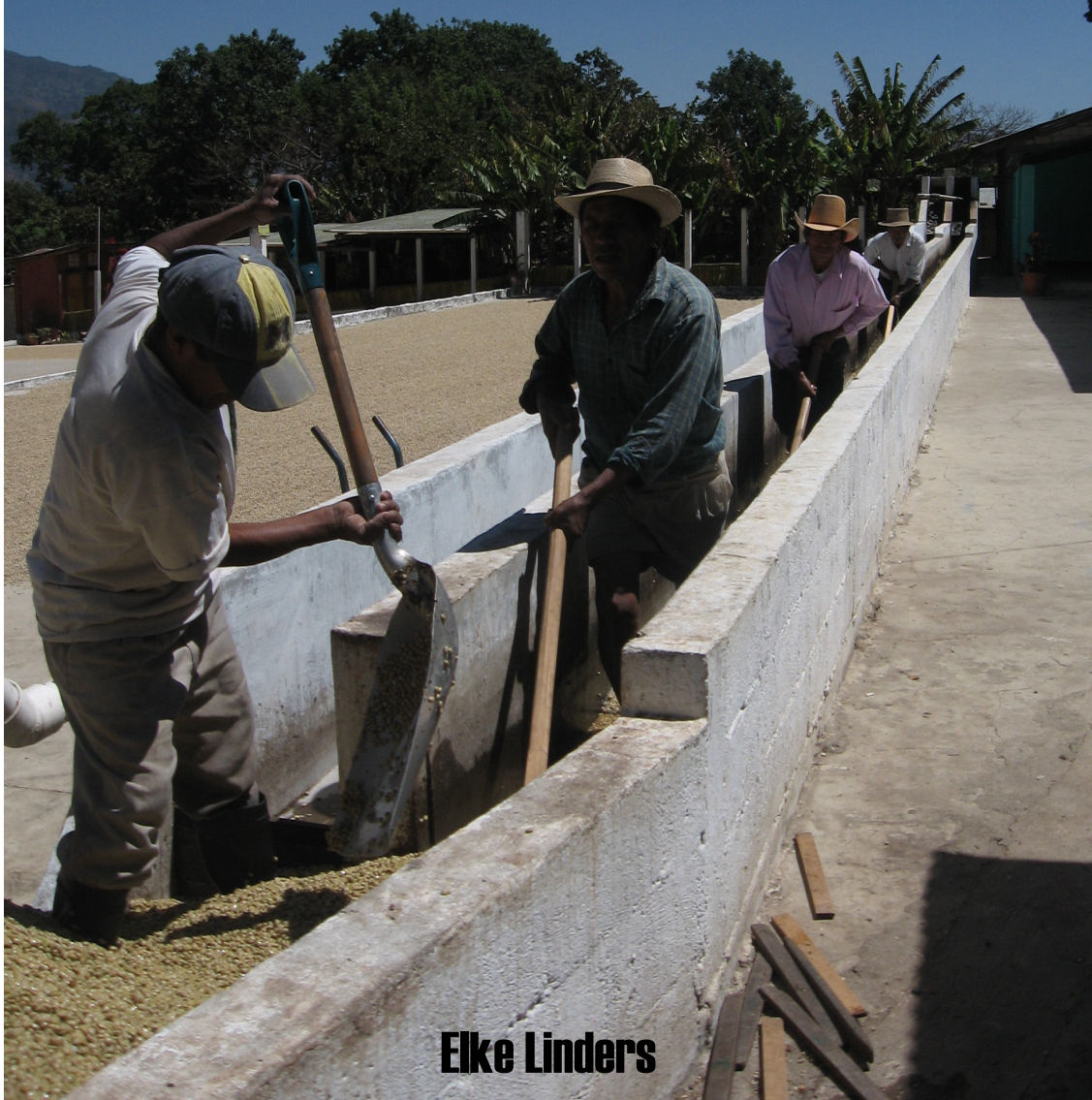


We are coffee farmers

Somos caficultores

Exploring coffee farmers' identities in San Juan La Laguna, Guatemala



Elke Linders

The picture on the cover shows four coffee farmers in their daily ritual of pushing the washed coffee out of the channels by which three of them walk after each other in a row through the channel while pushing forward a wooden board on a stick. A fourth coffee farmers stands at the end and has the task to shovel away the washed coffee.

Photo by: Elke Linders

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Elke Linders 3136906

linders.elke@gmail.com

Docent: Marc Simon Thomas

Contents

Foreword	V
Introduction	1
1. Theoretical Framework	5
1.1 Identity as a Dynamic and Situated Narrative	5
1.2 Indigenous Identity in Guatemala	7
1.3 Guatemala and Coffee	8
1.4 Fair Trade	9
2. San Juan La Laguna	11
3. The coffee production process	15
3.1 Farmer in the field	15
3.2 Farmer in the cooperation	16
3.3 The cooperation: La Voz	18
3.4 History	19
3.5 Bad Administration	21
4. Being Organized	25
4.1 Reasons to join	25
4.2 The prototype-member	26
4.3 An insufficient income	28
5. Organic production: Outside demand or cultural heritage?	33
5.1 Everybody wants organic	33
5.2 Hard Work	36
Conclusion	39
Literature	43
Appendix 1: Organigrama Funcional Cooperativa La Voz	45
Appendix 2: Construction of the coffee price in La Voz; an example	47
Appendix 3: Reflection	49
Appendix 4: Resumen en Español	53

Foreword

The thesis that lies in front of you is the proud result of my baptism of fire into the practice of doing anthropological fieldwork. I would not have been able to pull this through without the hospitality, helpfulness and kindness of the coffee farmers of La Voz que Clama en el Desierto to whom I owe millions of thanks. I would especially like to thank Andres for taking his time and having a lot of patience while introducing me into the world of the cooperation, and Lucas for always being there willing to chat and have coffee with me. Furthermore I would like to thank Juana and Pedro who provided a warm and kind nest to come home to which made my stay very pleasant. Thank you Pedro for introducing me to some of the coffee farmers in town and for the interesting conversations we had about the people and the history of San Juan. Having Polle in the field with me was a joyful privilege of which I am aware and very thankful. I would also like to thank my parents who have always been very supportive of me and made this research financially realizable. In this respect I would also like to express my appreciation of the scholarships that I received from the University of Utrecht and Trajectum. Last but definitely not least I would like to thank my supervisor Marc Simon Thomas for guiding me through the entire research process with his continuous enthusiasm and constructive criticism.

Introduction

“Here we have to maintain ourselves with coffee, so we have to fight.”

Cristóbal Mendoza Mendoza 13-03-09

When you get up in the morning and have your habitual strong cup of coffee to get ready for your stressful day, does the thought of where this product came from ever cross your mind? Do you ever realize that someone somewhere far away is working very hard to grow and harvest this coffee, but quite possibly is not able to generate enough money with it to send his children to school?

Since coffee farmers are at the bottom of the production chain they bear most of the costs, even though they are the ones that own the coffee and the farming-knowledge. On top of this the market for coffee is very insecure. In a reaction to such inequalities, Fair Trade movements have arisen to combat them and return a larger share of the product value to the producer (Lyon 2007). One of the Fair Trade Labeling Organizations' (FLO) prerequisites for certification is that the farmers have to be small scale producers that are organized into democratic and transparent organizations. This requirement is based on the presumption that such organizations stand stronger in the market and can express a collective voice (FLO 2005). But how do the farmers themselves feel about this? I think that social movements such as Fair Trade, who are committed to improve the situations of marginalized people, have to be even more careful not to take on a paternalistic role and impose their ethnocentric visions upon others in the form of prerequisites for Fair Trade certification.

Because of this I am interested in farmers' opinions about being organized into a group and will link this to the way in which they think and talk about themselves. The research question that I want to answer in this thesis therefore is: What impact does being member of a coffee cooperation have on the identity of a small scale coffee farmer in San Juan La Laguna, Guatemala? In order to answer this question some information on the coffee production process and the researched coffee cooperation is set out first. After, the opinions and experiences of the farmers about being member of an organization are discussed to then focus on one of the primary aspects of their group identity, namely organic production.

By answering this research question I hope to add to the existing knowledge about local perceptions on coffee production and organizations, which might be useful for Fair Trade movements who should have the wish to fit into the daily lives and wishes of the farmers as good as possible. With regard to their own identities, the farmers that I have spoken to referred to themselves with concepts such as *campesinos*, *farmers*; *pequeños*, little ones; *caficultores*, coffee farmers; *Juaneros*,

inhabitants of San Juan, and *indígenas*, indigenous people.¹ Sometimes these labels vary depending on the context. When I talk about small scale coffee farmers I refer both to farmers that work their own fields and do not need permanently hired workers, as to famers that have small plots of lands on which they let another family work that in its turn does not need to hire more workers. Both might seasonally hire additional workers however, for example during the harvest period.

This thesis is based on eight weeks of anthropological, qualitative, research in San Juan La Laguna, Guatemala, from February 22nd until April 15th of 2009. During these eight weeks I almost every day visited the local coffee cooperation La Voz que Clama en el Desierto, where I was welcome to observe and participate in the coffee production process. Here I had a lot of informal conversations with different members, as well as interviews ranging from semi-structured to open. A lot of observation and initial contact making happened in the cooperation when the farmers came in to deliver their coffee. I have also participated many times in spreading out and moving the coffee for drying, as well as packing it into jute bags afterwards. During these moments there was a lot of space for informal conversations with the coffee farmers in the cooperation. Other occasions of observation and participation existed out of joining coffee farmers in their fields to pick coffee, seeing how the compost is made, observing the machines working in the cooperation to clean the coffee and being present at the General Assembly. With the help of Pedro, my guest father, I found a few other members as well that did not show up regularly at the cooperation and with whom I mainly met in their homes. An integral part of the first few weeks was raising my Spanish to a level that was sufficient to have decent conversations and interviews.

