Peasant autonomy

- Seed-saving practices of maize in rural Jalisco, Mexico

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Abstract

The debate of maize seeds in Mexico has been, and is, intense and divided, with large seed companies on one side, mass-producing improved maize seeds and lobbying for the introduction of transgenic maize cultivation, and on the other side activists wanting to conserve and protect the native maize seeds. Farmers in Mexico have been facing large changes since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Competition from industrialized farms in the US and Canada has pressured Mexican farmers to raise yields and challenging the traditional agriculture and seed-saving practices. In the middle of all this there are Mexican peasants refusing to give up their traditional agriculture, holding on to their traditional seeds and seed saving systems. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate what motivates these peasants to continue saving traditional maize seeds, and hold on to organic farming, and how they relate to the situation of seeds and agriculture in Mexico. I investigated this through five months field work with a local seed-saving organisation in the region of Jalisco. I participated in their meetings with peasant farmers and performed in-depth interviews with selected peasants involved in the organizations' work. I draw on the concepts of commodities and anti-commodities to show how peasants chose to keep traditional maize seed and practices as a form of resistance to the commodity agriculture that has come to dominate in Jalisco. My findings also show that the values of saving one's own maize seeds are going beyond purely economic ones, and include values of history and traditions, values connected to taste and texture and values of the human-nature relationships. In particular, autonomy is found to be a central value in the process of obtaining seeds, and an explanation to why farmers expresses such a strong opposition to buying improved seed.

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1. Introduction

One of the first sentences I would properly learn to say in Spanish when I arrived in Mexico was “I am here to write my thesis about maize seeds, and how farmers obtain them”. I must have said that sentence a few hundred times, so many times it almost feels as comfortable as saying my own name. The reactions to this sentence was very often of the same nature: “Oooh, well then you surely are in the right place!”. At this obvious exclamation, me and the Mexican in front of me would laugh a little together, both of us thinking about the never-ending tortilla-making, pasole-eating and the thousand other aspects of Mexican culture where maize is essential.

I got interested in the topic of seeds because of my interest in food production. It somehow just amazed me that our survival as humans depends on food, and that seeds are the beginning of all our food-crops. The way we can improve seeds and give them the right conditions can assure people access to food, and the way we can conserve seeds or not will determine the variety of what we can eat. I found maize intriguing simply due to the fact that it is one of the world’s most important crops, next to wheat and rice, and accounts for a substantial part of the daily calorie intake in many South American and African countries (Badstue 2006), with more than 30% in Mexico (Brush 2004). How we grow maize affects many.

As my Mexican acquaintances pointed out, Mexico is a very good place to start when looking at maize seeds. The region is agreed to be the place of origin of maize cultivation and compared to other crops the cultural importance of Maize in Mexico is unique (Brush, 2008). The crop is frequently found in indigenous Mexican history in imageries, myths and stories, from different tribes and places, and Brush (2008) states that these values surrounding the crop and the food made from it, still are visible in Mexican society and peasant culture today. Mexico is also unique because the region holds the highest diversity of maize races and varieties today. Fitting (2006) explains how this diversity in maize germplasm is important for future possibilities to develop seeds that are adapted to changed conditions, new pests and diseases (eg because of climate change), and therefore important for future food security. She also states that small-scale farmers are the base for this diversity because of their local conservation, where they actually use and reproduce seeds.

My focus in this thesis is on peasants practicing maize cultivation under organic agriculture. I find peasants in Mexico to be of particular interest because 1) as Fitting (2006) points out, they are important for the conservation of the biodiversity in maize seeds and 2) they have the

past decades been facing changes and challenges because of the modernisation of agriculture and competition on the international market (Fitting 2006), which in turn has challenged the traditional maize cultivation and seed saving systems. These things make it interesting to get a better understanding of how and why peasants in Mexico conserve their seeds, how they interact with the changing world around them and what impacts their choices. This thesis is a small-scale attempt to do that.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how and why peasants practicing organic agriculture in south Jalisco, Mexico continue with their traditional farming and seed-saving practices. I also explore how these peasants experience and relate to external pressure from the society. My research questions are the following:

- How do small-scale, organic peasants obtain their maize seeds?
- What are the values that peasants aim to conserve with their seed sharing and saving practises?
- What challenges do the peasants experience in the process of obtaining seed?
- In what way is political engagement expressed through handling of maize seeds?

2. Background

2.1 Mexico

Recent agricultural history

Without going too deep into Mexican agricultural history some things are worth mentioning to understand the present situation in Mexico, in Jalisco as a region, and for the peasants of Jalisco. Mexico has throughout the past four decades implemented different policies, that has created what Fitting (2006) calls a "neoliberal corn regime", which in accordance to neoliberalism promotes market liberalisation, competition and efficiency, reduction of the state's interference and puts less value in domestic maize production. Many of these policies stem from the situation in 1982 when Mexico was in a debt crisis and to receive debt relief the country agreed to implement the IMF's and World bank's famous Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). Previous to the crisis, self-sufficiency and state support to small and medium scale farmers had been a priority to the country (Fitting 2006) but this was de-prioritized to make way for less spending in the public sector, freeing of the market, less government regulation, especially in export-oriented sectors.

One of the more important policies implemented was the North American trade agreement – NAFTA - which was accepted in 1994, something that the World Bank also pushed Mexico to implement as a part of its SAP (Weaver et al. 2012). The agreement was another step in liberating the market, between the US, Canada and Mexico, and letting trade take place more freely between the countries. The signing of the agreement had positive effects for some, but it also made life difficult for many small-scale farmers in Mexico that had to compete with maize-producers in the US and Canada. Cheap maize from the US was imported extensively, between 1994 and 2000 imports of maize rose from 14% to 24% of the total maize consumption in Mexico (Fitting, 2006) (in 2012 1/3 of the maize was imported (Fernández et al. 2012) and maize prices fell; between January 1994 and August 1996 by 48%, forcing many farmers who depended on maize production to adjust extremely quickly, or leave their farms and look for wage jobs elsewhere. In response to the signing of NAFTA, and to the wider neoliberal policies, there were people protesting, Zapatistas rebellion being one of the more famous ones.

Maize seeds in Mexico today

The market for maize seeds consists of commercial OPV (open pollination varieties) and hybrid maize seeds, produced by various seed companies. The hybrid maize seeds are improved by a specific method, making the yields high the first year, after which yield drops significantly if seed are saved several years in a row. Therefore, farmers need to buy new seeds every year to continue benefitting from the high yields (Badstue 2006). This extra cost of buying seeds is pointed out as problem for many small-scale farmers who cannot afford the seeds and the additional inputs needed to maintain them, such as fertilizer, pesticides and irrigation (depending on the farm's conditions) (Fernández et al. 2012).

As of today, the debate about transgenic varieties (or genetically modified organisms, GMO) of maize in Mexico is intense, with large transnational companies wanting to introduce these in the country, while many peasants, NGOs and indigenous groups are protesting against allowing transgenic maize and for strengthened regulations. This scepticism regards both regarding environmental problems, that transgenic maize may contaminate other non-transgenic maize sorts, and the effect on culture and tradition it may have (Zavala et al. 2014, Fitting 2006). Transgenic crops are not cultivated on a large scale in Mexico today due to regulations, but cases of experimental cultivation have been permitted by the state (ibid).

