Community, cargo system, and social project.
An analytical proposal of local societies in Mexico.

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SUMMARY:

This paper is a proposal for the anthropological analysis of the cargo system, including both indigenous and non indigenous communities. From the understanding of the cargo system as an essentially heterogeneous institution, the paper suggest as main hypothesis that this institution is the origin of other mechanisms in the interaction of the members of the communities. First, the community institutions promote the participation of the largest number of people. Second, interactions' scenes are constantly created and recreated by the community members. Third, the roles' rotation, as a product of a tacit agreement into community members, is fundamental to assure social participation. The proposal is structured in three parts. First, the composition of the cargo system as a *continuum* which explains the differences between individual and collective behaviour. Second, the idea of *community* as a fundamental concept to understand the cargo system. As a conclusion, the idea of *communitarian project* becomes the common characteristic of all the communities –native or no native- in the Mesoamerican area.

KEY WORDS:

Community, Cargo system, Social project, Mexico.

1. Introduction

This text regards a study of the kinds of community organization present in the village of Jesús Tepactepec, a municipality in Tlaxcala and contains the reflections that the author has had throughout three fieldwork stays in 2008, 2009, and 2010[1]. During this interval of research, we study the diverse processes that hinge on questions of political anthropology, more concretely, the designated *cargo systems* and their role in the constitutional forms of political participation. From the first instance, we see that the majority of texts regarding these phenomena are centered on indigenous communities, with very little literature attempting to include non-indigenous groups in their analyses (Bonfil, 1988: 238; Robichaux, 2007: 25; Korsbaek, 2009: 49). Similarly, our experience in the field at Tlaxcala, also researches a community that can easily be classified as mestizo[2] with clear characteristics of a cargo system[3], to the extent that some characteristics are even intensified[4].

And yet, in this article we propose to delve deeper into the previous reflections and propose an anthropological analysis of cargo systems that includes both indigenous as well as non-indigenous communities, always recognizing that their origin is in "the cultural tradition of Mesoamerica" (Robichaux, 2007: 27). It is not our intention to gather up stock traits that can be found in any given community, as Korsbaek does in his model of the *typical cargo system*. Rather, understanding the cargo system as an

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1. The author is a member of the research teams of two projects: 1) the Project entitled *Continuities and Socioeconomic and Cultural Transformations in the municipality of Nativitas, Tlaxcala: Towards the creation of a new rurality?,* which receives funding by the PAPIIT Program (Code IN302709) from January 2008 until December 2011; and 2) the Project entitled *Rethinking the rural and the concept of a new rurality as a proposal for understanding the contemporary transformations in Valle Puebla-Tlaxcala,* funded by CONACyT (Code 98651) from January 2010 until December 2013. Both projects have Hernán Salas Quintanal (IIA-UNAM) as their Principal Investigator. He read the draft of this text and made suggestions towards a clearer version of its presentation.

2. Employing the indian-mestizo *continuum* of Robichaux (2007: 23), the "mestizo pole" is identified as "the national Mexican culture".

3. The cargo system in the research community, Jesús Tepactepec, exhibits the appropriate elements found in *typical cargo systems,* which, according to Korsbaek (2009: 41-3), are: a number of clearly defined roles, rotation of the members of the community, hierarchical order of the cargos, identifying with all or almost all of the members, no remuneration for services-but compensation in the form of prestige, and two separate hierarchies, political and religious.

4. In other work (González-Fuente, 2010; 2011), the author highlights that in the community of Jesús Tepactepec there is a mutual effect between the *uses and customs* and the constitutional forms of political participation. These analyses deeply investigate the diverse phenomena tied to political behavior such as political clientalism, non-conventional political participation, or creation of political identities.

essentially heterogeneous institution, we suggest it is an empirical structure that may be observed directly in the field, and, as is argued here in this text, produces and reproduces a series of mechanisms, which can promote scenarios of interaction[5] where members of the community interact through a system of roles-including that of the cargo. First of all, the mechanisms allow for the greatest number of members to play a part in the scenarios. Secondly, they allow for such scenarios to be articulated with the greatest possible frequency. Finally, there exists a tacit agreement between social actors for the rotation of roles from scene to scene.

This proposal is thus structured into three parts. As a frame of reference for the study, the analyzed phenomena are placed on the cargo system as a *continuum* of behaviors ranging from individualism to collectivity. Secondly, the concept of *community* is taken as a basic element for the observation and interpretation of the cargo system. Finally, we propose the idea of a *communitarian project* as the common denominator in what is observed of and read about all kinds of cargo systems. We avoid direct involvement in the debate (Romero, 2002; Castro, 2000) over the various interpretations that anthropology offers of cargo systems, such as that of leveling, stratification, redistribution, modernization, secularization, etc., although they will undoubtedly appear throughout the text.

2. The individual-collective continuum

At an intercultural and holistic level, we discuss the concepts of *community-individual*, attempting not to fall victim to the idealization[6] and confusion[7] of the first; in this sense, we are talking about "the human ways of organized living" (Delgado, 2009: 51). There are two circumstances in particular which incite the author of this text to begin this debate: on the one hand, the classical work of literature by Bonfil Batalla *México*

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5. The concept allows us to "put forth a proposal that ties together a structural analysis with an analysis of action. At the same time, this permits consideration of the territorial dynamics and the temporal variable" (Rivera, 1998: 10).

6. The ideology of "modern communalism" signals the tension between the community and the individual, "generally positioning the community against the individual". In this way, we agree with Zárate's (2009) claim of "a communitarian modernity" that accepts "the possibility of deterritorialized communities and of individualism within the community living with all things communal".