The thesis is build up out of a theoretical framework, a context in which the research location is introduced and three chapters based on empirical research done in the field, followed by the conclusion. In the first part of the theoretical framework, using amongst others the work of Halleh Ghorashi (2001), 'Ways to Survive, Battles to Win: Iranian Women Exiles in the Netherlands and the US', which contains a profound section on identity, I discuss the concept of identity and the implications of conceptualizing identity as dynamic and multiple, but also as restricted by social frameworks. With reference to arguments from Hogg and Terry (2000) something will be said about the interaction between *group* and *personal* identity. Then, heavily drawing upon the recent and insightful work of the anthropologist Elisabet Rasch (2008), 'Representing Mayas; Indigenous Authorities and the Local Politics of Identity in Guatemala', a short overview will be provided of the relevant history of indigenous peoples in Guatemala. The final part of the theoretical framework introduces the reader to the place that the coffee industry occupies in the Guatemalan society and

¹ Based on expressions of amongst others: Jose Canajay Cholotio 29-03-09, Informal Conversation; Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vasquez 13-03-09, Interview; Bernardino Mendoza Mendoza 11-03-09, Interview; Cristóbal Mendoza Mendoza 13-03-09, Interview.

includes a section on Fair Trade which strongly draws upon the works of Sick (2008) and Lyon (2007) who both have been conducting research amongst coffee farmers in respectively Central America and Guatemala. This part on Fair Trade is included in the theory because the coffee cooperation formerly was certificated as a Fair Trade organization and its history and present are strongly entangled with this. The research reports of both Sick and Lyon provide a very useful discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Fair Trade movement and also extensively report on local experiences with the Fair Trade network.

Chapter three is the first chapter based on empirical data and describes the coffee production process from the field to the cooperation. Based on the bulk of data gathered from talking to many coffee farmers living in San Juan, an example farmer, named Juan, was born to guide the reader through this first chapter. The chapter will also focus on the inner structure of the cooperation and its history including the notorious bad administration. The fourth chapter explores the reasons for farmers to join the cooperation and the benefits of membership, to then focus on the value that farmers attach to being part of a group. With reference to the theory from Hogg and Terry (2000) about the prototype ideal member, the different obligations and responsibilities of membership that the farmers identify will be set out. Focus will also be on the price for coffee because even though this is being mentioned as one of the reasons to join the cooperation, they also feel that it is too little and that they cannot sufficiently maintain their families with it. The fifth chapter will focus more specifically on one of the key characteristics of their group, namely producing organically, which seems to form an important element of their group identity. A seemingly paradoxical finding will be portrayed between their expressions of high valuation of organic coffee and their personal behavior. The source of their appreciation of organic coffee will also be questioned to conclude that it is a mixture of outside demands imposed by international buyers and tourists, and an attempt and wish to go back to ancestral modes of production. This chapter will also pay attention to the notion of hard work, because this is where the coffee farmers associate organic coffee production with as well. Finally the conclusion will bring back together the relevant information and conclusions from the different chapters to provide an answer to the central research question. Here I will argue that the identities of small scale coffee farmers in San Juan are influenced by their group identity and the expectations and obligations that group membership creates. This group identity in turn is influenced by outside demands that value organic production as well as by a wish to return to more natural production modes practiced by their ancestors. It could be argued that the farmers make these outside influences their own by translating them into a process and a wish of going back to their roots in order to give these influences a meaningful place in their lives.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1 Identity as a Dynamic and Situated Narrative

The concept of identity is rather vague and complex and its meaning(s) and definition are contested. In this section, drawing upon theories and opinions from various scholars, I will try to define identity to make it a workable concept within this thesis. A useful starting point is provided by Epstein (1987:101) who argues that identity is primarily a 'concept of synthesis'. Identity could be seen as the process that an individual experiences while trying to incorporate his different roles and statuses, and his various understandings, into a consistent self image. Ghorashi (2001: 24-28) compares this consistent self image with a narrative. The narrative that an individual makes of his identity offers him an opportunity to construct his identity within a story that helps him to make sense of his environment. As long as this narrative makes sense to the person, it is not very important whether or not the different aspects of his or her identity are contradictory or perceivably incompatible. Erikson (1968) notes that identities are never formed as static or unchangeable 'things', as an essentialist approach would suggest. Nowadays the constructivist vision on identity, in which it is acknowledged that identity is dynamic and does not evolve in isolation, prevails. During a life span 'normative contextual transitions', such as starting to go to school, having a baby or other significant turning points or stressful events impact upon the self-concept of the individual (Bosma & Kunnen 2001). Different contextual aspects impact upon the notion of self in so far as they have particular meaning for a specific person. The meaning that a person ascribes to the context, the perceived context, therefore is of key significance. Bosma and Kunnen (2001: 18-21) argue that in this manner the context becomes one of the features of the personality of the individual, instead of something that can be measured on its own. This would make individuals active participants in their own development, instead of passive receivers of contextual influences.

The agency of people to shape their own identity is however limited. Even though the notion of multiple identities might imply that individuals can freely choose who they are, this is not the case. Ghorashi (2001) writes that change in identity is always a 'situated change' that has certain continuous components. The formation and reformation of identity is influenced by both past and present experiences, and future expectations. These experiences and expectations provide a social framework, a set of borders within which individuals can actively shape their identities.

Furthermore, not all aspects of identity formation are conscious. It is for example very debatable whether past experiences impact personal choices in a conscious way. Many previous events in the life of a person create preferable and habitual structures that are no longer thought of as history, but incorporated as a second nature. In this manner they form a largely unconscious social framework that shapes the behaviour of people in certain directions (Ghorashi 2001). Wilson (1995:

12) argues that such historical structures also shape collective identities and bind individuals to an imagined community by means of a 'shared past and a common future'.

Another restriction that individuals face in the formation of their identity is the fact that identities are always gained through a process of interaction with others (Berger & Berger 1972: 62). Only when an identity is affirmed by others, it can become real for the person involved. Therefore individual identity is relative to the identity of others (Erikson 1968) and persons are set apart by a certain pattern of commonalities with and differences from specific others (Sökefeld 1999: 419). Furthermore, external identifications which are imposed on the individual by dominant cultures and discourses specific to space and time can contradict personal identifications and influence which identities become dominant. The combination of past and present discourses situates the agency of the individual to choose (Ghorashi 2001: 26-27).

As noted above, individual identity is relative to the identity of others. Individuals obtain part of their identity and sense of self from the organization or group of which they are a member (Hogg & Terry 2000: 121). According to Social Identity Theory the self-concept is made up of personal identity, which entails individual characteristics such as physical traits, interests and capabilities, and social identity which entails valued group membership(s) (Ashfort & Mael 1989: 21). Ashfort and Mael (1989: 21) state that a person's own position in society is generated and defined by structures of social classification. Individuals are inclined to classify themselves and others into different social categories, such as group membership, religion, and ethnicity, which allows them to organize their social environment and place themselves within it (Tajfel & Turner 1985, cited in Ashfort & Mael 1989: 21). Members of an organization match their individual characteristics such as race, gender and ethnicity with those of other members and apparent similarities are thought to improve corporate behaviour (Hogg & Terry 2000: 127).

According to Hogg and Terry (2000:123) individuals categorize themselves into groups by self-identifying with a certain valued prototype within the group. This prototype is an abstracted blend from actual characteristics of group members. By identifying with this prototype members create a distinction between their own and other groups, and they incorporate group identity and membership into the notion of self. Furthermore, by prescribing a set of behaviours and beliefs, such an identification with a prototype gives security and meaning to a person's life because he knows how to act and what to expect from his material and social environment. According to Ashfort and Mael (1989: 22) a person can gain self-esteem by identifying and complying with these prescribed behaviours and beliefs. Group membership, or social identity, thus forms an important and integral part of personal identity.

1.2 Indigenous Identity in Guatemala

In the section above we saw that identity is bordered by a social framework made up from present and past experiences. This section shall now focus on the Guatemalan context relevant to indigenous identity formation, mainly drawing upon the work of Elisabet Rasch (2008). It will touch upon historical and present situations in order to provide a background against which the identity of local coffee farmers in San Juan La Laguna can be placed.

In Guatemala, indigenous Maya identity can be seen as shaped by a set of borders and influences. During old and recent history, actors such as the state, guerilla forces, the Maya movement, churches and the international community have conceptualized indigenous people in Guatemala in different, stereo-typifying ways by assigning various traits and qualities to them. Because of this, there now exists a wide range of meanings and imaginations of what Maya or indigenous stands for (Rasch 2008). One important way to 'decide' ones ethnic identity has been for a long time, and sometimes still is, educational level. Indigenous peoples are though to be little educated, and little educated people are conceptualized as being indigenous and subordinated. For indigenous people education is associated with upwards mobility and development. Spanish literacy is therefore seen as a skill that could help them escape their marginalized position. Indigenous language and dress are important cultural indicators (Rasch 2008). A general image that was ascribed to indigenous peoples in Guatemala included characteristics such as politically excluded, isolated, economically deprived, backward and drunk (Rasch 2008: 87). Along with this there was the general idea that in the end the Maya would assimilate into the mass of the ladino's after they had left their communities and stopped being indigenous. This general assumption was proved wrong when economical and social opportunities for Maya came, but they did not loose their Mayan identity, nor became ladino. Some even began to ascribe more value to their cultural heritage (Rasch 2008: 80). Even though identity within a community is strongly connected to its geographical area and the spoken language, leaving the community does not mean loosing Mayaness. According to Rasch (2008: 134) traveling Maya's still hold on to their roots and some even try to construct a 'unifying Mayan identity' by making use of (re)invented traditions as well as real continuities. In dominant discourse this agency of indigenous peoples in their ongoing struggle to maintain a sense of community and hold on to the idea of a unified Mayaness was neglected (Wilson 1995: 313). Mayas have rejected the negative label that ladino's always put on them, but even though identities are constructed, history can be rewritten and traditions invented, history does impose restrictions on the creation of identity and its expressions (Wilson 1995).