Map of Jalisco in Mexico (Wikipedia commons, 2011)

2.2 The study site: Jalisco, El Grullo

The commercial agriculture of Jalisco

Jalisco is located in the southeast part of the country and home to 8.1 million people. It has grown in the past decades to become one of the most important states in Mexico when it comes to agricultural production. The region has a very varied landscape, consisting of a 342 km of coastline to mountains and volcanos with the height of 3839 m, and in between, plains and hills with a tropical climate making it well suited for cultivation. As of 2018 the region accounted for 11.74% of the national agricultural GDP in Mexico, making it the leading state in contribution to the national GDP (Jalisco Gobierno del Estado, 2017). The region is the second largest maize producer in the country and the largest producer of livestock products (pork, chicken, beef, egg, milk). Fernández et al. (2012) identify Jalisco as a state that differs from others in its intense maize production, with a high usage of hybrid seed varieties (but also high numbers of landraces exists in the region), medium level of rural population and low-medium yields, despite high usage of hybrid seeds. In many ways the region is affected by the national neoliberal trend and policies and has also incorporated the ideology. The agricultural (slash and burn) "Milpa" system, of intercropping maize, bean, calabaza and chili, that has been the traditional cropping system in the area has begun to be replaced by the big, monocultural agriculture and the local government of Jalisco has proudly taken on the identity of a modern, world-wide provider of agricultural products, promoting the title of the region as "Jalisco: gigante agroalimentario" and publishing several documents/books with the same title (Jalisco Gobierno del Estado, 2017).

In these publications the state of Jalisco presents, in a quite boasting manner, the agricultural advancements of the region in recent years, expressing how the results are the work of passionate and hardworking people and of political policies focused on creating economic development. One voice in this book, José M. Muria (2017), titled as the general chronicler of the state of Jalisco, explains how the politics implemented by the state of Jalisco, with help of improved agricultural technology, has been able to improve the life for all, even those who were harmed by the acceptance of NAFTA: creating more jobs in the countryside, improved incomes, supplying food for rural and urban people at reasonable prices, exporting more food and also importing less. Technology and infrastructure are repeatedly in the focus of Jalisco's vision for enhanced productivity and development in general in the rural areas (Jalisco

Gobierno del Estado, 2017). The fact that the region has many small and medium scale farmers that cannot invest in modern technologies is expressed to be a challenge/problem.

Jaliscos agricultural production has developed and expanded rapidly, which is presented proudly by the state in their publications. In four years, exports increased with 55 % (Jalisco Gobierno del Estado 2017), with the most important crops for export being agave (for tequila production), avocado, berries and lime (Ibid) and the vast majority being shipped to US, Canada, Europe and Russia. Especially berries, grown in greenhouses, and avocados are products that have increased tremendously in a short time: the avocado, between 2003 and 2018 avocado production grew from 5 200 tons, to 201 804 tons in southern Jalisco, where it is mostly cultivated.

A study from the University of Guadalajara titled “Jalisco a Futuro 2018-2030” is pointing out the negative impact of these changes. Despite that the state of Jalisco does work to prevent negative social and environmental effects of the intensification of agriculture, the report shows that these measures have not managed to sufficiently mitigate the negative impacts. Due to the rapid increase in cultivation, the extensive use of chemicals and the industrialization processes, the agave, sugar cane, avocado and berries - the products most important to the exportation of Jalisco - are also the crops with most damaging environmental impacts (Santana Castellón & Graf Montero, 2019). The adaptation of new varieties and commercial practices also leads to the abandonment of traditional practices and cropping systems. In addition, agave and avocado cultivation contributes to deforestation, when many farmers decide to cut down forests and jungles to start new cultivation of these crops (ibid).

3. Theoretical framework

I draw on writings about farmers' political resistance and how it might be expressed in ways that differ from conventional political engagement and activism, and I will mainly use three different concepts: *Everyday resistance, Anti-commodities/commodities* and *Mexico Profundo*.

In his book "Weapons of the weak" Scott (1987) develops the concept of *Everyday resistance*, in an attempt to nuance the previous research done on rebellions and political activism and instead explore the actions of the low-class peasants who have not afforded and had resources/(or found it suitable) to engage in these type of activities. He shines a light on the constant struggle between peasants and the ones who extract food, labour, taxes, rents, interest from them, and he shows how the peasants' rebellion is expressed in more subtle and always on-going actions such as sabotaging, feigned ignorance, slander etc. Scott argues that over time these actions, the everyday form of life that do not comply with the more powerful peoples wishes, are the most effective way to resist, or in the end make the political ship run aground.

In an edited book Maat & Hazareesingh (2015) discuss similar ways of resistance to what Scott talks about, and use a historical perspective from the colonial era to illustrate how peasants in various, and often subtle, ways reacted to and resisted the colonial powers' demands to grow specific crops. They call these crops *commodities* – the crops that were important economically for the ruling colonial power, often crops for exportation to industries in the west. The resistance that Maat and Hazareesing (2015) describe takes its expression in maintaining of choosing to plant different crops or varieties of crops than those promoted by the colonisers- referred to by the authors as anti-commodity crops. The choice to keep crops and varieties that the colonial powers wanted farmers to abandon is a similar form of subtle resistance to what Scott (1987) tries to catch in the concept of everyday resistance. Farmers are not actively protesting against the political rulers with banners and songs but rather, they simply continue to sow the traditional crops, with the traditional agricultural practice despite the present political rule implementing other practices (Maat & Hazareesingh, 2015).

Anti-commodities are being explained by Maat & Hazareesingh (2015, 6) as *"an enduring form of production and action in opposition either to actual commodities and their existing functions, or to wider social processes of commodification, rather than simply a momentary form of protest or reaction"*. Examples of anti-commodities are specific crops, agricultural

systems or other local productive processes, such as rituals surrounding the harvest or food, that are long-term, resilient and persistent, and in opposition to the colonial rules initiatives. The examples of anti-commodities in the literature do not primarily describe the use of anti-commodities as a conscious "political action" from the farmers side, but rather just the desire to create local sustainable livelihoods – and how this desire often happens to go against the ruling powers wishes (Maat & Hazareesingh 2015). The traditional/anti-commodity crops themselves generally produced lower yields than the commodity crops but were often favoured by the peasants because they were better adapted to local ecological conditions, being more resilient to different weather conditions and pests. They also contained values other than purely economic ones, such as traditional or religious, that either had been preserved through history, or that was picked up again/created when confronted by the colonial (or the other foreign) rule (ibid).

Authors using the concepts of commodities and anti-commodities illustrate in historical examples how different crops and/or peasants' productive processes, have been functioning as anti-commodities. Some explain how the anti-commodities where primarily production focused on food, sustainable livelihoods and well-being for the local community, built on local/indigenous knowledge – in contrast to the commodity crops that primarily focused on capitalist values as that was the priority of the farming by the colonisers (Richards 2015). Others put less importance of the actual crop, the use and its function, and rather place emphasis on the local ideas surrounding it that emerged and united the people, against the colonisers, or in other cases in general against modernisation (Maravanyika, 2015). In my essay I use the ideas of crops as commodities and anti-commodities to frame my discussion about the role of maize seed and acts of seed selection and sharing amongst peasants in Jalisco- as a form of resistance to the emerging "neoliberal corn regime " (Fitting, 2006) that has come to dominate Jalisco in recent years.

