?
- ¿Qué tipo de responsabilidades municipales implica un tianguis?
- What kind of municipal responsibilities come with a tianguis?

¿Para usted, en qué sentido los tianguis sirven los intereses de los ciudadanos? ¿Y los mercados públicos?

In your opinión, how do tianguis serve the interests of citizens? And public markets?

¿Cuáles ingresos recibe el municipio de un mercado público? ¿De Mercado de Abastos?

-What income does a municipality receive from a public market? From Abastos?

¿Cuáles ingresos recibe de un supermercado?

-What income does it receive from a supermarket?

Parece que hay cada vez más vendedores ambulantes en Oaxaca. ¿Cómo explica usted este fenómeno?

It seems like there are more and more street vendors in Oaxaca. How do you explain this phenomenon?

¿Cuáles son las organizaciones sociales que representan estos vendedores?

What social organizations represent street/ambulant vendors?

¿Con qué dependencia del gobierno negocian para conseguir permisos? ¿Son permisos o simplemente acuerdos de no desalojarlos?

What government entity do they negotiate with to receive permits? Do they receive permits or just tacit agreements not to remove them?

¿Cuál tipo de comercio (súper, mercado, tianguis, ambulante) atrae más al turista? ¿Qué tipo no lo atrae o lo perjudica?

What kind of commercial food retailers attract tourists? What kind don't attract them or harm tourism?

Dado que Oaxaca tiene un sistema de mercados públicos y tianguis bastante completo, ¿por qué cree que el gobierno favorece a los supermercados? Cuando hablan de los nuevos trabajos generados, ¿cree usted que se están considerando los trabajos perdidos en los otros tipos de mercados por la competencia? ¿Hay estudios sobre los probables impactos en el sistema original de mercados y tianguis?

Given that Oaxaca has a system of public markets and tianguis that is quite complete, why do you think the government favors supermarkets? When they talk about new jobs created, do you think they are factoring in lost jobs in other types of markets due to competition? Are there studies about the probable impact on the original system of markets and tianguis?

¿Desde la perspectiva de la cultura oaxaqueña, qué tipo de comercio es más importante?

From the perspective of Oaxacan culture, what type of commerce is the most important?

¿Qué tipo de comercio proporciona más trabajo? ¿Mejor trabajo?

-What type of commerce offers more jobs? Better jobs?