According to Rasch (2008) the enhanced amount of indigenous organizing and the materialization of a Maya Movement that called out for indigenous and universal citizenship rights for the indigenous

people did book some progress. The general notion of Guatemala as a homogenous nation-state of Ladinos changed into the acceptance of the notion of a multicultural nation with multiple languages. This was a serious change away from the past when Guatemala was pictured without indigenous people. The final outcome of this lobby was the Accord on Identity in 1995 (Accord on the Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Population (AIDPI)), when the indigenous peoples were finally recognized as 'one of the sectors that could negotiate', and thus gained a place at the negotiation table. This accord recognized the multicultural nature of Guatemalan society and the right of the indigenous population to have their own governance systems, follow indigenous rule, and to occupy seats in governmental institutions (Handy 2000: 5). The cultural rights that the accord recognizes are for example the right to use Maya traditional dress, names, language, and spirituality. Even though the accord was met with resistance, it was the first time that Maya people were subject of a national program and gained a voice in the decision making. The contemporary Maya Movement thinks of the accord as a means to fight racism and have the realization of the accord on identity as their key objective (Rasch 2008: 78-88).

1.3 Guatemala and Coffee

Coffee became the most important export product of Guatemala in the late 1800's. Subsequently, it also became the basis of prosperity and the establishment of social status. The production of coffee was a key factor in the changing division of labor in Guatemala into a way of production more closely related to capitalist ideologies. As demand for coffee in the North grew, the work became tougher for workers in the South (Lyon 2007).

Since coffee is Guatemala's key export commodity, changes in the world market for coffee have a major impact on the nation. Guatemala is the fifth leading exporter of coffee in the world; twenty percent of all export incomes is obtained through coffee. Recently however, new producers such as Vietnam are starting to enter the market and some countries in Latin America are overproducing. These new developments have led to very low international coffee prices and subsequently to lower incomes for producers in Guatemala. The National Coffee Association (ANACAFE) has estimated that while in 2000 Guatemala exported 6.3 million bags of coffee, this number only counted for 5.3 million bags in 2001. Since these relatively recent changes in the international coffee market are structural, the drop in prices is expected to be lasting (The World Bank 2004: 86). According to the ENCOVI (Living Standards Measurement Survey) eleven percent of rural Guatemalan households produce coffee. For many rural households, coffee farming is an important basis of income; an estimated 140,000 rural households obtain their earnings through coffee production, more than 75 percent of them are poor (The World Bank 2004: 88). About 200,000 people are estimated to be

employed in coffee producing permanently. In harvest season, this amount climbs to 500,000. A large share of the rural population will thus be concerned with the crisis in the coffee sector. It is highly possible that, when they are not entirely pushed out of business, some coffee farmers have to severely reduce their demand for workers because of lower incomes (The World Bank 2004).

1.4 Fair Trade

In today's world market it usually are the small-scale farmers that live insecure lives because they are both dependent on the success of their harvest and on fluctuations in commodity prices. In response to this disparity a Fair Trade movement arose in the mid-twentieth century in order to challenge conventional markets and their hegemonic and exploitative features. This alternative trade movement is mainly aimed at securing a fair living wage to marginalized producers by returning a bigger part of the market value of the product to them (based on FINE definition in Redfen & Snedker 2002).² The movement directs its attention to small scale farmers who are organized in democratic independent associations that follow recently established ecological goals (FLO 2005). The movement acts on the believe that such transparent organizations ensure individual producers with stronger economies since they are thought to be able to express a collective voice in the market place. It also acts on the presumption that these organizations include more marginal producers since they give equal voting power to their members irrespective of land size or gender (Sick 2008). Various researches however, point to both positive and negative experiences with the Fair Trade movement. One of the key benefits of Fair Trade certification is the higher and guaranteed price for the product; this is particularly a critical component of Fair Trade for commodities such as coffee which have unstable markets (Lyon 2007). Sick (2008) notes that higher and more stable prices provide hope for many producers to earn wages that are sufficient to sustain themselves and to gain the resources to improve circumstances for their families and communities. The long-term economical partnership between buyer and producer that is aimed at is acknowledged as an important benefit for producers in various researches as well. Lyon (2007) argues that such a relationship between formerly marginalized producers and powerful international cooperations can provide the former with political security and legitimacy. She continues to argue that this access to the international market allows producers to circumvent manipulative local buyers and other national economic and political obstacles. Research however, has shown that demand for Fair Trade is too little and most producer organizations still have to sell a large amount of their coffee on the conventional market (Sick 2008). Several scholars (Taylor 2002, Lyon 2007, Sick 2008) write that the long-term contact between buyers and producer groups could allow for the

² FINE brings together the Fair Trade Labelling Organization (FLO), the International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT), the Network of European World Shops (NEWS) and the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA).

latter to gain social and human capital, in the form of organizational expertise and communication skills, which can possibly make the producers more self-assured when they deal with buyers that are non-Fair Trade as well. Over the last years however, scholars have started to question topics such as economic efficiency, sustainability and equality in Fair Trade projects (Sick 2008: 198). While the fair economic relationship between buyer and producers is one of the main principles of Fair Trade, studies in multiple locations have shown that many producers conceptualize Fair Trade as access to the market or as a form of international assistance instead of as a fair economic partnership (Lyon 2007: 257).

Finally, according to Sick (2008), the guaranteed minimum Fair Trade price is not always the highest price offered at the market. Even though the Fair Trade movement tried to establish an alternative market, it cannot work totally outside the structure of the conventional commodity market, nor sufficiently compete with it. More and more large companies are searching for higher quality coffee and are willing to pay more as a result of growing competition in the global coffee market. Sick continues to argue however that small scale coffee farmers could be able to profit from this competition because their Fair Trade certificate can provide them with the status of being good and wanted suppliers which gives them a more stable position in this niche-market.

In this theoretical framework I have provided some background information and theories on identity, Fair Trade, and indigenous identity and coffee production in Guatemala. I have explained that the way in which contextual aspects impact upon the identity of individuals is dependent upon the way in which individuals give meaning to these contextual aspects. And we have also seen that group identity forms an integral part of personal identity. In order to find out how being member of an organization impacts upon the identity of coffee farmers I will thus have to explore the meanings that they ascribe to being a member of the group. We will get back to these questions in the upcoming chapters, but in the next chapter we will first take a closer look at the research location San Juan La Laguna; the context in which the research took place and in which the researched coffee farmers live their lives.

2. San Juan La Laguna

On the shores of the largest lake in Guatemala, Lago Atitlan, lies a small idyllic town called San Juan La Laguna. Arriving by boat from Panajachel it is not hard to understand the reasonable amount of tourists that visit here; through the cane that dances in the wind while gently moving the water, the shape of a little quay takes form, framed in a background of tropical plants and impressive high mountains. The bright red coloured *tuc-tuc*'s which are the local way of transportation are already waiting in line on the steep road that leads up into town. A number of art galleries that sell typical paintings of, amongst others, coffee and market scenes as seen from above which they call 'birds view', flank each side of the road. As is immediately made clear to the visitor when he arrives at the quay by means of a large billboard, San Juan La Laguna is 'the place where the Tz'utujil live'. The Tz'utujil are one of the many Maya groups that live in Guatemala. Their language is called Tz'utujil as well and San Juan La Laguna is one of the five towns surrounding the lake where they speak Tz'utujil.³ Most people also speak Spanish, since this is the official state language which is used in schools and organizations. The inhabitants are mainly Catholic but there are also some Protestants and people with other religions. Mayan *costumbres* are said to be practiced still as well, but only by a small percentage of the inhabitants and there is a certain mysticism involved with this topic. There is a lot of youth in the town and, subsequently there are a lot of schools; from primary schools to professional education. Education is a highly valued good amongst the spoken population. The streets of the town which host benches and waste bins, a very uncommon sight in Guatemala, look very clean and the one-floor-level houses are painted in bright colours. The many murals that typify the street image give an artistic feeling to the town. When one leaves these main streets, the rural identity of the town becomes evident, and unfortunately the waste problem springs in the eye; the coffee plantations that lie directly besides the roads are filled with plastic garbage. The streets of the town are constantly filled with people going to and coming from one of the small shops or their plots of lands, carrying axes or wood for their stoves which they have gathered in the mountains. Most inhabitants have their own land where they do subsistence farming. Besides subsistence farming many *Juaneros*, as they call themselves and their fellow villagers, own coffee plantations which determine the look of the mountains surrounding San Juan. Once you set foot outside of the village, you encounter the coffee plantations that cover the mountains as far as the eye can see. The people live in the town, but have their plantations in the hills. Some have to walk up to two hours to reach their plots. Besides this many *Juaneros* have other jobs such as owning a little store, a bakery or construction work.

³ The other four towns are: San Pablo, San Marcos, San Pedro and Santiago Atitlan.

Tourism is growing in the little town which provides other kinds of work such as weaving and painting; there are over seven weaving shops and about five art galleries in the little village. The town mainly attracts the older, richer type of tourist, but also a lot of volunteers and people that are more interested in natural and 'authentic' cultural aspects. These kinds of tourists that the town attracts might have its impact on the identity of the town, and vice versa, since many restaurants and hotels promote a natural and ecological look with their signs on the street. The few billboards in town invite the visitors to come and see how the women of San Juan use all kinds of plants and trees as colorants for their threads. The coffee tour that the organic coffee cooperation offers forms another attraction to the tourists and source of income for the inhabitants.



Photo 1: Mural painted on one of the houses in San Juan, portraying people picking coffee By: Elke Linders

Juaneros like to make a comparison with the kind of tourists that they attract and those that their neighbouring town San Pedro does. According to them San Pedro attracts the 'bad' kind of tourists that only want to buy drugs and have a bad influence on the town. In contrast, San Juan attracts the conscious 'good' tourists that are interested in nature and culture, and are willing to help the inhabitants of the town. There is also a general opinion that the people in San Juan are very open

and that you should not be shy to ask people things, which they link to the fact that their town was not hit very hard by the war. San Pedro, in contrast again, is said to have been hit very hard by the war. There many people lost their lives during the war which is why they are though to be more closed because of fear for strangers.⁴ There is a general tendency to warn tourists about the surrounding villages in which it is thought to be less safe. Some people say that thieves from other towns come at night to rob things form the houses of the *Juaneros*.