To situate my analysis of maize as an anti-commodity in Jalisco I will also draw on insights from the book "Mexico Profundo: reclaiming a civilization" by Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1996), which I think is an important addition to my theoretical framework since it is written about the Mexican context, by a Mexican academic. It will be used to analyse the cultural situation of my participants and for the perspective that Batalla develops on resistance.

Batalla (1996) describes two different existing cultural groups in Mexico – *México Profundo* and *the imaginary Mexico*, where Mexico profundo is the persistence of Mesoamerican civilisations amongst indigenous, "indian" people and non-indian/mestizos, and *the imaginary*

Mexico are the ones who represents the dominant discourse about Mexico as a present and, even more, future "western" country and culture. One of the main points he makes is that *México profundo* – the "original" indigenous culture - is not only found in indigenous tribes, who call themselves Indians and are being recognised as Indians by others, but that this culture is also still very present, and a base for life for many, in non-Indian mestizo Mexican communities. The difference is that they are not identifying themselves as Indians anymore – largely because of how *the imaginary Mexico/*the dominant society through history caused a de-Indianization of communities in favour of a primary Mexican identity (because of political interests). Batalla argues that even though they do not call themselves Indians, such communities still are Indian culturally, in most aspects of life. He specifically points out rural Mexico and traditional farmers, as a place where *México profundo* still exists. Social practices, agricultural practices, food and medicinal practice in these communities are often very similar to in purely Indian communities and for these people, modern agriculture is a different world, which one only visits when one has to.

With this claim he moves on to talk about, amongst other things, what resistance means in the *México profundo*. He points out that these cultures always need to be understood within the framework of colonial domination. Since the colonialization of Mexico the Indians have been limited in their autonomy in a sense that they are not able to make their decisions freely, he describes it as their *cultural space* being restricted – meaning their decision-making capacity and cultural patrimony (legacy/inheritance). According to Batalla (1996) keeping control over ones *cultural space* is essential. He means that acknowledging the centrality of this strife to maintain autonomy (historical, collective memory being suspicious of that from the outside) is essential for understanding the *México profundo,* and how their actions are connected to resistance.

> "One must understand the orientation towards self-sufficiency and the need to preserve the limited spaces of cultural autonomy in order to understand why external innovations in traditional productive activities are rejected." (Batalla, 1996, 135)

According to Batalla (1996) these cultural traits explain why communities and people within *México profundo* are more prone to saying no to modernities and innovations, giving examples of vaccines and improved agricultural methods – because often the key to understanding it is that there exists a trait of dependency in these new innovations that would further restrict the self-sufficiency and autonomy of the people/communities. If one does not understand this, it is easy, from a colonial perspective, to perceive the Indian Mexicans, and

all of *México profundo* as solemnly back-striving, conservative and unreasonable, even when significant improvements can be made, and often this is how they are perceived, according to Batalla (1996).

The work of Batalla (1996) deepens the perspective of *why* it is so important for indigenous communities and traditional farmers in general, and *México profundo* in particular, to resist commodity-agriculture, and to resist some specific aspects of it more than others. Where the theorisation on commodities and anti-commodities exemplify how the resistance mainly derives from a wish to create sustainable livelihoods and food production, or to unite the collective and create an us and them (Sinha-Kerkhoff, 2015, Maravanyika, 2015), Batalla (1996) emphasizes that the collective memory of the historical experiences that persist in the culture of *México Profundo* have made them sceptical towards anything that specifically creates dependency and takes away (more) of the cultural autonomy and possibilities of decision-making. According to him, this is important to bear in mind when one looks at examples of resistance in rural Mexico.

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4. Method and material

4.1 The fieldwork

My fieldwork was conducted on site in Jalisco, Mexico, as I was invited to work as a volunteer for four months with the organization "Colectivo por la autonomía y Saberes Locales" (here on “CpA/S.L.”), located in El Grullo in southern Jalisco. The organisation is a small NGO working with the collective rights of rural populations and peasants. One of their major concerns has been the developments of extensive, large-scale agriculture and the focus on products for export, promoted by the state in Jalisco, and the consequences this has and might have on small-scale farmers, biodiversity, health, the environment and climate. Out of this concern they have during the autumn of 2020 held several conferences with the title “Mujeres, communidades, territorio y la vida Digna” (Women, communalities, territory and the dignified life) creating a platform for women with connections to agriculture to meet, discuss and organise themselves surrounding these topics.

Through this I had the opportunity to conduct interviews, observations and write my thesis on site. I was able to get a feeling for, learn about and to some extent consider, the cultural context in which my thesis takes place, and I got to see the places, meet the people and experience the everyday life of my interview subjects in a way that would not have been possible at a distance.

4.2 The interviews

The majority of the material for my essay comes from qualitative, semi-structured interviews with five small-scale, organic farmers. Semi-structured interviews are interviews where the interviewer has prepared to some extent what the interview should be about, but where she also leaves space for the conversation to develop independently and for the informant to speak freely (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). It is a form of interview that is well suited to delve into a specific topic and take part in the interviewee's own feelings and experiences about this topic, which suits my research questions (ibid). I developed a question guide (see appendix 1) for my interviews according to my research questions and asked follow-up questions freely during the interviews. The interviews were conducted in English, with a Mexican, Spanish-speaking translator. During the interviews I recorded audio and took notes and used both afterwards when analysing the interviews. I roughly transcribed the English translation of the interviews.

In qualitative studies, it is common to make a strategic selection for one's interviews, meaning that one chooses consciously and not randomly as in quantitative studies (Teorell & Svensson 2007). The selection for my study among these peasants has mainly been based on choosing relevant and significant cases, which is a selection method addressed by Teorell & Svensson (2007). In my case, significant meant peasants who work more or less full time in agriculture, who practice organic agriculture and who are or have been in some way engaged with organisations/networks working with seeds. The selection has been made with the help of key persons in the organization who knew the farmers situation from before. This knowledge would have been too time consuming, if even possible, for me to acquire myself to make the selections.

Four of the five informants have participated in several 2-3 day-long conferences called "Mujeres, communalidades, territorio y la vida digna" (Women, communalities, territory and the dignified life) organized by the civil rights organization CpA/S.L. with the goal of being a platform for women to organize and talk about the agricultural situation in South Jalisco. One of the informants did not participate in the conferences but has direct connections to *CpA/S.L.*, being the father to one of the facilitators.

Presentation of participants
María [group interview in person with translator] 5 October 2020 She and her husband are mainly growing organic maize for their own consumption, but they also sell to a “tortilleria” in Guadalajara. They own 7 ha but are leasing out 3 ha to be able to pay for their youngest daughters’ school.
Josefina [group interview in person with translator] 5 October 2020 Owns 5 ha with husband, but leases out parts. Grows primarily for self-consumption. Used to do tortillas to sell, but now only for the household.
Itzel [group interview in person with translator] 5 October 2020 Youngest (38 years), single. Farms collectively with 8 other families. Is also part of a network called “Guardianes de Semillas” (keepers of seeds).
Xóchitl [interview in person with translator] 23 October 2020 She and her husband grows primarily maize for self-consumption, but also fruit trees. Her husband is very experienced in organic farming. She also owns a little shop from her

mother in law.
Fransisco [interview in person with translator] 23 October 2020 Primarily farms for self-consumption (approximately 3,4 ha). In the group of participants, he is the one who most outspokenly criticises the government and the large agricultural companies.