7. Delgado (2009: 53) argues that one cannot confuse "the communal" with "the collective". The communal "can belong to everyone, […] that with which everyone partakes […], and that encircles its components [of the community] in an orderly and organizational world-view from which no one could imagine escaping". On the contrary, the collective "is associated with the idea of a gathering of individuals that are knowledgeable about the benefits of their copresence" […] and "they organize through communication".

profundo; on the other hand, the aforementioned fieldwork experiences in Tlaxcala.

Following Bonfil (2003: 57 and ss.), one of the main objectives of a community is to carry out a self-sufficient life, "with autonomy". In order to do so, Bonfil tells us, it is fundamental to foment family and community relations "that allow for the organized cooperation of the greatest number of individuals".

This "continuous collective relationship" of which Bonfil writes, is fundamental in practice: an innumerable amount of interaction scenarios with the greatest amount of people that alternate roles in order to bring about the greatest number of possibilities where the entire collectivity is favored and not just one or a few individuals. In this way, the cargo system is the skeleton, the common structure that sustains and reproduces "intense coexistence".

In Bonfil's words, there exists an "individualistic and accumulative perspective" (2003: 68) tied to Western capitalist society. In contrast, the "communitarian" society grows with the continuous and frequent interaction of the members of a group, with the institution of the cargo system acting to systematically promote these interactions. All of this can be explained with the positioning of the social phenomena observed in the behavior *continuum* ranging from individualism to the collective[8].

Bonfil (2003: 84) describes

> different cultural tendencies: one corresponding to the kind of individuality that is prevalent in contemporary Western civilizations, and the other towards a local society in which neighborhood connections play a very important role […] and allow for the growth of their own cultural forms of a more everyday nature that are more extensive than that of the nuclear family[9].

8. The theory of a *continuum* presented in this article is useful to gauge the possible transformations in the communitarian institutions that are derived from the processes of modernization. This proposal does not tie in, as do Nutini and Isaac (Robichaux, 2007: 23), "secularized" communities at the Mestizo pole, instead the author associates certain institutional mechanisms with the collective, against other mechanisms brought about by individualistic behaviors. Neither does this proposal come to the same conclusion as Cámara (2009: 398) which is that "centripetal communities […] are constituted by culturally indigenous inhabitants. […] on the contrary, centrifugal communities, comprised of a great number of ladinos and/or mestizos […] seek to change (modernization and urbanization)".
9. Bonfil makes these claims as he speaks about the home, in the sense that, the department of urbanization is faced with old neighborhoods (private homes surrounding a common patio in which shared spaces are located): in this sense, the author presents the thesis that the areas with the greatest number of these kinds of neighborhoods are the ones that exhibit more vigorous communitarian organization, as was the case with events following the 1985 earthquake.

A person, in everyday practice, will have the greatest opportunity to cater to individualism when there are few opportunities to interact with his neighbors; on the contrary, the collective is instigated with continuous interaction. In this article, we introduce the hypothesis that one of the structural forms with which local Mesoamerican societies assure the greatest number of interaction scenarios —and with them, make use of a communitarian project that assures collectively beneficial behaviors— is the cargo system.

In conclusion, we trace how the cargo system, as exhibited through the institutional mechanisms that reflect it, deals with putting together scenarios characterized with the greatest interaction amongst members of a community; and how it reinforces the relationships between members with the greatest possible frequency of scenarios by assuring that each member —not necessarily equals— have opportunities to occupy the different roles that are put into play. All of this in contrast to the local societal institutions with weak or no community efforts, which are characterized precisely for their lack of shared scenarios.

3. The community

The next part of this proposal is to define, in a clear and concise form, what is a community[10]. Along these lines, Korsbaek (2009: 32) is one of the authors that has most dealt with the definition of *community* in terms of the study of cargo systems. He claims it deals with "finding a precise and operational definition of the concept of community".

A community, he explains, is "a group of people in close quarters most often within geographical or political borders" (2009: 33). In another work, he writes of the "six characteristics" that make up a community: "a process [1] carried out by a collectivity [2], frequently, although not always, within a territorial space [3], that has horizontal coherence [4], vertical coherence [5], and history [6]" (Korsbaek, 2005: 134). He adds, that given the aforementioned operational characteristic of the concept, what distinguishes them from non-communities, is not the size of its population, nor whether they ultimately posses a shared history, rather that they make use of a "social project" in the sense of "carrying out responsibilities to the community". In this way, "the cargo system is the institution that lends itself to the formulation of a social project, thus creating a community" (Korsbaek, 2009: 36).

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10. **For a current discussion over the concept of** *community*, see Delgado (2009) and Cámara (2009).

Sandoval (2005: 266) adds that the roles carried out in a community—Mazahua—strengthen the cargo system "with the accomplishment of tasks and the participation of everyone, creating an interactive and coherent system […] that constantly nourishes itself".

With this legacy, we propose in the next few pages, the following working definition of *community*: a social group generally territorial, whose principal characteristic is that the majority of its relationships are channeled by institutions (social, political, economic, kinship, friendship, religious, etc.) that generate, maintain and create scenarios of interactions led by the greatest majority of members possible of the aforementioned structure.

More concretely, a community is a "social group articulated by the relationships of cooperation and conflict" (Muñoz, 2008: 175) whose institutions allow for contact between the greatest number of members of a group and with the most possible frequency. Community is a human group that is characterized by the institutions dedicated to putting in direct and constant contact the greatest number of members possible at all sociocultural levels. The debate over whether or not the individual is active is another question[11]: what is of importance is that the communitarian institutions seek the participation of all of its members. All the while keeping in mind the limitations on accessing specific roles: some of which —the ones of the higher social hierarchy— are destined for specific members of the community given their gender, age, civil status, birthplace, type of property, religion, etc.

Finally, from this perspective, the cargo system will be very active in human groups that wish to and need to be a community, that is, that depend on a *communitarian project*. In the words of Delgado (2009: 56), the components of a community want to be one when they "agree on what is most important, living together. What happens is that this project […] cannot obscure the existence of the social structures that are created by inequality and injustice".