In earlier times many people harvested tomatoes and onions in the region. But when some people started with coffee and others saw that it was beneficial they started to produce coffee as well. Now 'coffee is where the money is at'. In San Juan they produce organic as well as conventional coffee.⁵ Almost everybody owns a bit of coffee and there used to be a tradition that children join their fathers to work the fields when they are young. When they become older they inherit some of their father's plots to start their own agriculture. A lot of the coffee is sold in 'the street' to 'coyotes'. These so called intermediaries often sell it to people that own the facilities to process the coffee. The buyers in the street usually do not distinguish between conventional and organic coffee, they buy it for the same price and it is meant for local and regional consumption. A number of farmers that produce organic coffee have united themselves in an organization which exports the coffee to foreign countries.

This cooperation, La Voz que Clama en el Desierto, commonly named La Voz, is the only coffee cooperation in the town and in the close region. The cooperation processes the coffee fruits from its 125 members into dried *pergamino* coffee.⁶ Previously the cooperation was certified as a Fair Trade organization and financed social projects for the town, but about two year ago they lost this name because of troubles within the administration. At the time of research they were suspended from Fair Trade but the board of directors was thinking about reapplying again. Over the years the cooperation has received multiple loans and gift from international cooperations and organizations. Last year for example Intermom Oxfam, from Spain, paid the salary of the people that worked in the office. The organization of the cooperation seemed to be in line with Fair Trade requirements, but the main obstacle that was identified was the large application fee that FLO asks for membership. The time when the cooperation had the Fair Trade certificate was for many interviewed members strongly associated with the problems that happened within the administration in this specific time and which caused their suspension. Almost everybody in town owns a bit of coffee, and since the cooperation has a lot of members and San Juan is very small, the cooperation occupies an important place in the town.

⁴ Pedro Cruz Ixtamer Ujpán 11-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁵ Conventional coffee refers to coffee which is produced with the use of chemical fertilizers.

⁶ *Pergamino* is coffee that is clean (because it has been washed) and dried. It still has a little layer of skin around it that has to be removed with the use of special machines. The coffee bean that is ready to be toasted is called *oro*.

3. The coffee production process

3.1 Farmer in the field

Juan sets out at eight o'clock in the morning to go to one of his coffee fields that lie out of town in the mountains. At this time in the morning the path that leads from the village up into the mountains to the coffee fields, is filled with villagers walking uphill. Men, boys and a few women. Some of them walk in groups or are accompanied by dogs, all carry a small backpack and a plastic basket. Juan wears thick, chic, seemingly warm trousers and a light coloured long-sleeved blouse. A sombrero rests on his head; a machete hangs down his waist in a brown leather holster adjusted to his belt. Juan carries a little black radio with a rope around his neck. On the foot of the hill he buys two oranges from a women vendor in the street. In about half an hour Juan reaches his plantation and ties his basket around his waist with a piece of rope. He hangs the radio in the tree under which he puts his backpack and under the shade of the coffee trees he starts picking the coffee beans with his hands. After a few minutes Domingo, his nephew, arrives. Domingo, who wears jeans, a long sleeved T-shirt filled with holes and a baseball cap, helps his uncle when he is not in school. Together they pick the dark red coloured fruits from the coffee trees while avoid picking the green immature fruits. When the coffee sits high in the tree they pull the top down so that they can manoeuvre their hands around the plant's branches to release the coffee so that it falls into their baskets. They systematically work the field, even though the borders of the coffee plantation would seem unidentifiable to an outsider since the entire mountain is covered in adjoining plantations. The plants are covered in dust and little insects, and after a while Juan and Domingo are covered in them as well. Now and then they empty their full baskets in large plastic bags near the radio, which they bring to the cooperation at the end of the day. After a few hours they take a rest and sit down on some of the empty bags. With their grimy hands and the machete, they eat the oranges that Juan had bought that morning. Around four o'clock in the afternoon all the red fruits have disappeared from the plantation and Juan and his nephew each carry one of the filled bags to the cooperation on their backs.

Harvest time in San Juan La Laguna lasts about three months and usually starts around December, this year is started somewhere in January which is why it lasted up until mid-April. The mountains surrounding Lake Atitlan are at the highest altitude possible to grow coffee.⁷ At the lower, warmer spots of the mountain, the harvest finishes faster than high up in the mountain because the coffee matures faster there.⁸ After the harvest period the oldest parts of the trees have to be cut to give way to new branches for the coffee of next year. They call this cleaning.⁹ The farmers start making their organic compost just before the rain season comes and the harvest season is over, they apply it one time a year when the rain starts.¹⁰ The compost is made out of the skin of the coffee plant, animal excrement, organic garbage and a few other ingredients. According to Federico, making the compost is easy; the difficulty lies in the transportation and application of the compost.¹¹ Every single coffee plant needs a certain amount of compost which has to be adjusted by making four

⁷ Coffee farmer from Santa Cruz, member of La Voz, 25-02-09, Informal Conversation

⁸ Lucas Bizarro Yojcom 16-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁹ Félix Anselmo Cholotio García 09-03-09, Informal Conversation

¹⁰ Pedro Cruz Ixtamer Ujpan 05-03-09, Interview

¹¹ Federico Mendoza Mendoza 07-04-09, Interview

holes next to the plant. This translates into a huge amount of compost that has to be transported to the coffee plantations that lie far away and often are not reachable by car. The compost and the transportation of it are reported to be fairly expensive and have to be paid for by the farmers themselves.

Another significant aspect of the organic production process is maintaining the shade. The coffee plants are protected from the sun by different types of trees that all have their different lengths. Among these are lime, peach and avocado trees, which are also used by the weaver women in town as natural colorants.¹² But since the coffee plants need a certain amount of sun as well, these trees have to be controlled in their growth. In order to separate the organic coffee from their conventional, chemical neighbors, tunnel shaped holes of twenty centimeters deep are dug in the ground between the plantations.¹³ Those farmers that produce their coffee organically and are a member of the coffee cooperation in town are helped by Félix, the so called 'monitor of the field'. On behalf of the cooperation he checks whether the farmers work their fields according to the organic guidelines and he also helps them with maintaining the shade, growing, cutting, cleaning and making the compost.¹⁴ Félix in his turn is checked by an organic labeling organization. Last year they came twice to check the quality of the coffee. A woman looked at twenty-five pieces of land per day, she checked all of them. She looked at the quality of the compost, how it is made, and how the shade is maintained.¹⁵

Although a lot of farmers in San Juan work on their own coffee fields, it is important to realize that a reasonable amount of people hire others to do so and occupy different jobs themselves. They do however strongly emphasize, as we will see later, the fact that they did grow up in the fields with their fathers. When they do not have to work in the weekends they go and check their plantations and say that they like cultivating coffee, and other crops, and that they enjoy visiting their fields.¹⁶

3.2 Farmer in the cooperation

Two people enter the terrain of the cooperation through the driveway. While they are approaching one can distinguish a slightly older man and a youth. The man is wearing an orange blouse and a brown sombrero, the youngster is dressed in jeans and a long sleeve; it is Juan with his nephew Domingo. They walk bended over forwards, the straps on their foreheads carry the loads on their backs a little, but their backs bear the main load. Serious concentrated faces covered in dust and shining from sweat, their cloths stick to their soaked bodies. They bend trough their knees and lean backwards to drop the heavy bags by throwing their heads in the air and releasing the strap from their foreheads. They use the little energy they have left to lift the bags those few centimeters above the ground onto the scale. The

¹² Cristóbal Mendoza Mendoza 13-03-09, Interview

¹³ Félix Anselmo Cholotio García 09-03-09, Informal Conversation (while walking through the coffee plantations)

¹⁴ Mariano Ujpan Vaskes 13-03-09, Interview

¹⁵ Félix Anselmo Cholotio García 09-03-03, Informal Conversation (while walking through the coffee plantations)

¹⁶ Pedro Nicolas Ixtamer Ujpan 16-06-09, Informal Conversation

young man who manages the weighing device moves the weights by tapping it to the left with his index finger; a little more, a little more, a little less, a little more, until the iron arm has found his right balance. Two quintal.¹⁷ The young man makes note of the delivered amount and hands the paper to Juan who checks it and puts it away in the left pocket of his trousers. Juan and Domingo lift the bag from the scale and walk towards the little steep ramp that leads up to a large basin. The man that operated the weighing device helps them with the last part, to lift the bag up a little higher into the basin. Slowly the faces soften and while Domingo climbs on top of the coffee basin to untie the bag, the cheerful chatting and joking with the other farmers present at the cooperation starts. The bag is being bottomed; the coffee has arrived.¹⁸

Depending on the size, amount and distance of their fields, the farmers arrive in the coffee cooperation between one and seven in the afternoon. Entire families arrive in the cooperation to deliver their coffee, some enter the cooperation through the driveway; others enter through the back entrance which arrives at a small dust road which leads directly into town. Most farmers have no other means than to carry the large bags of coffee on their backs, using straps that are tied around their foreheads to carry the weight a little. Some have a horse that can carry two or three bags for them. A few are the fortunate owners of a pick-up truck; others with large amounts of coffee have to hire cars for transport. Another few arrive in tuc-tuc, the common local transportation which can however only transport one bag of coffee.