4.3 Observation

To supplement my interviews, I also use participant observation (Robson 2011), mainly from the conferences in which the (female) farmers participated and the meetings held there. I took notes during these conferences and also spontaneously in other discussions and forums relevant for my thesis. From these observations, I have been able to gain a broader understanding of the women's political involvement, how they use their involvement, how they interact with each other, what issues are most important to them in regard to the agricultural development in Jalisco, and so on.

4.4 Difficult practicalities

I want to shortly mention some difficult practicalities. First, the interviews very much depended on the skills of the translator, her understanding and ability to retell to me what the participants said without leaving out details. I primarily used the English translation of the interviews, but since I do know some Spanish, I also listened to the audios to make sure that the translator did not miss anything too big. Secondly, during the observations I was not able to have a translator, which left me alone with my limited Spanish knowledge. For parts I was unable to hear exactly what people said or I could not fully grasp what they were saying. I still managed to grasp enough of the conversations for them to provide important additional information that helped me understand the wider context and I made sure not to draw conclusions beyond what I could understand from these discussions.

During the process of collecting data and writing this thesis I have been considerate of the influence that the organization and their biased interests, letting their local knowledge and experiences enrich my understanding of Mexico, but at the same time also confirm facts and “truths” with other sources.

4.5 Ethical issues

All informants in the interviews have fictitious names and have been informed about this before the interviews took place, as well as that the recordings of the interviews are only for personal use, and that they can stop participating in the research whenever they want.

For the observations, I introduced myself and my thesis before joining a meeting, but this was not always possible at every meeting, and there is also the risk that participants forgot that I was there observing despite my initial introduction. This could be ethically problematic, especially regarding the meeting where sensitive topics and emotional reactions came up. I dealt with this by using these observations to enrich my understanding, while mainly reporting findings from the interviews. I have also taken care not to mention any details that could reveal whom the people are.

4.6 Analytical approach to the material

I used a thematic coding analysis when analysing my interviews (Robson, 2011). This basically meant that I coded the material into approximately 15 different categories – based on the kind of descriptive information each sentence communicated (eg, nature, tradition, food, relationships etc.). According to my research question I then picked out a fewer number of themes that I sorted the codes into. I chose the themes primarily inductive from what I saw as most central and interesting in the material, but the analyse was also deductive in the sense that my material was directed by my research questions and that I continuously during the process read about theories and had some ideas about what could be fitting (Robson 2011). As doing the thematic coding I “deep-dived” into the material, getting to know it really well, comparing different answers, finding similarities, differences and contradiction, and interpreting it according to what I have learned as a whole in my time in Mexico, and at the same time developing my understanding of my experiences here from the small parts of the interviews – similar to what a hermeneutic circle illustrates (George, 2020)

5. Results

The results are presented in three different chapters, following the structure of the research questions: first, the process through which the peasants obtain their seeds are described. Second, the different values connected to the themes are mapped out more in detail. Third, the peasants' experienced challenges are being discussed, and theories of everyday resistance, commodities and anti-commodities are applied to the situation.

5.1 How do small scale farmers obtain their seeds?

Saving - Autonomy

All the participants save most of the maize seeds that they sow, by selecting, picking and storing the seeds themselves. The storage is important, there should be no airflow into the containers and no animals that can get in, otherwise the seeds can go bad. Different criteria are expressed as important in the process of selecting seeds, such as the biggest seeds, straightest lines etc.

> I chooses them myself, the cobs in the Milpa that is short and thick, and I choose to preserve the most characteristic traits in each of the varieties. That is the most important, to not lose the characteristics in each of them. If they get mixed I will lose them. They are in the same space [when they grow in the field] but they are not mixed because they don't have the same cycle. Some grow faster, for example one of the white ones grows much faster. (Fransisco, 2020)

> We take a wooden stump and use to take the seeds off. We use the middle ones, they are the biggest. And I chose the biggest to keep, the ones in the centre, and the other ones they used for the animals or my mother makes tortillas from it. (Xóchitl, 2020)

All interviewees express a wish to continue with the process of saving seeds. They express with pride that this is what they do, and that the options, primarily buying, are not as wanted. The autonomy that the peasants have in their system of saving seeds themselves are also expressed as valuable. Fransisco describes this in relation to the farmers who buy seeds.

> You can buy a lot and you will sow a lot. But the weather can change, things can change or happen, and they can lose everything overnight and be in debt with these companies. Perhaps you get something and go plus, but then there is also the transgenics… I would rather grow my own, than to depend on them. I don't get too much but I am guarding a

> way of life that is safe, healthy and that gives me joy and that does not make me depend on anyone else or something else. (Fransisco, 2020)

Xóchitl adds to this by telling us about how she views her childhood differently from her sister.

> My sister says that we were poor, but no, we had so many things, we had maize the whole year, we had chickens, eggs, pork, we had animals, and our mother did everything at home. (Xóchitl, 2020)

To her, the lack of money was not the most present thing, but she rather remembers the self-sufficiency and autonomy they had as something valuable.

Exchange – Networks and relationships

All interviewees described that they sometimes gave or were given seed for free from relatives, neighbours of friends. Reasons for asking for seed were for example wanting to try a variety that you did not have, or if you for some reason did not have enough seed for that year. Though, it was also described that the practice of exchanging seed was more common in the past.

> Yes, [to give seeds] is very common. We can get the black ones from our neighbours. They just give it, I do not pay, we only bring some maize once we have harvested it – so we exchange food. If we have seeds over from our own ones we also give them away, to neighbours or my brother. (Xóchitl, 2020)

> When I visit my dad still, he gives me some seeds, he shares seeds with me. I also use the seeds and knowledge I got from the Guardenas de Semillas: Helen, Nereida [Helen: active in organisations working with seed, Nereida: seed producer], this has helped me a lot. (Itzel, 2020)

Like Itzel, other participants also express that they obtain small amounts of seeds through networks and organisations that they, or their spouses, are part of.

> My husband in his reunions [with other farmers], he use to bring some of his seeds, maize and beans. He likes to share it. Some of the others also bring and they exchange. (María, 2020)

Exchange of seeds at reunions (Klara Lindqvist, 2020)

These types of seed exchanges also took place in the conferences of women held by *CpA/S.L.* and were encouraged by the organisation and the facilitators of the conference. People were encouraged to bring their seeds for exchange, and a separate meeting was facilitated where people showed and described their seeds/maize cobs and the group were able to share with each other.

Participants expressed that if they would lose their seeds, or need a new variety, exchange, to be given or to buy from another farmer, would be their main option to get the native seeds. Some of them also expresses a wish to generally exchange more, but they also express difficulties that hinders them from doing this.