4. The communitarian project

Given the aforementioned criteria, the prerequisite characteristic for the cargo system to be truly present in numerous regions of the Mexican territory is for its indigenous and non-indigenous leaders to pursue both

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11. Following Sullings (2004), we maintain that social institutions should guarantee "that all who want to should be able to participate" as opposed to guaranteeing that "all participate" which is tied to the "vocation for social activity" of the more active citizens.

implicitly and explicitly a *community project*, that is, that community members arm themselves with institutions —including the cargo system— set to "guarantee diverse communitarian projects" such as "the gifts of life, health, well-being, work, good crops, plentiful rains, etc." (Topete, 2005: 293).

In other words, the cargo system serves as an organizing force in local societies with members cohabiting through their participation in institutions—with the cargo system serving as the backbone of such institutions—which generate and reproduce a "field of social interrelationships" and "a mechanism of identity that supports the different groups that interact" (Castro, 2000: 510).

In this sense, given that the population of Jesús Tepactepec is primarily Mestizo[12], the key characteristic they share with other indigenous communities is that their members share in a communitarian project, going beyond the mere vigorous[13] upkeep of communitarian organization. As such, the study of communities such as that of Jesús Tepactepec is relevant because of its characterization as an urbanized locality, notably influenced by global processes, and of a manifest heterogeneity[14]. Conclusively, it is fundamental to pay attention to communitarian projects of towns that are known for their industrial work and that participate in a capitalist economy. These social actors redefine and manipulate communitarian institutions "in the way of conflicts and struggles found both inside and outside the community" (Zárate, 2009: 83).

Following these introductory comments, we set our main objective to look for and find the *least common denominator* so that a social group can be considered a community. This minimum requirement is precisely the fact that members of a group want and need to be a community. This means that they share in a communitarian project, interact-structurally-with the greatest number of members possible in the group, with interaction scenarios occurring systematically with the greatest possible

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12. Jesús Tepactepec has a total of 990 inhabitants (Serrano, 2008: 76), of which 300 heads of families cooperate regularly to pay the various costs associated with the political and religious spheres of the cargo system. In terms of the ethnic demography of the population, only 98 of the 18463 inhabitants (0.53%) of the municipality of Natívitas whom are over the age of 5 speak any kind of indigenous language—Náhuatl—(INEGI, 2003).
13. Robichaux (2007: 26) references this perception of the cargo system in the Southeastern region of Tlaxcala in such a way that "the communitarian organizational structures […] continue to be strong, are capable of reproducing to the point of expanding and flourishing".
14. The community being studied is found in a region that is more generally known as the Valle Puebla-Tlaxcala. It is a region with a vast agricultural tradition that today —facing the abandonment of farming activities, precarious industrial employment, the outsourcing and flexibility of employment— deals with social inequalities, deterioration of natural resources and growing migration.

frequency, and finally that the basic contract[15] amongst all parties assure a regular exchange of roles (rotation).

In line with this objective, we present our principal hypothesis arguing that a local social group has a communitarian project when a substantial part of its social institutions work like mechanisms (at social, political, economic, and religious levels) —geared towards a large or small scale, articulated in variables— to:

a. harness the active participation of the greatest number of members in different interaction scenarios (variable *quantity*—geared towards "everyone");

b. foment the greatest possible occurrence of the aforementioned scenarios (variable *frequency*—geared towards the smallest temporal interval between scenarios);

c. promote the interchange of roles between participants with the necessary frequency that the group has consented to (variable *rotation*—geared towards increasing the possibility that "everyone" can occupy -at some point in their particular communitarian history- the greatest number of roles present in the scenarios).

Keeping in mind the main hypothesis as well as the *individual-to-community continuum*, we present the following declarations:

1. When there is the greatest number of community member interaction in conjunction with high frequency interaction scenarios —assuming a guaranteed exchange of roles— the possibility will increase that economic, political, social, and religious behaviors in the community will strengthen the collective (the benefit of the group outweighing the benefit of the individual)[16].

2. When the least number of members of a community interact in conjunction with a low frequency of interaction scenarios and combined with the notion that a regular exchange of roles is not

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15. Delgado (2009: 55) speaks of "minimal but sufficient agreements" between the members that, "of course […] may be very different or even incompatible".

16. For example, an inhabitant of Jesús Tepactepec affirms that, as a product of the continuous interaction with members of the community, we all "give each other a hand […] I am the school principal and I help my neighbors place their children, and they help me in other aspects" (DLF Interview, July 2010).

guaranteed, the possibilities increase that the economic, political, social, and religious behaviors of the community will lean towards individualism.

In effect, these hypotheses come from the already mentioned notion that rural communities can and want to be self-sufficient, wanting to lean towards collectivism, wanting to construct together a social project; in this sense, the institution that systematically assures this tendency is the cargo system. It is true, as will be exhibited here, that modernizing onslaughts, the predominant instigators of individualism and, in practice, mitigators of the continuous scenarios for "all", are achieving diverse results: on the one hand, some communitarian institutions are disappearing and on the other hand, some institutions are strengthened by the coexistence. In the specific case of Jesús Tepactepec, informants speak of the disuse of the *faena* and the notifier or *tequihua* only in the past 15 years[17], while the structures of elected assemblies continue to thrive.

Effectively, as Korsbaek (2005: 137) concludes, the communities in Mexico

> find themselves permanently under enormous pressure to modernize, and in direct contact with it. […] The community lives in this state of permanent tension with multiple dimensions and aspects […] because it is an historical product of a series of processes that function on different speeds, giving the anthropologist a very complex situation that crystallizes in the ethnographic present.

Korsbaek refers to forces that are large, medium, and of short duration, amongst those that we will deal with in the present article, poverty generated from non-distribuitive politics, salaried employment that "belongs to the modern world", migration, transportation and communication infrastructures, etc.; all of which are "strongly supported by television promises, education, and the government" (2005: 139).