At the end of the day, when all the farmers have brought in their coffee and the basin is filled with red coffee fruits, the workers in the cooperation start processing the coffee. With the use of water and a pump, the coffee is transported from the basin to the top level of a concrete construction which houses the machines that process the coffee beans. With the use of gravity the coffee is transported from machine to machine. On the top floor the coffee arrives in a basin and streams into another, smaller, basin where the first quality diversification happens. Benito, one of the workers, uses a little plastic basket to make sure that the floaters, which are of lesser quality, also make it to the next machine one floor lower. This machine separates the red shell, *casca*, from the bean. The shells are saved in a large basin and later used to make organic fertilizer. One of the workers stands in the basin with a large shovel, to move the shells away from the place where they fall in, to avoid a large pile. The beans fall into another small basin with a cylinder made of chicken wire that works like a filter. While the cylinder rotates, the coffee falls on top of it and a man uses a brush to sweep over it. In this manner the first quality coffee is separated from the second quality. In this separated form they are finally transported to the fermentation basins where the coffee has to stay for about 42 hours. The coffee of lesser quality ends up in a basin on the far right, and makes up only a small share of the total amount of coffee. This lesser quality coffee is dried on a separate spot

¹⁷ One quintal is 45 kilo

¹⁸ Based on eight weeks of observation.

and destined for sale in Guatemala. It is easily identifiable because it contains a lot more waste, leaves and shells, than the first quality coffee which makes the second quality coffee look browner. There are four basins for the first quality coffee; two are used a time. In these basins the process of fermentation makes sure that the sweet and sticky layer around the coffee bean which they call *miel*, honey, is removed. When the fermentation process is completed the coffee is again transported with water to the pump. The pump transports the coffee to the top of two long channels. The tops of the channels are a bit higher and the water, along with the coffee, flushes into the trenches. This is the last step in cleaning the coffee and also the last classification part. At the end of the channels the workers make a barrier with flat pieces of wood, which they can make lower step by step. Because the coffee of higher quality sinks, the coffee of second quality comes through first. After the cleaning is done the coffee is spread out over a specific part of the concrete patio on which it has to dry for five to seven days depending on the weather circumstances. Every fifteen minutes the coffee has to be moved around to make sure it dries well. When the coffee is dry the workers push it together with wooden boards on sticks and they use plastic baskets to fill jute bags with the coffee. These bags are stored until they are transported to Guatemala City, to the *beneficio seco*, which is the workplace where they have the machine to produce the *oro* from the *pergamino*. The cooperation does not have the money to buy such a machine. From the capital the coffee is transported to the foreign buyers where it is toasted and sold.¹⁹

3.3 The cooperation: La Voz

As every morning before Juan sets out to his fields, he visits the cooperation to check the work that is being done, because he is a member of the Comité de Vigilancia. As he is approaching the cooperation, the intense, somewhat sweet and moldy smell of the coffee gets more intense. The familiar sound of the water pump which is used to wash the coffee beans is ever present during the early mornings. While Luis stands up until his knees in the water with coffee beans and shovels the washed beans into wheelbarrows, Domingo and Pedro take the wheelbarrows and dump the coffee in little piles on the concrete patio most near to the cafeteria, for drying. You can see that the coffee is still wet because of the reflection of the early sunlight. In the meantime Benito has already started moving the coffee that was spread out in the lowest patio down by the road yesterday, using something that looks like a large wooden fork. Juan greets them while he passes on his walk towards the offices where he runs into Andres, the gerente. They chat about the weather, when the next truck with coffee will be transported to the capital and the upcoming General Assembly. After Juan checked the storage buildings he sets off to his fields.

According to the *gerente*, the manager, La Voz is the only cooperation in San Juan. There are many associations but those are organized by non-governmental organizations (NGO's) that work with these associations for only a number of years. He says that these associations are based on money

¹⁹ Benito Mendoza Pérez 25-02-09, Informal Conversation

not, like La Voz, on its members. Many times when the NGO leaves, the association terminates as well. At the moment of research a hundred of the hundred and twenty-five members were 'active', which means that they actually deliver their coffee in the cooperation. Varying per day fifty to seventy producers come and bring their bags of coffee to the cooperation.²⁰

On paper the cooperation is organized as follows: The *Asamblea General* forms the basis and consists of all the members, called *asociados*. This assembly elects the *Comité de Vigilancia* which has three one-year seats and has the task to control the *Consejo de Admonición*. This advisory body in turn is as well elected by the assembly and consists of seven members that are elected for two years. Its members have to control everything that is going on in the cooperation, especially the work of the *gerente* and the four following committees: *Comité de Crédito*, *Comité de Educación*, *Comité de Comercialización*, *Comité de Café Tour*. Each of these committees has around three members who are elected for a period of two years. The *gerente* is in charge of most of the external contacts of the cooperation. Between the *gerente* and the people that work in the cooperation stands the secretary. Besides the secretary, three other employees work in the office: the *contadora*, accountant; the *pesador*, person that weighs the coffee and the *monitor del campo*, who is in charge of checking the plantations of the members. The *beneficiador* also works in the cooperation and is responsible for the coffee production process in the cooperation and the temporary workers involved.²¹

The cooperation organizes an annual meeting for all its members which they call the General Assembly and which is held in the final stages of the harvest period. In special circumstances they can also organize an *Asamblea Extraordinaria*, when the *Junta Directiva* has to take an important decision for example. In the General Assembly all committees have to present the work they have done this year. The *contadora* informs the members about the financial situation of the cooperation. The *gerente* informs them about how much coffee they have harvested and sold this year, which aid programmes they are enrolled in or applying for and all other ups and downs that the cooperation is facing. In the end the new members of the committees and *consejo* are chosen.²²

3.4 History

"The cooperation was founded in 1978. We did not have a place to meet, we did not have any buildings yet, but it was necessary to cooperate. We needed twenty to twenty-five people to create an organization and because there were not enough men, we needed to include women as well. Then we started to look for a name for the cooperation, but there already existed many names for all the little stores in town that we couldn't just simply copy. San Juan Bautista was the patron of the town and it was said that he preached in the desert. He is an

²⁰ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 26-2-09, Informal Conversation

²¹ Based on the 'Organigrama Funcional Cooperativa La Voz, see appendix 1, explained to me by the *gerente*.

²² Based on observations during General Assembly 28-3-09, and various informal conversations.

image, and we named the cooperation after him. With the name La Voz que Clama en el Desierto, the cooperation was born. With the little money from the members we started a small shop that sold all the necessary vegetables and products. When the government changed, militants came to our village and robbed the entire store. Because of this we suffered a lot. But with some newly gathered money the cooperation was able to buy a machine to make the dough for tortillas. In this way we could help the entire community. First we used manual machines to process the coffee, after that someone helped us to improve the quality.”

Domingo Cholutío Quíc, *presidente* 03-03-09

As the president said, the cooperation did not produce coffee yet in its early years. Domingo Guzmán, who was also one of the founders of the organization, recalls the day that they met under a typical tree in front of the municipality as well:

“A cooperative is there to help people, but not just to give people money. So we thought about this and started a little store in which we sold many vegetables and other things that we bought throughout all of Sololá. We did not have the money to pay someone to work in the store, so we decided to take turns.”

Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 13-03-09

According to the current *gerente* the objective was to ‘try to improve the quality of living for its members’.²³ Before, the landscape surrounding San Juan La Laguna was characterized by tomato, union, bean and corn plantations. Only after a few started to work with coffee, and others saw it was beneficial a large scale transformation of the landscape took place.²⁴ When the cooperation started working with coffee in 1987,²⁵ they bought the coffee beans in the street because they wanted to sell the *pergamino* which they made with wooden machineries that removed the skin from the fruits. In about five groups from four to five people they worked with these machines, the problem was that the quality was very different and they wanted to unify this. What they needed was one machine and one processing place, which they were able to buy with the help of a Dutch organization called SOS Wereldhandel (Stichting Ontwikkelings- Samenwerking). As the price for coffee rose, the situation of the families improved.²⁶

In 1992 the cooperation joined ‘*grupo las catorce*’, which united fourteen small Fair Trade organizations in the region, and they inscribed in Fair Trade together. This was a bad experience however because in front of the law, everything owned, bought and produced by the group was on the names of other people, so when things went awry and La Voz decided to leave the group, they lost a lot. In 1994 they continued solo and joined Fair Trade individually until 2005 when the administrative problems were detected.²⁷ For the members, the history of La Voz is strongly

²³ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 02-03-09, Interview

²⁴ Bernardino Mendoza Mendoza 11-03-09, Interview

²⁵ Pedro Cruz Ixtamer Ujpán 05-03-09, Interview

²⁶ Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 13-03-09, Interview

²⁷ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 02-03-09, Interview

entangled with memories of this bad administration a few years ago of which they are still recovering and, subsequently, the suspension from FLO that followed. In order to understand the mind-set of the farmers it is important to explain this bad administration a bit more detailed.

3.5 Bad Administration

“Then we had the bad administration because the cooperation produced a lot of coffee but the money never arrived in the cooperation. Because of this we were suspended from Fair Trade, but not expelled for good.”

Pedro Cruz Ixtamer Ujpán 02-04-09

In the year 2004-2005 the cooperation is said to have produced a lot of coffee, but the money was never seen by the members.²⁸ According to some informants the administration spend money at its wish during the time when the cooperation had the Fair Trade certificate; they went on trips and with the money of the cooperation they paid for the food and other things in secret, creating a huge debt.²⁹ The benefits of Fair Trade were said to have disappeared in the bags of the administration and friends. Because of this the members were not stimulated at all and they lost their trust. A lot of the information in the cooperation was a little obscure. There was some information on Fair Trade when it initiated, but how much was gained was kept out of sight.³⁰ This time with the Fair Trade certificate is also associated with late payments up until June, July or August, which was the source of a lot of discomfort.³¹

Some ascribe the lack of control of this administration to the fact that the buildings of the administration were not at the same place as the coffee production place. Because of this the farmers never knew what went on in the administration. Now the office is at the same place as where the coffee farmers bring in their coffee and they can just walk in and go see.³² Some say that in fact there was no administration at all, and the papers used to apply for FLO are said to have been falsified to make it look like they were doing well. FLO finding out about this later is one of the possible reasons mentioned for the suspension of La Voz.³³ Others say that the previous manager and counter sold eighteen containers of coffee, which the cooperation could never produce. So they bought coffee from other places, from San Juan, but not organic. When the inspector came this was the reason for the suspension. The manager died of too much alcohol consumption and the *contadora* fled to America. Because of the failed administration the cooperation is in huge debt now.