> No. [I would not buy] instead of sowing native seeds. I could get [native seeds] from exchanging, but no one really save them to sell them. Very few save nowadays. Most people buy because the yields will be safer, you don't get the plague, but it comes with all of these chemicals – few people conserve the seeds. (Xóchitl, 2020)

Bought seeds – opposition

Generally, all respondents indicate throughout the interviews that they are convinced about that the best way to obtain seeds is to save, and to buy them is an alternative but inferior strategy. Negativity is expressed toward buying seeds and towards the bought seeds, calling them "poison seeds", saying that "not even the birds want to eat that seed" (probably a result of that purchased seed is coated with toxins to prevent pests from eating the seed before

sprouting). But, nonetheless, María and Josefina also buy or have bought seeds from time to time, one of the reasons being that organic farming is difficult, time consuming and very hard work.

> No, this was the first time that we did that [bought seeds], because we were growing more this year. For next year I will use my own seeds, because the bought ones are very expensive, and I have now saved more of my own seeds so I can grow a lot next year with my own. (María, 2020)

It is explained several times during the interview with Josefina and María and also mentioned with Fransisco that one issue with saving and not buying is the quantity of the seeds, and that if you would want to expand this could be difficult with only saved seeds.

María and Josefina tell me though that they are not too happy with the bought seeds, they are too expensive, they don't taste as good in tortilla and for Josefina the bought seeds she sowed one year did not sprout properly and were defected.

> I want to guard [the seeds], and to share it too. The conventional seeds are too expensive, 5000 pesos/bag, and you have to use chemicals to make it grow. My seeds are nobler, I don't need to use anything like that. And I don't need to waste money, only physical work. (María, 2020)

5.2 What are the values that peasants aim to conserve with their seed sharing and saving practices?

Tradition and History

A present theme in the interviews is the connection between the lifestyle of the interviewees and the life of the ones who came before them – parents, grandparents and the communities they grew up in. This is for instance illustrated in how they all came to know agriculture from their family, and how they talk about these experiences.

> My dad taught me to do it. My dad taught me how to love mother earth. Me and my dad had 14 ha that we used to grow, walking and by hands. My dad had helpers with big baskets on their back that would take the maize from the field to the house. I remember seeing my dad separating, the biggest, the healthiest and the seeds in the straightest rows… I loved this. I would wake up at 5 every morning and the horse or the donkey would already be ready and we would go out into the field, and when we came home we would just go straight to sleep because we were so tired and full of mud. I love that. I am

> still keeping this and I am doing what my family is doing, to remember and to continue to live their experiences. I am the youngest one so I didn't get to know her Abuelos, so my father taught me. (María, 2020)

María talks about this experience with joy and longing, expressing how close she and her dad used to be and the pride she holds in doing what he taught her. She still uses the black maize that her father used, from the seeds that she inherited from him. Other participants share similar experiences. Josefina who also grew up with farming parents and grandparents, says when we discuss her method to obtain seeds: *"I never remember that my dad bought seeds"*, as if this was enough to settle that she would not either do it. She also speaks on the issue of farming traditionally

> I believe the same, it is a challenge to keep on doing it as our grandparents did, to keep the tradition of saving the seeds, original seeds as well, to continue to fight. (Josefina, 2020)

More than only the own family´s values and traditions has had impact on the participants, the world in which they grew up (for the older ones) is explained as very different from the present day:

> It wasn't only different. It was a completely different world. The whole world was sowing maize, calabaza, frijol, chile, peanuts – in the same way/same criteria. Without getting money, but for the family. It was pure joy. No one knew there existed cars and those things… They were dedicated, happy, sharing, like one family. (Fransisco, 2020)

Fransisco describes not only how more people were farmers when he grew up, but he also highlights how the social relationships were different, putting them in a very positive light.

> Yes, because we were like a family, so we exchanged everything, we helped each other. Support each other. Tools, knowledge, horses, you have this and I have that so we exchange. If someone were sick we helped him… even the dogs we exchanged. If someone had dogs was good for hunting, when someone had a problem with animals in the fields. (Fransisco, 2020)

Relation to nature and seeds

Like María described how her father taught her to love mother earth (see quotation in previous chapter), this love, care, and knowledge about the earth, soil and nature is generally

present throughout all of the interviews. The way the participants talk about their care for nature makes it seem like something that sets them apart from non-organic farmers.

> I don't really know why her husband started with it. We bought the plot 10 years ago. He likes it. When he bought the plot he didn't cut down all the trees, traditional fruit trees, like other people usually do. So now we have a lot avocado - criollo. Everything is organic. (Xóchitl, 2020)

One thing that is brought up many times is the problems with and dislikes of chemicals – pesticides and chemical fertilizer – both for their effects on human health but also regarding soil quality and soil fertility. During the interviews the soil and land is mentioned repeatedly. One participant explains how she grows a certain bean mainly for the purpose of keeping the soil fertile, another points out that there has been a loss in soil fertility since farmers started using tractors, and that this is a problem. In different ways they are careful with their land.

> We grow for tortilla and we are leasing out the rest, but we don't like to lease out too much, and we do not allow the people that we lease out to, to grow just whatever, because we don't want the soil to get damaged. (Josefina, 2020)

Similar to the care expressed for nature, it is also notable that the participants have a special relationship to the seeds in themselves – the seeds that they have inherited and the general idea of the criollo seeds. They use colourful word when they describe their seeds, and sometimes, apart from the practicalities of their lives, they also touch upon things more abstract and emotional when describing why they save seeds the way they do.

> It is not a small thing (to save my seeds), its total. Because I was born in the countryside and grew up here. I am a part of the seeds and the seeds are a part of me. If I don't have seeds, where would I go? With Monsanto etc…? No. If I don't have seeds, who will I be? The same with land, if I have seeds but no land, what for? And if I have land but no seed, what for? It is better to have both. (Fransisco, 2020)

In the previous section Fransisco described his highest priority when selecting seeds to be that the characteristics of every variety is unchanged. This also shows how he has a strong relationship to each of his seeds, he knows their traits and he values them. Xóchitl also touches upon this special relationship and explains how this is connected to the whole experience of seeds.

> Because, I think they [other farmers] don't understand, they don't understand the significance of sowing this seed and then eating it. I feel this [significance]. They go

> instead with all these chemicals, and it is much easier for them because it will grow fast. They don't understand that it is not good. They don't want to wait for the Criollo to grow, and some won't grow. (Xóchitl, 2020)

According to her, this is something to be understood and felt, and that if others would understand this they could also enjoy this special experience when sowing, harvesting and eating the food from the maize seeds.

Health and food

One way commonly used to describe the seeds are, unsurprisingly, in a direct connection to food and health. Especially Xóchitl was referring throughout the interview to the food made from different seeds, how the maize is healthier, tastiest and so on. The other participants also use the quality of the food made from the maize as a measurement for which seeds they enjoy the most and which ones are more special and valuable to them.

> My favourite is the black maize because the tortilla is much tastier and has the best texture. We always bring it to the comadres (close friends) that make tortillas by hand, to make tortillas. We don't get too much of the black one but… it is much softer. (Xóchitl, 2020)

Xóchitl describes several times how taste, texture and the quality of the meals made from the maize is a central part of what separates the native seeds and the bought hybrid/transgenic seeds. María also uses the quality of the food in a negative way when she talks about the hybrid seeds, saying that *"I don't like to use the hybrid seeds fort tortillas, they get very ugly. The seeds from hybrid is very small and doesn't taste good."*

> I would not buy transgenics, but also, I would not want to buy the ones that are not transgenics either [i.e. purchased hybrids and OPVs]. They [bought seeds] have hormones that is not good for the young people, it disturbs the sex-hormones. I have a friend who has organic chicken. The smell and the taste and texture are totally different from the transgenic or hybrid varieties. They don't have the string that chicken should have in the texture. That is how you identify an organic or chemical product, the taste is the difference. (Xóchitl, 2020)

To her, and to the others, the criollo (native) maize is superior to the bought, improved varieties because of the taste amongst other things.