In conclusion, it is interesting to characterize the cargo system as a group of tools that: assures interaction scenarios in which the majority of a social group (that wishes to be a part of such a group) can actively participate; that said scenarios be carried out with the greatest possible frequency; and that the majority be guaranteed that, sooner or later, they can fill each of the roles of each of the interaction scenarios —whether these roles are located at the hierarchical cusp or not—. The reasons that

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17. In 2010 one member of the District Attorney's office in Jesús Tepactepec thought that these institutions were disappearing because of "government strategies which seek to divide us, inciting us to fight for the aid they give us" (SRF Interview, July 2010).

push towards a community project are varied and have been studied profusely by anthropology (self-sufficiency, social control, social cohesion, redistribution, stratification, etc.), although lately what we discuss in the present text is the analysis of a cargo system as generator and holder of institutional tools geared towards the collective.

5. The cargo system as the backbone of the collective

In order to corroborate the aforementioned hypothesis, we present some of the institutional mechanisms that have been analyzed by the anthropological literature and that the author has ethnographic knowledge of in Jesús Tepactepec and other communities in Natívitas where the cargo system is especially vibrant. With the aim of facilitating analysis, we categorize these mechanisms in four general dimensions: judicial-political, economic, religious, and social, which are of course strongly interrelated; in this sense, the cargo system is fundamental because it strengthens in a parallel and frequent manner many of these institutions.

Finally, all of the cases presented here, where "small worlds of sociability construct community" (Muñoz, 2008: 175), attempt to answer the question of how the cargo system energizes the collective over the individual —restricting but not cancelling out individual interest— and in this way, address how the communitarian project is maintained.

In practice, we maintain that such formulas, with the cargo system as a vehicle and key guarantor, all systematically assure the frequent interaction and exchange of roles between the greatest number of members in a community. In any case, we also pay special attention to the possible global onslaughts that collective mechanisms are facing, which, on the one hand, can lead to their weakening and disappearance, or on the other hand, result in the intertwining of traditional mechanisms with modernizing institutions in which both end up strengthened18.

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18. The author indeed maintains that the impact of globalized phenomena on communitarian institutions demands a more detailed and case by case analysis. Even so, as we will soon demonstrate, it is worth relating these mechanisms to phenomena already well studied by the Social Sciences.

5.1 Judicial-political level

There are four judicial-political[19] institutional mechanisms of which the variables of quantity, frequency, and rotation figure into: assemblies, the political cargo of the community president, the *comandancia*, and the *embargo*. All of these scenarios are guaranteed, as we will soon show, through the cargo system. The first one is through election, the next two are self-explanatory, and the last one is a traditional judicial system associated with various cargos. The assemblies are mechanisms of consultation, debate, decision, and election in the community of Jesús Tepactepec and of others throughout the Mexican Republic. They can be categorized either as general assemblies or special assemblies. The first one is an annual occurrence where the majority of the community may participate both in decision-making and organizing of various activities —including religious activities— that benefit the entire community. Every December 31st in Jesús it is the assembly that proposes three nominations for community president. Out of these, the official presidential candidate is elected through a majority vote (with assembly members supporting their respective candidates). Ultimately, the winning candidate cannot refuse the offer.

The special assemblies convene for situations that merit immediate attention and cannot wait to be addressed at the end of the annual cycle. These are rare occurrences and the special assembly is called only when the situation reaches a point of precariousness[20].

From the perspective of the present text, we conceive that the assembly acts as a scenario of interactions in which, each year (*frequency* variable), a majority number of members (*quantity* variable) of a group can suggest, elect, be elected, and decide over the issues that affect the community both at a political and religious level. Moreover, these members may actively participate in the different roles represented: orator, eligible candidate, elected candidate, elector, organizer, supervisor, etc. (*rotation* variable).

The assembly mechanism is the recipient of major modernizing impacts beginning with the way constitutional elections are run, especially in terms of how the secret nominating vote serves as an individualizing mechanism of election. In the case of Jesús, we can affirm that both mechanisms are positively articulated to the point that, as the people tell us,

19. All of the institutional mechanisms dealt with throughout the text are included in the Concluding Schema found at the end of part 5 (Table 1).

20. The most recent special assembly of Jesús Tepactepec took place in August 2010 and was convened in order to do away with the fiscal cargo —which is the principal religious cargo— due to a monetary theft in the accounts of the principal festivity.

the assemblies have grown in number of participants in the last few years due to the fact that the principal cargos (fiscal and auxiliary president) manage considerable sums of money.

The political cargo of the municipal auxiliary president—the second institutional mechanism that we bring to the mix—is traditionally in charge of the civic sphere of the community. This cargo is constituted, from a Political-Science perspective, as the public center of political decision-making, that is, as the representative and/or executive organ in which "the genuinely crucial options that will inevitably affect the life of the political community as a whole" (Spencer 2004: 60) are formulated, expanded on, and applied. At a local level, these centers are involved in "disputes between different factions […], and, at times, conflicts between the different title holders of the local cargos, as in the case of the secular and religious authorities" (Gledhill 2000: 201).

Following the particular schemas of the present study, we can affirm that the community president cargo can be occupied annually (*frequency*) by all those members that actively participate in community activities (*quantity*): the candidate who has a history of serving minor cargos in the community is chosen, assuring that there is a *rotation* in the roles in the different interaction scenarios throughout the life of the community. This assemblage filter reduces the possible influence that political parties would have both in the choosing of candidates and in the handling public monies. One of the most recent cases exhibiting this system of control is with an ex-*fiscal* of Jesús. He blatantly made it known that he wanted to become community president straightaway; this moved the assembly to sanction his pretentions and elected him to the minor cargo of bell ringing, momentarily, or perhaps forever, truncating his political ambitions. In any case, the residents also realize that the assembly members elect candidates according to party allegiance, usually electing presidents of the community that are friendly with the mayor.