²⁸ Pedro Cruz Ixtamer Ujpán 02-04-09, Interview

²⁹ Lucas Bizarro Yojcom 02-04-09, Informal Conversation

³⁰ Hugo Batz Casia 01-04-09, Informal Conversation

³¹ Domingo Cholutío Quic, *presidente* of La Voz 06-04-09, Open Interview

³² Benedicto Mardoqueo Ixtamer Perez 24-03-09, Informal Conversation

³³ Benedicto Mardoqueo Ixtamer Perez 13-04-09, Open Interview

'We are working very hard to get on top of this. But, *poco a poco*.'³⁴ Again others ascribe the suspension from Fair Trade to the fact that the five dollars premium were not used to invest in social projects. The *gerente* was not controlled in how he spend this premium. So when the inspector from FLO came to check the number of exported containers, at which price and where the premium was, nobody could give her the information. This administrative fault affected everything: the relationship with Fair Trade, with the workers, with the credit financiers, the internal relations between the members. Andres said that in this year 'we are trying to rebuild the relationships with the members, with the buyers and the administration itself.'³⁵

According to Andres who is the present *gerente* and who was a member of the cooperation himself at the time of the bad administration as well, the paperwork was not done correctly, there were given out loans, but no record was kept of what people would have paid back already, so on paper they would still owe the entire sum. Some members also incorrectly received credit because they were not actively contributing coffee to the cooperation, so called passive members, but they happened to be friends with the former *gerente*. This led to an *etapa de morosidad*, when the cooperation could not pay back the loan because the people would not pay back their credits and there was no accurate record of who owed what. In this time there should have been a committee that checked the credits, but this was not realized so the *gerente* was the one who authorized credits. Since they received a loan worth 2.000.000.00 quetzal from a Canadian fund, and had spend half of it in credits, they could not repay this and kept switching banks to pay off their debt. At this moment La Voz receives credit from a micro credit provider from Boston, US called ROOT CAPITAL. They created a plan for development and repayment of the debt.³⁶

Now that we know a little more about what the production process of small scale coffee farmers in San Juan looks like, on their fields as well as in the cooperation, and now that we have come to know about the history of the cooperation and how the cooperation functions, let us now turn to the farmers' experiences of being a member of La Voz.

³⁴ Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 13-03-09, Interview

³⁵ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 02-03-09, Interview

³⁶ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 27-02-09, Open Interview



Photo 2: A worker in the cooperation is moving the coffee that is spread out on the patio for drying ©Polle Aubert



Photo 3: Luis is washing the coffee beans. On the left the water pump; on the right the end of the channel ©Polle Aubert



Photo 4: Delivery of coffee in the cooperation, a man bottoms the bag of coffee in the basin

©Polle Aubert



Photo 5: Jute bags filled with *pergamino* coffee from La Voz

©Polle Aubert

4. Being Organized

"I think that people that step into a cooperation or institution always have the wish to better their lives economically and socially. Life is a constant fight, everyday you have to take care of a little more, everyday a child more."

Hugo Batz Casia 19-03-09

From this quote we can deduct the impression that working in a cooperation comes with benefits that will allow you to improve your life. This chapter will explore these perceived benefits of being part of a cooperation, and the meaning that being part of a cooperation has to the farmers. The latter is crucial in understanding the impact that being organized has upon their identities. First the reasons of the farmers to join the cooperation are explored, to then focus more on their opinions about working in a group. A link will be made here with the theory of Hogg and Terry (2000) about the prototype member abstracted from actual members whose behavior is admired and aimed at by others. Since the better price is one of the most important reasons mentioned to join the cooperation, but it is also said to be too little, the chapter will focus on this insufficient price; they feel underpaid and want to search for a better price.

4.1 Reasons to join

"One cannot evolve solo. In a group you stand strong. Before, I sold my coffee in the street. One day the prices are high, the other day they are low. But what can you do? You have to sell your coffee. The prices in the street are very low and they sell at the national level. In the cooperation they have a stable price that is more just. This is an advantage of being in the cooperation. With this we have to feed our entire families, pay for the education of our children, all the family's expenditures."

Mariano Ujpan Vaskes 13-03-09

What springs from this quote is the security that being in a cooperation offers, and especially the security of the price. Farmers that sell their coffee in the street to *coyotes* are subject to a lot of insecurity because the price fluctuates. The better and stable price in the cooperation seems to be the main aspect that makes it so attractive. Some farmers specifically mention that they need this better price to sustain their families.³⁷ One informant even felt that the cooperation has the obligation to pay them a good price for their product because they have to take care of their families.³⁸ According to Domingo Cholutío, the *presidente*, the price in the cooperation is stable and therefore always the best price. It is however dependent on the dollar. At times the price for coffee fell, but in the cooperation the price was always a little better.³⁹ The cooperation is said to pay ten

³⁷ Jose Canajay Cholutío 17-03-09, Interview

³⁸ Pedro Cruz Ixtamer Ujpan 05-03-09, Interview

³⁹ Domingo Cholutío Quíc, *presidente* of La Voz 06-04-09, Open Interview

quetzal, which was at the time the equivalent of one euro, more per quintal⁴⁰. Andres says that the better price is the benefit of the cooperation because with that one can improve his quality of life, pay the education of his children, food, clothing, and buy more plantations.⁴¹

Some link the higher price in the cooperation to the fact that they produce organic, but more to the fact that they have an international market.⁴² This international market in turn is said to be the result of working in a group: 'if a foreigner would come to San Juan to search for products, he finds organizations, not individuals, this is the advantage'.⁴³ This is not only said about finding a market for their coffee, but also about receiving international aid.⁴⁴ The *gerente* also strongly expressed the need to be organized and the associated benefits. As an example he asks me why the euro is worth so much. 'Because they have united themselves.' He says that there is a lot of individualism in Guatemala. 'Didn't you notice in the assembly that many do not attach importance to the rules of the cooperation? I think that in order to improve we have to follow the rules of the cooperation.' Benedicto also points out that working in a group is better because everybody has his specialty. Therefore, he says, the *gerente* is the key to a good functioning cooperation because he has to divide all the tasks over the people who are best suited to do them and then monitor everything. Andres, the *gerente*, for example studied Social Work and does not know much about the international market or commercialization. 'When there is ego involved however, things get difficult. But if someone is willing to work in *equipo*, team, and divides the tasks over the persons that have their expertises, this will be very good for the cooperation.'⁴⁵

It could be concluded that the farmers conceptualize their membership in the cooperation as the source of a better price, a link with the market, and a necessary collaboration, mainly in order to improve economical circumstances in order to be able to provide for the family. The cooperation is a securer of a good and constant price and it provides access to benefits.

4.2 The prototype-member

Group structures always create patterns of prescribed behavior and produce expectations between members. From the ideas ventilated by the farmers the form of a prototype-member takes shape (Hogg & Terry 2000). This prototype-member symbolizes the kind of member with whom the farmers are thought to self-identify. Through the existence of the idea of such a prototype, members will have an example which supposedly gives them security in their lives about what behavior is expected from them. Such a prototype therefore creates expectations and obligations of and

⁴⁰ For a detailed example of how the coffee price for farmers in the cooperation is build up, see appendix 2.

⁴¹ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 02-03-09, Interview

⁴² Lucas Bizarro Yojcom 03-03-09, Interview

⁴³ Bernardino Mendoza Mendoza 11-03-09, Interview

⁴⁴ Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 13-03-09, Interview

⁴⁵ Benedicto Mardoqueo Ixtamer Perez 13-04-09, Open Interview

between members. This idea of a prototype can be translated to the more measurable notions of expectations, obligations, compromises, responsibilities and so forth. We will now therefore take a look at what the coffee farmers say in this respect.

A general ventilated opinion was that members should have a feeling of responsibility to help the cooperation in times of need. Especially when you have the specific skills needed, as Lucas told me. He worked as a tourist guide in one of the eco-hotels in town, for which he received a good salary. One day the members of the cooperation called him up because they needed his expertise to set up a coffee tour in the cooperation. And he realized that he had to help them out.⁴⁶

Being faithful to the cooperation in the form of always selling all your coffee in the cooperation, even when the prices rise higher in the street is expected as well. A recent problem that the cooperation is facing is that prices for coffee in the street are rising to the same level as they pay, so the competition is higher. They cannot raise their prices however because they have their set buyers.⁴⁷ Even though the cooperation was suspended from Fair Trade at the time of research, they still had contracts with the same buyers as before who gave them fixed prices. This is an indication that the argument from Sick (2008) who stated that the Fair Trade market cannot sufficiently compete with the conventional market, might be correct. Here from stems the dilemma that it is better for the cooperation when the dollar falls, because this means that the price in the street will drop and the members will turn in their coffee in the cooperation. When the price rises however, and keeps rising, the price in the street is higher at times and some members sell there then because they want their money immediately and high. In the cooperation the price might be the same in essence, but they have a lot of expenditures to pay; the machines, the work in the cooperation, the administration, the certification and so forth. That is why in the end the producer receives very little. So when the price for coffee is high it is bad for the organization.⁴⁸ And even though the price in the cooperation is called constant, when the value of the dollar falls, their price falls as well. But according to Federico: 'they deduct less from our wage. I have to fight for my cooperation, the cooperation helped me with everything. With my bags of coffee I was able to pay for this house, my land, my instruments. I could sell my coffee in the street, but the price is bad as well and I want to stay in the cooperation because they helped me a lot. We have to fight with our compost, to protect our soil. And we have to maintain the shade'.⁴⁹ This obligation for farmers to work hard on their fields and to produce well is also commonly expressed.