> My maize [criollo] tastes much more than the other ones. Yes, it is smaller, but it tastes much more and so you can do a lot with it. (Xóchitl, 2020)

Xóchitl also explains further how she is not the only one who thinks that the criollo maize has a better taste, a proof of that being that people often steal the native maize from the fields for the sake of the taste.

> We didn't have the black one, but we got it from a man called Juan. He wanted to give it away because he grew between El Limon and La Cienega – but he wanted to quit because people were stealing so much from these fields, because they wanted to eat it. But they did not save them/conserve them. (Xóchitl, 2020)

Her solution to the problem is that more people should grow the native seeds, because they obviously want it.

> Yes, of course [people should sow themselves]. Because the people often steal the maize, because it is tastier. So others should grow it themselves because then they would not steal it. (Xóchitl, 2020)

5.3 What challenges do farmers experience?

Practical challenges

Mentioned throughout the interviews are the struggles, the time-consuming and the hard work by hand that is needed for this lifestyle. Xóchitl explains: *we worked a lot, very hard. Nobody wants to work today, everyone is lazy, my brother works all day outside, from 6 in the morning to the afternoons.* She also reflects over how this lifestyle is more expensive, even if they don't have any expenses for bought seeds, since they put so much time into the fields and the yields are lower than with bought improved varieties. According to her, this is also the reason for why not more people do it – they are too lazy, too accustomed to another way of farming to be able to cope with the hard work. Although Josefina, as well as the others, is content with their way of keeping the seeds and conserve them, she reflects on the downsides of it.

> [It is] much better to save from year to year. But now, with 5 ha it is a bit difficult because we would need to save so much, if you want to sow a lot you would need to exchange more. This would be my option instead of buying. I agree [with María], that the conventional ones are very expensive. (Josefina, 2020)

It is difficult to expand your production and plant more land when you only have your own seeds saved from last years (small) harvest. It's a difficult situation when you also don't want to buy seeds because you want to keep sowing your own landrace.

"Small people"

When talking to the participants about the challenges and problems that they are facing as organic farmers they all mention the problem of "other people" in various forms. This is accounted for through examples of what other people have or have not done in the past, how they are acting today and how the participants perceive the future in connection to the world around them.

As seen in previous quotations the action of other farmers and citizens are mentioned, how they cause problems by stealing maize or how the reason to there not being more organic farmers is the laziness that has evolved in the modern society.

> For the future I don't think that people will work as me and my dad used to do it. The idea is to keep doing it as we do it, but it's impossible because the young people have another mentality. My dad had a land and he shared it with his two kids. One of the kids rented it to a company who grows avocado, that's the mentality of the children, they just want to take their money, they don't want to work under the sun anymore. We are arriving in a situation where we are losing the land very, very quickly, but what is left is to keep fighting. There is no option. I cannot grow agave, because one plant is 18 pesos and that is impossible for me. A friend's cousin works with tomatoes, and he works with a lot of chemicals so that is also no option. (María, 2020)

María explains how the mentality of people today, which she perceives as different from before, is one reason to why they are so few doing what they are doing and why this way of life might get lost. This view was mentioned a lot through the interviews with Xóchitl, her frequently mentioning how people today are lazy, focused on getting money, inpatient and accustomed to an easier life. Josefina nuances this a bit by bringing in another perspective

> Sadly and talking about women. My dad gave my mother land and she gave the land from her father to her both brothers. One of them sold it and the other one wanted to sell. And I didn't like the way they used it? But as women we had no right to land. I wanted to take care of it better than her brother, they just wanted to sell it, I wanted to conserve it. This is the fight. Men are now not interested in land; they are interested in money. I want to be equal to my children, I will give to my daughters too. I believe women can be the hope for the land because they have different perspectives, more on the food and not much on the money. I would also like to give priority to grow maize. It just takes a year and after a year you can use the soil again. (Josefina, 2020)

Josefina is also acknowledging this problem of mentality shifts, but she puts the blame rather on men and the mentality of men, and her hope in the strength and will she has seen in women farmers. This thought is also reflected by *CpA/S.L.* and in the reunions, which were created as an exclusive space for women to come together and share their thought based on the idea that women holds a lot of experiences, worries and thoughts that differs from men's, and also a lot of capacity. The idea is that their priorities are food, health, in building a sustainable and safe future for their children.

Fransisco differs a bit from the others in the way that he talks about "the others". In a way he argues similar to the others and separates himself, and the farmers who do farming like him, from the other conventional farmers, but he also points out clearly when we discuss the situation where he puts the blame for the negative changes that he experience has happened since he was young, which is not with any farmer.

> The people and the campesinos [are not to blame], no. It is very easy to be tempted as a campesino, when they offer a lot of money. The people are the problem in the sense that the emprezas/companies and the government are people as well. All the organisations are the same because, Nos quita de libertad (they remove our freedom). The enterprises, the government is the problem. (Fransisco, 2020)

"Big institutions"

> To not lose the original seed, that is the main challenge. Cause the giant is tying us up. To continue to conserve them, to continue fighting. To continue to be campesino. It is a challenge. It is getting worse and more difficult because I feel like this giant is suffocating us by growing avocado, the agave, taking the water, putting the greenhouses. (María, 2020)

Although I perceive Fransisco as the one who more explicitly blames the government, their actions, the companies and capitalism as an ideology, the narrative of the transnational companies and big monocultures that comes creeping up from the hills and takes over the land, the fields and the native cultivations is all-time present in the other interviews as well. It is often described it as a fight, that they have to keep fighting against the "gigante agroalimentario" (the agri-food giant) – the same term as Jalisco's state proudly uses, being used in the conferences by *CpA/S.L.* as representation of the threat to food security, bio-safety and sustainability. They all tell a similar story where they experience more and more land

being used for monoculture of export-products (avocado, berries, agave), more farmers going into conventional farming or leaving the farm and it being harder for them to survive on their traditional agriculture when the world around them changes. Fransisco is further on blaming this on the government and companies' actions:

> The world shouldn't go back. I would like to return [to my childhood world] but I will never live to see it, it is like this. The people who have money change the world. Money changes everything. The government started to give the land to the campesinos, but also they give you the credit and seeds [improved] that they should work with. I think this is wrong. People should get the land and work it the way they can. They gave it before [credits/modern agricultural packages]. The companies had their own packages and rented out tractors. And the fertility was gone with the tractors. Before it was fertile but not anymore. (Fransisco, 2020)

Fransisco indicates, maybe because of his experiences and perception of what has happened, significant mistrust in the government, political authorities and conventional politics in general. When I ask about his motives for saving the seeds, suggesting political reasons as one possible, he reacts strongly. Although he throughout the interview expresses opinions on society and the government, he seems to want nothing to do with the work "politics":

> No, no, no, no, no, no politics. I had a friend who worked in the government who wanted to start a bank of seeds, to save them, and he asked if I could give them some. And I said no, if the government wants them, they can come here and pay for it, but I will not give it to you. But if another campesino wants it, yes of course, I can give it to him. But I want to see that they can use it and preserve it. (Fransisco, 2020)

I also ask Fransisco about his engagement in agricultural organisations or associations, and even though it is not as bad as political engagement, he answers that he would occasionally join meetings, but makes sure that I understand the he would not engage more, because what would he get out of it? He does not get a salary from them, and as for changing the society for the better he says he would not leave the farm to go and engage somewhere else. *"La lucha es que lo que hago"* – the fight is that what I do – i.e. the real fight is in the farm and the work he performs there.