Turning to other matters, the main political cargo is being formally transformed by the inclusion of a public budget, which, rather than weakening the position in Jesús, has led to the active participation of the majority of members, not least of all because as of 15 years ago the position boasts a salary. In any case, the community president has continuously overseen a considerable budget derived primarily from rent spanning the use of public spaces to small commercial stations that are employed during community festivals.

The commanding cargo, which is responsible for supervision and public security in the community—especially that of the auxiliary pre-

sident[21]—is a lesser cargo that can be filled annually by all the active members in the community for the sake of everyone. Usually, these "policemen" are in charge of distributing subpoenas to heads of families and making sure that members are aware of events such as the assemblies.

Even though we are discussing a unique mechanism, Sam and Davinson (2007) describe a similar practice of a judicial-political element of an embargo in a community next to Jesús Tepactepec: in Saint Apolonia Teacalco "the embargo" is domineering in the system because its residents force themselves to pay for contributions required from the village. The system consists of "withholding the goods of a villager that refuses or cannot pay the economic contributions". Generally speaking, the embargo, or withholding, is begun by a meeting of "the men of the village" together with the authorities. The head of the block —which is a position that also *rotates*— of whom the accused belongs to, demands that said person pay the debt and in the case that he refuses, proceeds to initiate the embargo: "we go to the house of the neighbor and reposses his goods up to the value of the debt". The authors conclude that such a system "does not permit exceptions" (*quantity* variable) by what is assumed to be a representation of "the right of the community over the individual" (Sam and Davinson, 2007: 117-141).

5.2 Economic level

There are two institutionalized mechanisms that can, at an economic level, grow the collective against the individual: communitarian work and cooperatives. The former forms a part of the labor organization of communities, and is related to a civil hierarchy; the later fits into, amongst other things, all things ceremoniously religious.

Communitarian work, in all its forms depending on any given region (*faenas, tequios, fajinas, fatigas, tandas,* etc.), are mechanisms of cooperative work, collective, and communal in "which all [*quantity* variable] the men[22] of the community are obliged to participate" and which "are used for public works, like construction and the maintenance of roads, the edification of schools, the repairing of temples and other communal buildings" (Bonfil 2003:61).

Specifically, in the community of Jesús Tepactepec, we can observe how these communitarian institutions are progressively weakening.

21. The team of cargos that annually accompanies the community president is constituted by affines, both in terms of kinship and friendship, who usually support one another in the assemblies in order to distribute cargo amongst themselves throughout the years.
22. The women participate by preparing food that is distributed amongst the workers.

According to the neighbors, many have ceased to function only about 15 years ago. Although one exception merits special mention where groups of young persons are still working together to help with the Eucharist every Sunday[23]. According to one of the members of the office of the *fiscalía* in 2010, these kinds of collective work are "a way of relating, collaborating, and identifying with others" and, if they are weakening, it is because of "city customs" (Interview of IVN, July 2010). Similarly, the community president of Jesús in 2009 stated that previously there were more *faenas*, but now "the way of life in the fields have changed, people have other work and no time" (Interview of FHC, August 2009).

Without a doubt, the modernizing processes which have most impacted communitarian work are those of urbanization and salaried work. As Bonfil states (2003: 61), the idea of a salary directly impacts the idea of collective work, which "does not pay, but works according to redistribution, having the obligation to do the same for others that they have done for you (*rotation* variable), when the time comes (*frequency* variable)".

Cooperatives are a present mechanism in all dimensions of a communitarian social life (political, religious, familiar) that work to socialize income of a specific group by means of monetary and/or contributions in-kind. For example, from the point of view of the political, cooperatives can finance a collective job, and above all, guarantee communitarian services like water; the bigger cooperatives follow the Catholic ritual calendar; and there also exist every day cooperatives between families in order to celebrate important events.

In the next section we will discuss the concrete mechanisms of the combined cooperation-commission in order to apply the variables that we have been alluding to throughout the text. The cooperatives, in conjunction with the commissions (which will be studied as social mechanisms later on in this text), allow that a few *rotating* neighbors (a commission in Jesús usually consists of 6 members: president, secretary, treasurer, and three speakers) visit "house to house" (Rodríguez and Romero, 2007: 79) all of the neighbors in the community (*quantity* variable) and, for example, make themselves aware of the residents that have emigrated, have separated from their partners, or are passing through economic difficulties. These visits are conducted in Jesús a minimum of 8 times a year[24] (*frequency* variable), taking an actual census of debtors

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23. **According to the data provided by INEGI (2003), 93% of the population of persons** over 5 years of age in Natívitas are Catholic.
24. **1-New Year's; 2-Carnaval; 3-Festival of the Fifth Friday of Lent; 4-Holy Week; 5-Palm** Sunday; 6-Día del Niño (April 30); 7-The Assumption of Mary (August 15); 8-Virgen de la Natividad (September 8). In addition to these eight, one can cooperate if one is an *ejidatario*

and payers.

The cooperatives have been deeply affected by a lack of participation due to the great number of people that have had to emigrate especially to the United States, and those that have converted from Catholicism to other religious denominations and have stopped financial contributions. Yet the cooperatives continue to run, now mostly by the efforts of migrant persons who look for cooperation amongst their family members.

5.3 Religious level

The religious aspect of the majority of the indigenous and/or non-indigenous communities in the Mesoamerican area with cargo systems involves an analysis of the Catholic ritual calendar, which is organized by the religious cargos (the *Fiscalía*'s office in the case of Jesús Tepactepec: the head of the *fiscalía*, *mayor*, porter, and two bell ringers). It is worth analyzing the unique system of *mayordomías* in this ceremonial cycle as a mechanism that incites the kind of social interaction we have been discussing, as well as "a structure that dialogues with the local forms of authority, to the point that the cargos and *mayordomías* are terms frequently used interchangeably" (Millán, 2005: 227).