An important obligation expressed by Andres is that members have the task to demand that the cooperation is transparent in its administration. '[The bad administration] was a lesson that we have

⁴⁶ Lucas Bizarro Yojcom 13-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁴⁷ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 18-03-09, Open Interview/Informal Conversation

⁴⁸ Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 01-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁴⁹ Federico Mendoza Mendoza 06-03-09, Interview

to change.⁵⁰ One of the complaints therefore also is that not all members of the *Comité de Vigilancia* come to the cooperation to check the work that is being done there. According to Salvador it is very important that the work in the cooperation is being checked; it is a responsibility to come and check. He adds to this that this is always the case with groups: some fulfill their duties, others not.⁵¹ Another prescribed characteristic of good membership is that farmers should respect the decisions that the *Junta Directiva* makes; they have to be present at the assemblies, choose the *Junta Directiva* and participate in it if you are elected.⁵² When I asked Pedro Nicolas whether he liked being in the *consejo* he answered that he was chosen and therefore has to conform. 'Loosing, no, spending three hours a day in the cooperation is good. They do not pay me, but I invest my time so that the cooperation can grow, that is what we want.' It seems that he instills pride in conforming with the cooperation rules and expectations even though the assignment falls on him as a heavy burden. He says that people in the cooperation always talk bad about those in the *Junta Directiva*, because they think that they withhold money. This is not true however according Pedro Nicolas. 'I do not like problems you know. I served and suffered my two years, but now I have had enough for a little while. Others need to be in the *Junta* so they can see with their own eyes that we are doing nothing wrong.'⁵³

In this manner being part of a group prescribes a set of 'normal behaviors' and aims to which the members can strive. Farmers can therefore feel satisfied when they work their fields well and are able to live up to the expectations of other members, this can also give him a sense of pride. As we have seen, problems that were identified with being part of a group are related to individuals that do not fulfill their duties, such as not controlling the administration; individuals that do not live up to the idealized prototype.

4.3 An insufficient income

Even though the farmers say that the better price in the cooperation was their main reason to join and is an important benefit of the cooperation, it still does not seem to be sufficient. The price for coffee is not enough to maintain their families, they say that they have to work very hard and at times some have to search other jobs as well.⁵⁴ Most members also grow other crops such as corn, beans and tomatoes for own use and sale if they have surplus.⁵⁵ They say that some, who have a lot of coffee and work their lands very well, are able to have a good life and do not have to worry about

⁵⁰ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 02-03-09, Interview

⁵¹ Salvador Cholutío Quiacán 02-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁵² Mariano Ujpan Vaskes 13-03-09, Interview

⁵³ Pedro Nicolas Ixtamer Ujpan 16-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁵⁴ Jose Canajay Cholotío 17-03-09, Interview

⁵⁵ Salvador Cholutío Quiacán 20-03-09, Informal Conversation

when the dollar might fall.⁵⁶ There is a general opinion however that the price they receive is too little and not really in proportion to the work they invest.

“For me and Maria it is not a problem because we both have another job. But I am thinking about those families that live from producing coffee. Where is the money? That is what I’m thinking. If they do not earn any money, how is it a fair trade? Coffee is like culture for the people here, a way of living. But not a real economy.”

Benedicto Mardoqueo Ixtamer Perez 24-03-09

“Our work is hard and though in the fields with the organic compost, cleaning the terrains. It costs a lot of work and money and the incomes are almost not enough to cover the investment. We want higher prices but there is nobody willing to pay this.”

Lucas Bizarro Yojcom 02-04-09

These quotes that talk about the insufficient price for coffee also touch upon notions of unfairness. If there isn’t any money going round, and if they hardly earn back the investment they make in the production of coffee, how can they feel that they receive a good or fair price for their coffee? The reasons for the low prices is by some identified as sitting in the many steps that the coffee makes from the producer until the cup of coffee in the United States. Too many steps they say, because every step costs money, and all those people do not pay for this. It are the small producers that pay these costs.⁵⁷ According to Benedicto they sell a pound of coffee in the cooperation for one quetzal; in the US they sell a cup of coffee for 21 quetzal. ‘How much coffee can you make form one pound? A lot!’⁵⁸

“Actually the price in the cooperation is the same as before, but the costs of other things have risen, and the price for coffee not. As well the price of other things such as corn is very little. We as indigenous loose. The price is not just because before, the compost for example was a lot cheaper. And you need a lot for the coffee. But now the coffee does not give enough profit to cover these expenses. With coffee there is no gain. Here fore I think the cooperation should search for a better price.”

Jose Canajay Cholotio 03-04-09

Some also relate their low prices to a general rise of living costs associated with the world wide economical crisis. ‘It is going to be tough for us with the economical crisis. The poorest ones are always hit most hard. Because we have a debt and we need help. But we are doing good at the moment. We have our fortifications which are the machines, the offices and the *beneficio*. But we might loose this if it is not going good. We have to fight for our children, for them to be able to go to

⁵⁶ Hugo Batz Casia 19-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁵⁷ Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 13-03-09, Interview

⁵⁸ Benedicto Mardoqueo Ixtamer Perez 24-03-09, Informal Conversation

school and have a good future.⁵⁹ Being in the cooperation provides them with a sense of security in hard times. If asked if it is worth it in the end to produce coffee, they say yes, because in the cooperation, with organic coffee, at least it is a 'change in price' and other agricultural products do not have an international market but stay in Guatemala.⁶⁰

Recently a man from Transfair, one of the many Fair Trade organizations organized under FLO, visited the cooperation with the idea to sell the coffee of La Voz directly to the buyer in the United States. The farmers reacted positively and liked the idea of having their own children with their 'corazones Tz'utujiles'⁶¹ and 'rostros campesinos'⁶² selling the coffee of La Voz in the stores, explaining the buyers about San Juan, the coffee production, and fair trade. Domingo, the *presidente*, also likes this new idea. He claps his hands and his eyes twinkle when he says that as soon as they have 'gathered some young ones' and bought the necessary machines to make the *oro* and toast the coffee, 'BAM' they will say 'bye bye' to the other companies.⁶³ 'This is fair trade!'.⁶⁴ In an assembly the man from Transfair explained to the farmers that only a small percentage of the product price makes it to the farmer. He told them that only six percent reaches the coffee farmer. According to him, ten percent stays in the cooperation, five percent goes to the *beneficio seco*, and another five percent is meant for boat transportation to the buyer. With the toasters stays 22 percent of the profit and another 22 is for the stores. 'I do not know why they keep such information from us' says Hugo Batz. 'It is good that they have told us now. Having our own store in the United States would be more just. Now the producer is the one who receives the less even though he has to suffer most.'⁶⁵ Others express similar sentiments:

"The little ones always earn too little. The coyotes, the transporters, the toasters, the exporters, the sellers and the people that finally sell the cups of coffee always earn more than the people that work on the field. The people that own the coffee and have the knowledge never get paid enough."

Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 13-03-09

Besides the enthusiasm for this new plan most farmers also realize that 'it won't happen overnight.'⁶⁶ The man from the United States said that he only wanted to be the engine of the plan and that they first have to restructure the cooperation, meaning to better the administration and get rid of members who are unwilling to bring in their coffee.⁶⁷ It also needs a lot of money to be

⁵⁹ Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 01-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁶⁰ Jose Canajay Cholotio 12-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁶¹ Hugo Batz Casia 12-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁶² Farmers' faces. Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 01-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁶³ Domingo Cholotío Quic, 06-04-09, Open Interview

⁶⁴ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 25-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁶⁵ Hugo Batz Casia 12-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁶⁶ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 25-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁶⁷ Benedicto Mardoqueo Ixtamer Perez 13-04-09, Open Interview

able to send their children to the United States and they will need the machines 'to make a good coffee.'⁶⁸

In line with the argument from Wilson (1995) who says that a common future binds groups together, 'new' collective goals such as to purify the cooperation, pay of their debt, look for funds, attract more members, buy machineries, cut intermediaries, improve the administration and sell their coffee directly in the United States, bind the members of La Voz together.⁶⁹ This shared future is also based on a common past which was less bright, but of which they are determined to get out from better together. They still want to grow as a cooperation and work and fight for this⁷⁰. Members that do not agree with this have to be expelled.⁷¹

This chapter has explored the reasons for farmers to join the cooperation and the meanings they ascribe to being part of a cooperation. It also explained that being member of a group comes with expectations which impose obligations upon members, but which also gives them a sense of security in their lives because they know what is expected of them. By fulfilling with these expectations a sense of pride can be obtained. Even though the better price that the cooperation was said to be paying was singled out as an important benefit of the cooperation and being organized, the farmers paradoxically also feel that this price is insufficient. They feel that there is little to no gain and that they cannot adequately maintain their families with it. It seems that the recent visit from the man from Transfair strengthened these notions. At the same time however working with organic coffee is being cherished as well, as we shall see in the next chapter.

⁶⁸ Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 01-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁶⁹ Based amongst others on expressions from: Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 13-03-09, Interview; Pedro Cruz Ixtamer Ujpán 02-04-09, Interview; Benedicto Mardoqueo Ixtamer Perez 24-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁷⁰ Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 13-03-09, Interview

⁷¹ Pedro Nicolas Ixtamer Ujpan 01-04-09, Informal Conversation

5. Organic production: Outside demand or cultural heritage?

“Organic coffee is la vida, el corazón, el espíritu de la cooperativa. It is good because everybody wants it. Working without chemicals also leads to fewer diseases.”

Domingo Cholutío Quíc, *presidente* 03-03-09

This quote from the *presidente* of La Voz is useful in understanding a few core notions about the meaning that the production of organic coffee has for the farmers. First of all it is the prime characteristic of the cooperation with which they set themselves apart from other farmers in the region, and therefore an important self-identification element for the group. The quote also highlights their positivism about working with organic coffee, here seen in his reference to the fact that it is healthier. It also touches upon the notion that organic is good because other people like it. This implies that the high valuation of organic coffee which they express could partly have its origin in the desires and wishes of international buyers and tourists. This could in turn be linked to a more economical rationale because of the market that organic coffee offers the farmers and the better price they consequently receive for their product. This does not mean however that farmers cannot self-identify with organic production, nor does it mean that they cannot acquire a sense of pride from doing something, producing organic coffee, of which others think it is a good thing and, perhaps therefore, they also see as a good thing. Furthermore there is also reason to believe that their high valuation of organic, natural production is connected with the cultural heritage of their ancestors who practiced more natural modes of production. It could be argued that relating organic production to their ancestors' modes of production is a way for the farmers to make these new influences, demand for organic, their own and to incorporate them into their lives in a way that is meaningful to them. This chapter first looks at the positivism surrounding organic coffee which is expressed by the farmers. After, it points out some seemingly discontinuities in their expression, to then make some notes on the role of tourists' and buyers' wishes in this, which is linked to the role of farmers' cultural, Maya heritage. Organic production is however also connected to very hard work, on which the final part of this chapter will focus. Here a link will again be made to the theory of Hogg and Terry (2000) about the prototype member, in relation to prescribed group behavior.