This thought is mirrored in the way *CpA/S.L.* has focused their work to "fight" against the development in Jalisco with monocultural agriculture for export – by having reunions and practically teaching how to save, guard and sow seeds, and how to make composts and fertilise the soil properly. Eva, founder of *CpA/S.L.* sums up one discussion at the "Mujeres,

communidales, territorio y la vida digna" with a quotation from RED en la defensa del maiz: *"sembrar maíz nativo es un asunto político"* (To sow maize is a political issue/action).

6. Discussion

6.1 Commodities, anti-commodities and peasant resistance

The thoughts expressed by Fransisco and *CpA/S.L.* fits well in the framework of crops as commodities and anti-commodities. Fransisco explains how his farming is a way to "fight" for what he believes – actually the most essential way, more than that of engaging in agricultural organisations. María and Josefina also talk about a fight, that the only thing they can do is to continue to fight, and with this they are referring to continuing their lifestyle, sowing what they sow and not giving up no matter how hard it gets. *CpA/S.L.* continues this idea and talks specifically about maize as a crop with political meaning and how sowing it is a political action.

From these perspectives both the agricultural practices, such practice of saving seeds instead of buying, and the native maize varieties that the participants are using can be conceptualised as anti-commodities. Their counterpart - the commodities – are several things: the hybrid/transgenic maize seeds that are being used for modern agriculture, the practice of buying the seeds and additional pesticides and fertilizer, and the rapidly increasing products for export: berries (grown in greenhouses), avocados and agave (for tequila) - all being favoured by the neoliberal regime of Jalisco and Mexico at large. From listening to the worries of the participants and *CpA/S.L.*, the berries, avocado and agave are at present perceived as most the threatening and invasive commodities that the state of Jalisco is enforcing, with the visible consequences of big companies buying land and setting up plantations and green houses.

Unique for these crops (berries, avocado, agave) are that 1) they all are being exported by 50% (avocado) or more (berries, tequila), mainly to western/European countries and 2) they are luxury products, rather than products focused on food self-sufficiency. Hazareesingh (2015) expresses in the chapter of cotton in India that one reason to why the farmers did not start growing the cotton presented by the colonial rulers and continued to grow primarily local cotton and jowar (sorghum) food crops (anti-commodities), was their focus on sustainable food production in their climatically vulnerable region. We see in the interviews that food is mentioned frequently, both expressed in the main goal for most of the participants: to grow maize for the family to eat, and in the discussions about the quality of the food and the types

of food that can be made from maize. In a similar way to Hazareesingh's (2015) study, my participants seem to favour food security from locally adapted maize varieties, over trying to make money from export-products that need another type of agriculture (pesticides, greenhouses). The worries of *CpA/S.L.* also centre around the topic of food-security of the region. They are concerned that Jalisco's farmers increasingly grow luxury products for export instead of food available and beneficial for the local communities.

Hazareesingh (2015) also points out how the farmers preferred their local varieties because of their local adaptation. This preference for locally adapted varieties can be found in my interviews too, Fransisco especially mentions the risks of growing the maize not adapted to the local conditions, Itzel and her colleagues from "Guardianes de semillas" (keepers of seeds) have a goal to preserve the seeds that are adapted to the climate of the mountains and Josefina has experiences of bought seeds that fail in her conditions. Hazareesingh (2015) argues that one cannot separate that what is human from nature when analysing peasant communities – but rather we need to see them as one intertwined entity. He calls these relationships between human and nature, and the knowledge that humans have developed regarding the specific conditions of their local natures, "socio-natural forces", and he describes how these "socio-natural forces" hinder commodification because of the relationship the local people have with their surroundings and native crops.

We catch glimpses of these "socio-natural" powers in my study in how Fransisco describes his close relationship to his local seeds and how one of Itzels main objective is to conserve seeds adapted to conditions in the mountains. These "socio-natural" powers and their importance in the farmers' lives provide one explanation to why the peasants in my study has resisted the commodification. Other important factors for making a crop an anti-commodity are that the anti-commodities contain other values than purely economic (Hazareesingh and Maat, 2015). The major ones that have been mentioned in my results are the crops as bearers of tradition, history and culture.

Itzel stands out in the group of participants in the way that she relates to the anti-commodities. She is younger (38 years, around 25 years younger than the others), has a high educational degree (post-grad in environmental science) and she has been working for many years with other things, such as in health institutions. I found Itzel to be an interesting example of people not only *continuing* to sow their traditional maize seeds but also people *returning* to the practices, in new innovative ways. Some essays in Maat & Hazareesingh's (2015) work also give examples of situations where anti-commodities have emerged, or gained in importance,

when the commodities started to be enforced by the colonial power. Itzels work and experiences can be seen as actions of resistance against the neoliberal regime, by returning to the traditional sowing, and in a way reinventing it.

Sinha-Kerkhoff (2015) writes about a local tobacco variety as anti-commodity in colonial India and about the nationalist movement that during the 1920s spread to the rural parts of the country. As a part of this, a peasant movement emerged at the same time – with farmers protesting against colonial rule and the exploitive system in which farmers operated. He describes how the boycott of foreign products and companies became important for these movements, and especially how tobacco became a central target for the boycott – with great results for the movement. With this Sinha-Kerkhoff (2015) is illustrating how the anti-commodity of local tobacco, and commodity of foreign tobacco, became important symbols in a larger social movement – uniting people in actions.

Although there is no nationalist liberation movement in the context of my study, I still see similarities in the sense the traditional maize with all of its colours, and the traditional system in which it is grown, are symbols around which people unite. They are important symbols for the networks and communities working for example, in different ways with organic agriculture and indigenous rights issues. Traditional maize is used very frequently by CpA/S.B.L in their work, discussions, literature, pamphlets, stickers and art, for example are they handing out stickers with the encouragement to "do Milpa" – the traditional intercropping of maize, pumpkin, beans and chili. In the smaller context of Itzel's farming group we see it as well, how the traditional practices and the preservation of seeds unites people with similar goals, creating new communities, and possible in the future, movements.

Apart from the anti-commodities there are other actions of everyday resistance that can be spotted in the material, such as Fransisco's action of not complying by refusing to give seeds to the government when they asked for it, although he expresses to gladly give it to another peasant. Actions like this are, like Scott (1987) describes, simple, subtle expressions of resistance for the ones who do not afford or want to protest, but who still do not want to comply. *CpA/S.L.*'s conferences where the participants were actively encouraged to bring, share and start saving seeds and to teach others can also be seen as an act of everyday resistance.