The Catholic festivals allow for the *frequency* of cohabitation of all the neighbors (*quantity* variable) to be systematically continuous throughout the year (in the municipality of Natívitas[25] one can participate in a festival every day of the year). This includes pilgrimages (to other communities), processions, decorative arrangements and cleaning of the churches (collecting flowers, floral wreaths), automobile blessings, etc. A mechanism of singular interest —especially in terms of what we are describing in these pages— is the *chapel of perpetual adoration*, situated in the community for whom the municipality is named: it deals with a scenario of interaction in which one member of the community must be present in the small Catholic religious center holding the Blessed Sacrament during the 24 hours of every 365 days of the year.

On a different note there are also scenarios of interaction that include members of various communities, such as the pilgrimages or the inter-communitarian processions (collection of firewood by the members of Jesús Tepactepec for Santa Apolonia Teacalco). In addition, Rodríguez and Romero (2007: 78) make reference to a "system of invitation and

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(shareholder) in San Isidro Labrador (May 15); if one is a landlady, in the Precious Blood of Christ; and if it relates to your street, the Christmas Posadas.
25. **The municipality of Natívitas has 15 localities (12 villages, a** *barrio*; **two colonial ex-***haciendas*) that function according to the president of the community.

assistance to the festivals of the Patron Saints of the neighboring villages [that work] as a mechanism that allows for the strengthening of communitarian relations of the regional network". A neighbor in Jesús illustrates how the residents want the visitors to "pass by all the houses" (*quantity* variable), creating scenarios "for a person to make oneself known" especially if one accompanies the pilgrims as a member of the *fiscalía*. The interaction is even more significant if one manages to secure employment through such encounters as "they lend themselves to political interests" (Interview with DMG, July 2010).

Despite the strong manner in which the productivity driven (work associated with the weekends and vacation periods) labor calendar impacts the ceremonial traditions of the district, such institutions maintain the vigor of past eras, which in Jesús Tepactepec is associated with the image of Jesus the Father of the Three Paths, one of which receives the most visits —and with them, offerings and donations— along with San Miguel of the Miracle in the region.

The *mayordomos* deserve special mention (in the case of Jesús we must speak of religious cargos of Godfathership). Even though most of the festivals are financed by the economic contributions of all the members of the community, which presupposes a kind of "collectivism of monetary contributions and ritual reciprocity" (Sandoval, 2005: 270), the system of *mayordomia* is another fundamental expression of the communitarian ceremonial tradition. The *mayordomos* assume costs that, in many cases, are above the economic possibilities of the group; in this sense, the *mayordomos* usually are the members of the communities who have had it the least bad in relation to the rest of the group[26]. We are dealing with an institution of selective personalities "in so much that to reach the cusp of the communitarian hierarchy is only for a privileged few" (Millán, 2005: 227).

The community of Jesús Tepactepec does not have *mayordomos* of their own per say, however, they do depend on various ecclesiastical Godfathers, one of which is the Godfather of "la acostada del niño Dios", which runs around a million pesos[27] according to informants. In conclusion, there needed to be financing for two days (December 23rd and 24th) worth of food, drink, music, and fireworks for members of the community and its visitors.

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26. Sandoval (2005: 272) explains such behavior as a way to "avoid the economic accumulation that is partnered with social differences and power. […] This is mandatory for a cultural formulation whose original value is based on socialization, very different to the exacerbated individualization and accumulation of money that runs the life of the Western world.

27. At the time of the study, 12 Mexican pesos were equal to one United States dollar.

5.4 Social level

This fourth part of the text classified as the social level contains various mechanisms which are specifically characterized as being present in the rest of the parts discussed. We count on three institutions as being fundamental —commissions and/or committees, *compadrazgo* and the festivals—, and we include two mechanisms that although less relevant carry great explanatory value in this text: the *mole* and the playing of bells.

The commissions and/or committees are fundamental in the day to day functioning of the communities: they are an integral nucleus for those people whose responsibility it is to aid those responsible in organizing both public (drinkable water, school, other public works, etc.) and religious (oversee the income and costs of each festival) works. Hence, recounting the interconnection that exists between committees and cooperatives, "the model of obligation to the cooperative religious cargo system has extended into the civil sphere. In one way or another, nobody [*quantity* variable] escapes the communitarian cooperative" (Robichaux, 2007: 24). Given what has been observed and recorded in Jesús Tepactepec, members must serve through a majority of commissions before arriving at the presidency of the community (*rotation* variable). Additionally, based on conversations with the treasurer of the water commission in Jesús, the community uses the commissions for those who want to arrive quickly at the hierarchical cusp, in such a way that "a bone [commission] must be given to silence those who speak too much in assemblies" (Interview with DLF, July 2010).

The ritual of *compadrazgo* or kinship creates the existence of figures that can substitute for biological relatives in the case of their absence (widowhood, separation, divorce, emigration, etc.). Following Bonfil (2003: 58), we discuss on this social level how "it allows for the organization of the cooperation of the greatest number of individuals [*quantity* variable] for certain jobs in which the members of the domestic unit are insufficient", jobs which include all of those related to the cargo system —including those that we have been discussing here—[28].

Indeed, the number of Godfatherships (*padrinazgos*) that Nutini and Bell (1981) have recorded for the state of Tlaxcala alone is extraordinarily supportive of our proposal. There are no less than 27 kinds of *compadrazgo* —including those shared by the rest of Mexico— baptism, first communion, confirmation, the *quinceaños* of girls, marriage

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28. **Already in his work** *Cholula: the sacred city in the industrial era,* Bonfil highlights the importance that the cargo system "has in strengthening kindship relations and in establishing *compadrazgo* relations" (Robichaux, 2007: 58).

and the different school graduations. Then there are those lesser known *padrinazgos* which are less heard of but nevertheless still functioning: the Godfathership (*padrinazgo*) of recently ordained priests, a child's third birthday, or silver and gold marriage anniversaries; more specific to Tlaxcala the aforementioned authors record the *Parada de Cruz de Entierro, Acostada del Niño Dios, Coronación de la Santísima Virgen, Coronación del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, Sacada a Misa,* etc. In conclusion, considering that "if there is no food or drink, there is no party", we have a remarkable degree of scenarios that, as we have characteristically discussed, exponentially multiply the interactions between individuals, in addition to feeding the local economy. In this context, the cargo system is a reliable structure that creates and maintains kinship interactions, interactions of friendship and of *compadrazgo*, which guarantee, amongst other things, the consolidation of networks of mutual aid.

In terms of the possible forces that are tied to globalizing processes that can halt the institution of *compadrazgo*, we refer to Bauman's proposal of "liquid relations": this author speaks of an era of actual fragility of human relations, in the sense that we have increasingly less ties with the people that surround us, or at least, the ties we do have are not unbreakable; individuals are in search of "top-pocket relationships, shallow and numerous", a phenomenon that would explain the success of virtual relationships (Giddens, 2007).

The *fiesta* is one of the most prominent institutions in the communities. It constitutes a fundamental space for "the practices of sociability in public spaces" (Sandoval, 2005: 272) and it stimulates the participation and reinforces the solidarity between various individuals (Bonfil, 2003: 61).

The festivals that are celebrated in a community can be characterized either as familial occasions tied to rite of passage rituals of a rather extensive family (baptisms, communions, confirmations, graduations, birthdays, anniversaries, *quinceaños,* and even wakes) that would also usually invite members of the community that are friends and *compadres*; or as communitarian festivals tied to the Catholic ceremonial cycle, funded, as we have aforementioned, by the community itself in the form of cooperatives or by some member -—*mayordomo* or *padrino*— who has more resources than the majority of the population.

In the first instance, familial *fiestas* serve as a platform for generating and maintaining ties of kinship, *compadrazgo*, and friendship. Shortly we will discuss the ethnographic case of a celebration of the *quinceaños* of some young ladies in the neighboring municipality of Santa Apolonia Teacalco with familial business in Nativitas. Figuring into the organiza-

tion of the celebration are a number of "godfathers" that take up the responsibility of funding the event. First, the baptism godfathers —whom have to be married— agree to pay for the dresses at the party. The parents pay for the food; however, they may also accept contributions by other family members in the way of animals to cook. The drink is paid for by some family members, and in the event that it runs out in the middle of the event, there is cooperation to go buy more. Other family members, friends, and *compadres* are in charge of *apadrinar* or fund the flower arrangements at the church, the event place and its decorations, the cushion, pendants, shoes, the mariachi, the musical group, the invitations, the gifts for attendees, the crown, and a very long list of etc.

In this case it is interesting to point out —in addition to the interrelationship between the economic mechanism and cooperation— the high number of participants, in other words, the tendency for the party to have the highest possible number of invitees[29] (*quantity* variable), whom will later find themselves as hosts (*rotation* variable) when their own daughters turn fifteen (*frequency* variable): "one must invite everyone whom has invited you".

Secondly, the communitarian *fiestas* are known for always having food, drink, music, firework shows, popular dances, collective church masses, little bulls, rodeos, sporting events, etc., "despite the efforts of politicians and priests to eradicate them" (Sandoval, 2005: 272). Given that these festivals are coupled to the plentiful Catholic cycle of ceremonies, the costs can run the gamut of the entire community (*quantity* variable) and/or be the responsibility of the *mayordomos* whom are *rotated* from festival to festival (*frequency* variable). Often the familial and communitarian festivals are carried out jointly and share hosts, to the point that in some places the institution of the "*tornafiesta*" (afterparty) is in effect: after the initial days of the main communitarian festival — when the greatest number of non-resident visitors are in town— the residents organize "another less important dinner party for family members" (Vizcarra, 2002: 196).

The frequent *fiestas* encourage solidarity for the collectivity in times of cooperation and of conflict, explained in varying anthropological terms, but always under the pretense of scenarios in which "everyone" can participate: they foment the social cohesion that unites "everyone"; they are a mechanism of social control because "no one" can escape the

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29. The informants themselves correlate "prestige" and "having resources" with the greatest number of guests: "there are people that close down the streets and make you dance!", said a neighbor in Jesús when referring to the latest wedding that he attended (Interview with IVN, July 2010).

cooperative; they halt the accumulation of wealth for a few, redistributing surplus so that "everyone" can participate in the fiesta; they legitimate the differences in riches so that "everyone" can pass through the service of the cargo system; etc.

On this note, the preparation of *mole* lends itself as a great explicative scenario. In addition to the fact that "it is the most frequently offered ritual plate to guests on certain festivals [*frequency* variable]" (Robichaux, 2007: 30), we want to emphasize here its capacity as a culinary scenario that exacts a large number of persons in its preparation —more than in any other "platillo" or plate in Mexican cuisine— (*quantity* variable), during a rather lengthy time —usually longer than 24 hours— and with an exchange of roles: there can be diverse cooks, helpers, cooperation with money or spices, guests, etc. (*rotation* variable). In Jesús Tepactepec and Natívitas, men and women participate in the "fiesta" of mole production, first in the cooking and then in laboring to gather firewood and sacrificing animals. Great quantities of mole are prepared both to enjoy in the moment of celebration and so that guests can take some home with them: that moment before the departure —"I'm going to give you your mole"— revisits a great symbolic cargo of "indebtedness".