One thing that is quite different for my thesis compared with other works using the concept of commodities and anti-commodities (e.g. Hazareesingh and Maat, 2015) is that it lacks the relation of colonial – colonialized. The ruling power in Mexico and Jalisco is not a colonial

foreign power in the traditional sense, and so, the relationship between the (non-indigenous) farmers in this study and "the ruling power" (the government of Jalisco and in extension the federal government of Mexico) is not as dramatic as e.g. how Hazareesingh (2015) describe colonial relations in India under British rule. This has practical aspects, for example, the government of Jalisco do not lack the local knowledge of natural conditions that the British did about Indian ecologies.

There are reasons though to argue that the relationship is quite similar to that of foreign colonial rule. Referring back at the work of Batalla (1996) and his concept of *México Profundo*, much of the rural, traditional Mexican population has an "Indian" culture and inheritance, much more than they have a "western", even though they no longer refer to themselves as Indian. Historically the rural Mexico was colonised and this is still alive in the collective memory. Hence, there are reasons to believe that the relationship between the ruling power (implementing neoliberalism and capitalism) and the participants in my study can be understood from frameworks originally developed for communities under colonization. Another interesting factor is that the berries, avocado and agave are all crops that are exported in a large scale to "the west" - US and Europe – their economic power thus in some ways causes the neoliberal Mexican agriculture, focused on making money from exports, to follow preferences and trends from Western powers. In some respects, this resembles the situation of a colonized country.

6.2 Autonomy and dependency

I have tried to illustrate above how the traditional maize, sowing and actions of seed selection, for the individuals and the collective in the organisation, can be seen as acts of resistance against the neoliberal ideology imposing modern agriculture and export in Jalisco. With this perspective we get a deeper understanding of the peasants' actions: why they do it, and what bigger meaning it may contain. These are interesting perspectives and concepts because they can make us see that the peasants are not only sowing their maize because they like being "conservative". There are other more fundamental reasons that these peasants' resist commodity maize even though it usually gives a higher yield. The keeping of local seed can be seen as a political resistance to modern agriculture focusing on capitalistic values, out of rhythm with their relationship with and care for nature and without focus on food-security. Because the peasants want to retain their autonomy and food-security they continue to save and sow their seeds.

We get an additional understanding of this when we apply the work of Batalla (1996) and his understanding of the resistance amongst people of *México Profundo*. Once again, the farmers are not rejecting seed of improved varieties and chemical fertilizers or pesticides primarily because they are conservative in their nature, but because these are objects that when applied involve a level of dependency on "the others" – which in turn limits the cultural space that has become so important to people in *México profundo,* with the collective history of having been colonized. To not save means to buy – and farmers adopting hybrid maize seeds need to buy them every year, and often also additional expensive inputs. This makes the farmer dependent on the market and the "outside world". The modern agriculture in general includes many aspects of dependency – on seeds, the seed-companies, inputs, foreign buyers and so on. According to Batalla (1996), this is one important explanation to why people in *México profundo* may resist "modern" innovations and continue with their own self-sufficient traditional system, even if it may not be the most economically rewarding.

An interesting observation from the interviews is that the participants do not seem to separate between different bought seeds. When we talk about buying seeds and bought seeds they do not make any notable distinction in their reasoning between OPV seeds, hybrid maize seeds and transgenic seeds but they rather talk about it as if all bought seeds are bad seeds, or at least seeds that they do not want. I get the impression that it is not necessarily the seeds in themselves that are the problem, even though some of the participants also give some actual reasons to why they would not want the hybrid or transgenic seeds, but rather the ideas that they stand for, and the act of buying ones seed and not saving. With the perspective of Batalla (1996) this makes sense – that a reason for not wanting to buy seeds is the dependency that comes with it.

According to Batalla (1996) the constant fight for autonomy is essential, and as already mentioned, autonomy is a present theme in the interviews – the wish to be able to continue with a farming that does not depend on "others", the wish to farm for the family's consumption and so on. I refer here to others as in people outside of the community or the same cultural circle (*México profundo),* since all participants expressed that they happily shared, received and exchanged seeds and experiences with other farmers similar to them. To several of them, autonomy, both the autonomy of the self and the one of the communities, is a central part of their wishing and visions for the future.

> I would want the whole word to conserve their own seeds. Or that we could go back in time… that the whole world would have their own maize, conserve and select their own seeds. (Xóchitl, 2020)

Fransisco forcefully expresses the wishes for a more independent future with a demand to the government: "*I want them* [the government] *to stay away from us. No nos chinge. Don't fuck with us.*"

7. Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate how small-scale farmers practicing organic agriculture in Jalisco, Mexico obtain their maize seeds and what values and challenges there are connected to this process. In the interviews the farmers expressed several non-economic reasons for sowing and saving their specific varieties of seeds. In different ways they expressed values of history and traditions connected to the seeds and the traditional practices, values connected to taste and texture and values of the human-nature relationships. These findings, in the political context of Mexico and Jalisco, leads me to argue that native maize seeds, and the process of saving them, used by the traditional farmers in rural Jalisco can be conceptualised as an anti-commodity- it is a form of active resistance against commodity agriculture, practiced, not through marches or songs, but through the everyday work in agriculture, where the focus is on preserving local varieties of maize. Furthermore, findings in the interviews align with the works of Batalla (1996) in the sense that autonomy, and the power over cultural space, is a central value in the process of obtaining seeds, and an explanation to why farmers expresses strong opposition to buying improved seed.

For future investigations I think it would be interesting to dive deeper into the importance of autonomy for rural farmers in Jalisco, and for example more profoundly compare it to the other values. In what other ways can the desire for autonomy explain farmers' choices? What findings could contradict the hypothesis that autonomy is a key driver in the keeping of local seed? Further on, a topic for research could be how these cultural aspects of the rural Mexico could positively impact the rural development programs lead by the state to become more effective and fitting to the context.

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Images

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Appendix 1

QUESTION GUIDE

1) Introduction / introductory, basic questions

Names, age, occupation. How big is the farm/land? What do you grow? How much of your income is from agriculture? Sell? For their own use?

2) Possible, introductory open question: Do you have a specific sort of maize that is your favourite? Why?

3) How do you obtain your seeds (maize)? Describe in detail how you usually do every year to get the seeds for planting next year.

A normal year. Which actors? The place/transport. How much is bought/saved? Costs? What choices do you make? Special knowledge required? Other ways used? Gifts? People ask for seeds? Laws that you know about?

4) Why do you save/buy/change? Why not the other options? (if several: which likes more. Why?)

Would buy/save if other rules/choices? Would you like to exchange seeds? Why/why not?

5) How did you learn about agriculture/seeds?

How do you/people get their information?

6) What do you do if you want to get a new variety of maize?

Motivation for it? Information?

7) How do other people react to the way you save seeds?

Positive/negative reactions? Would you want other to do like you?

8) What are the challenges in these processes? Negative/positive sides

Cost/affordability, need for subsidies? When something goes wrong? Better long time ago? Would need help from authorities?

9) Do you participate/have you participated in any organized meetings/organizations about seeds/access to seeds?

Why/why not? Why are they important? Is saving/exchanging seeds a topic you discuss in these meetings/organisations? Would you want to discuss it more?

10) Would you ever consider starting more commercial agriculture/buying commercial seeds? Why/why not?

Concluding question: Is there anything else you are thinking of that you would like to address? A question that I missed? Is there anything you would like to ask me?