In the same way, a similar mechanism of communication is enacted through the "tolling of the bells" (Rodríguez and Romero, 2007: 81) of the church. In the community of Jesús Tepactepec there exist at least four ways of ringing the bells, in addition to the two daily bell tolls at five in the morning —as a sign to wake up and go to the fields to work the earth— and at eight in the evening —a sign to come home—: the "*doblada*" (doubling) to announce the death of a member of the community; the "*rogación*" (pleading) to plead with the saints for the end of some natural catastrophe like heavy rains, storms, or tempests; the "*repicada*" (tolling) to call all the faithful to mass; and the ringing of only the biggest bell in the bell chamber to warn of an imminent danger in the community such as the theft of icons from the church.

Without a doubt, this is one of the mechanisms that would suffer greatly under the extraordinary effect of the new technologies on communication, to the point that, in contrast to face to face interactions, in mass communication, the personnel that participate in the production and transmission or diffusion almost always lacks the immediate feedback of receptors (Thompson, 1990: 218-224). And yet, the ringing of the bells in Jesús manages to unite —in the case of imminent danger— to the church in a brief interlude all that may hear the sound of the bell, that although disconnected, can maintain a direct interaction with the bell ringers.

6. Concluding reflections

With the help of anthropological literature and his field experiences in the town of Tlaxcalteca of Jesús Tepactepec[30], the author has been defining and describing the different institutional mechanisms found in the majority of the local communities —including some urban neighborhoods— in the MesoAmerican region of territorial Mexico. All of these mechanisms are, in one way or another, tied to the system of cargos, in such a way that it is the backbone to each of these mechanisms. Indeed, if each of them could function autonomously —even on occasion— it would also be true that the presence of the system and its own inertia produces and reproduces the aforementioned institutions, which from the point of view of this text: 1.- they promote scenarios of interaction in which the greatest number of members of a community may actively participate; 2.- they procure that these scenarios occur with the greatest possible frequency; and 3.- they promote the exchange of roles, which, on the one hand, allow the members of the community to participate in the scenarios from all possible positions; and on the other hand, this reality generates active citizens that assure that the system never loses its vigor despite the onslaught by phenomena tied to globalization.

This constant and direct interaction comes to be the implicit and explicit constant that determines the *communitarian project*, or in other words, the lowest common denominator of Mexican rural communities, be they of the majority and ethnically dominant population, be they of a designated mestizo population (in neither case are there groups of complete homogeneity): their members want and need to belong to a community, or similarly, they believe that continuous contact with people who surround them generates a collective benefit over and/or articulated in conjunction with the benefit of the individual in *modern* societies. All under the premise that the more one can interact with one's neighbors, the more that "we can help one another", in job searches, in cooperating with a celebration, or support in getting to the United States as a new immigrant. In this sense, we look to Bonfil (2003: 72) when he argues that each community faces the changes in the world in terms of their Autonomous culture […]: it resists to conserve its space in all matters of life, it appropriates foreign cultural elements that result in being useful

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30. These reflections are equally enriched by other ethnographic experiences found in the research projects of various anthropological colleagues in the communities of Xico, Veracruz (2005-2006), Teocelo, Veracruz (2006), Santiago Yolomecatle, Oaxaca (2006), Santa María Zolotepec, Edomex (2009-2010), San Juan Chamula, Chiapas (2009) y Pahuatlán, Puebla (2010-2011).

and compatible, and it invents new solutions, new ideas, and new strategies of accommodation that allow for survival in a limited and different collectivity, whose members have access to a common cultural heritage which is distinctively their own.

Institutional mechanism	Modernizing forces	Principal dimension	Participants	Participation frequency	Exchange of roles
Cooperatives (tied to commissions)	Migration and conversion to other job titles	Economics	All of the heads of family	Every festival (familial and communitarian)	Reciprocal exchange (determined by the assembly) and redistributive
Commissions (tied to cooperations)	Executive decisions from the elected constitutional representative	Social (including political and religious)	Everyone (limited to certain variables)	There are annual commissions that are tied to communitarian festivals	Tied to service to the community on behalf of minor cargos
Catholic ceremonial cycle	Priests and other public powers	Religious	All Catholics	Great frequency tied to Catholic Saint schedule (many each day of the year)	Exchange between different hierarchized roles
Mayordomo System	Instability of conditions of life and migration	Religious	All Catholics with above average resources	Great frequency tied to catholic saint schedule	Highest difficulty in accessing the peak
Compadrazgo	"liquid" relationships	Social	Mechanism for adding to members of a family	Each opportunity	The roles are maintained. Reciprocity is enacted in celebrations.
Fiestas (familial and communitarian)	Festivals tied to the calendar of productivity (weekends and vacations)	Social	Everyone who is at the place and wants to share whether or not he is from the community	There are festivals pretty much everyday of the year	Strong sense of indebtedness and repayment in terms of the festivals (hosts and guests)
Mole	Fast and decontextualized food	Social	Family, friends, compadres, and members of the community	Each festival is important	Strong sense of indebtedness to reciprocate an invitation to a future mole
Assembly (general and special)	Nominal vote (individual decisions)	Politics (including religious)	Everyone (limited to certain variables)	One obligatory per year; as needed	Exchange between orators, eligible, candidates, etc.
Presidency Cargo Municipal Auxiliary	Public Budget developed by a single person (democratic representative)	Politics	The elected persons in the general assembly	Annual	History of minor cargos
Commandant	Private Security	Judicial-Political	The people elected by the president of the community	Annual	A person whom the president trusts
Sanctioning System	Formal justice based on individual rights	Judicial-Political	All of the males and authorities	Annual	Any neighbor who does not comply with the cooperatives may be sanctioned
Collective Work	Salaried	Economics	All adults with division of labor between men and women	When the moment arises	Reciprocal exchange by turn

Table 1: Instutional Mechanisms of Collectivity in Jesús Tepactepec.

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