5.1 Everybody wants organic

With reference to production, coffee farmers say that it is better with organic coffee than conventional because even though it produces less than chemical, the fruits are bigger and there is harvest every year. Chemical coffee has small fruits and sometimes a lot of harvest and the next year

none. Organic harvest has its highs and lows as well, but there is always harvest.⁷² The quality of organic is therefore said to be better as well because even though the chemical produces heavy, the taste in the cup of coffee is softer. Organic keeps its taste and is stronger.⁷³ Organic coffee is also said to be better because it causes less contamination⁷⁴, some also mention that the organic compost helps the environment because it protects the soil.⁷⁵ Most mentioned however, is the idea that organic coffee is healthier: 'The chemicals that we eat are bad and cause sickness.'⁷⁶ Some even say that organic coffee protects your health: 'It helps with your health because it is totally natural.'⁷⁷ A noteworthy finding is that even among those 'farmers' that did not work their own fields there was a strong identification with nature, naturalness, and farming. When taking a closer look this is not very remarkable however, because these farmers have all grown up as farmers producing coffee, and other crops with their fathers and they later inherited some of these fields. So they are indeed farmers and many also have other crops that they do still work themselves. Now times have changed and most of the farmers' children do not work with coffee anymore; they all have educations of which their fathers are very proud. The farmers are not afraid that the cooperation will end however: 'it is in our culture to have agriculture, and our children will have an education but coffee plantations on which other people will work as well. The families that will work our children's fields will probably be a little poorer than we are.'⁷⁸ They say that they check their plantations in the weekends and that they really like being out there in the fields. A man who owns a bakery and thinks of himself as both farmer and baker says:

"Doing agriculture is very nice, I like it a lot. For example having a bakery delivers more money, but it also costs a lot more stress. With agriculture I have little troubles or worries. I just work my fields, bring in my coffee, there is not rush to it. I just go home when it is done."

Hugo Batz Casia 19-03-09

A few discontinuities or seemingly contradictory findings came forth during the research however. First of all, despite the expressed notions of being proud to produce organic coffee because it is, amongst other benefits, healthier, a lot of them do not drink the coffee from the cooperation. Or when they do it is the so called 'float', the coffee that floats and 'does not contain much' so therefore is of lesser quality.⁷⁹ One farmer told me that they drink coffee like a soft drink with every

⁷² Bernardino Mendoza Mendoza 11-03-09, Interview

⁷³ Lucas Bizarro Yojcom 03-03-09, Interview

⁷⁴ Cristóbal Mendoza Mendoza 13-03-09, Interview

⁷⁵ Lucas Bizarro Yojcom 03-03-09, Interview

⁷⁶ Mariano Ujpan Vaskes 13-03-09, Interview; Salvador Cholutío Quiacán 20-03-09, Interview

⁷⁷ Salvador Cholutío Quiacán 20-03-09, Interview

⁷⁸ Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 01-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁷⁹ Hugo Batz Casia 19-03-09, Interview

meal. They do not drink it because they like it that much, *por gusto*, they just have it with their breakfast and dinner; 'Here they are not used to drinking the coffee that we produce'.⁸⁰ Despite the many serenades in favor of organic coffee expressed by Andres, the *gerente*, he is at the same time thinking about processing conventional coffee in the cooperation as well because there is a market for it.⁸¹ In line with this; because there are some foreigners that are willing to pay more for coffee produced and administrated by women, there is a program starting up in the cooperation where Chonita, the secretary, instead of Félix, handles the administration and the contacts with the few female members.⁸² If you look at these things, and keep in mind sayings such as: the tourists like the organic things,⁸³ the farmers' high valuation of organic coffee is at least partially influenced by what the buyer, the international market, or the tourist wants or values and therefore also provides the farmers with a market and a good price for their coffee. Quite possibly this 'outside' demand also functions in a way as a recognition for the farmers of the idea that they are doing something that is good. Here fore they could deduct a sense of pride out of producing organic or women made coffee. Benedicto, who is a painter but also owns land and grew up farming, also said: 'What people want is more and more eco, they like the word eco.' He says that the women [in San Juan] have to use this by promoting their naturally colored products. 'The people here have a lot of knowledge, Mayan knowledge, and we all speak a Mayan language. We have Spanish as a second language, but all the cultural stuff is transmitted in Tz'utujil.' He says that what they need to learn is how to make business out of this and earn money out of what they know. He is a painter himself and he says that he would like to be more authentic and create his own natural colors, and not to use oil anymore. He thinks this would be a good business and he wants to study the Mayan murals in Tikal and Palenque where the Maya used bright colors that kept their intensity for many years.⁸⁴ So on the one hand he wants to be more authentic by producing naturally dyed colors, but part of the reason also lies in the potential for the business he sees in it. I interpret this as an interchanging effect between the desires of the tourist and his own sense of identity as being an 'authentic Maya', an urge to go back to his roots. Linking his business plans with his roots can function as a way for him to make sense of this opportunity which is led by tourists' demands, and perhaps even to justify his business-set mind that wants to use Maya knowledge in order to earn money.

Returing to coffee, some farmers also link their mode of production to that of their ancestors which was more natural and to which some feel the urge to return:

⁸⁰ Domingo Cholotío Quic, *presidente* of La Voz 06-04-09, Open Interview

⁸¹ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 02-03-09, Interview

⁸² Félix Anselmo Cholotio García 04-03-09, Interview

⁸³ Jose Canajay Cholotio 29-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁸⁴ Benedicto Mardoqueo Ixtamer Perez 27-03-09, Informal Conversation

"I think we have to regain this idea of working naturally and organically because it is better for us. It is also a Mayan heritage and we do not want to lose this. Hopefully our children will be able to continue to better the organic production and use organic methods to work in the fields."

Jose Canajay Cholotio 19-03-09

In conclusion I have the strong feeling that 'outside' desires and values come together with Maya ancestors' identifications in order to give meaning to their mode of production in a way that makes sense to them. There seems to be a strong identification with organic coffee which is thought to be a better production, healthier and better for the environment, but at the same time it is mentioned that they do not drink the coffee themselves because they are not used to it. Still, they seem to obtain a sense of pride from producing organic production by on the one hand linking it to the buyers' and tourist' want and the higher price they gain and on the other hand to their roots. This sense of pride can also be obtained because of a compliance with group expectations which favor and idealize organic production as one of the core characteristics of the cooperation. This is explored a little further in the next part, in relation to the hard work which is thought to have to be invested in the work with organic coffee. The group expectations will be linked to notions of the 'prototype good farmer' who works his fields good and organically.

5.2 Hard work

When the coffee farmers talk about the organic coffee they look satisfied, their faces shine of pride and their eyes twinkle when they explain that organic production is better, that is it good for the environment, has a better, stronger taste, and that it is better for your health. Their faces turn serious however when it comes down to the hard work that their organic plantations demand of them, even though they generally add that this is not always a difficulty because they are accustomed to it already.⁸⁵

"In order to produce organic coffee one has to totally change his mind. Many people do not want this, they choose the easy way. Apply the amount of chemicals in an hour and be done. Making the organic compost takes a lot of time, it also costs a lot of effort to transport all the bags of compost to the terrains. Our terrains usually are a bit far away. Organic demands more investment, costs and spending."

Domingo Guzmán Ujpán Vásquez 13-03-09

Organic production is seen as something special, something really different from conventional coffee. Most of all it is conceptualized as coming with the cost of a lot of investment, as Domingo Guzmán stresses in this quote. One of my informants compared organic coffee with having children,

⁸⁵ Mariano Ujpan Vaskes 13-03-09, Interview

because it always needs to be looked after, it needs its shade, its compost and so forth.⁸⁶ Another farmer pointed out that when you work with coffee you do not have a lot of free time. He says that working with coffee is different from other work because the coffee does not have a day rest, it has to be washed and dried everyday and the drying coffee has to be looked after, also on Sundays.⁸⁷ What is especially singled out as a difficulty with the production of organic coffee is the transportation of all the compost to the fields. Every single tree needs a lot of compost which translates into many bags of compost that need to be transported to their fields that usually lie far away.⁸⁸ At this moment they hardly earn enough to be able to make this investment and therefore some say that they want for the cooperation to search for a better price.⁸⁹ Before the bad administration the cooperation had a credit system with which the farmers could loan this money to invest, but now the cooperation lacks the capital to do so. The organic certification costs the cooperation a lot of money as well. With their certification from BCS ÖKO-Garantie (Bio Control System), from Germany, they can sell to America. For their sales to Japan however they need a different organic certificate. All together this costs La Voz 3700 dollars per year, plus the on-costs that the people who come to check the coffee make. This costs them a lot, but the *gerente* says that they have to make this investment because it secures their production.⁹⁰

Underneath these notions of hard work, a sense of pride in working organically can be felt. Since the organic production is an important part of their group identity, members are expected to work their fields good and organically; it is seen as an obligation to work hard. This can again be linked with the theory of Hogg and Terry (2000) about the functioning of a prototype within a group. The prototype good farmer works his fields well organically. The farmer knows what is expected of him and identifies with the prototype. By conforming to behaviors and believes that the prototype, and thus other members, prescribe, a sense of security and meaning is provided because the farmers know how to act and what to expect from others. In line with what Ashfort and Mael (1989) argued, the farmers can gain self esteem by complying with the prescribed behavior and beliefs of the group. The bad administration affected the trust between the members about whether they would actually fulfill their duties. During their General Assembly two members who had done something wrong were decided to be expelled, because they were not seen as good members and therefore obstacles.⁹¹ Possibly the administration wanted to set an example for other members about good membership. The idea of purification of the cooperation: getting rid of the members that are not seen as good because they do not bring in their coffee, help in the cooperation, or check the

⁸⁶ Jose Canajay Cholotio 17-03-09, Interview

⁸⁷ Pedro Cruz Ixtamer Ujján 06-04-09, Informal Conversation

⁸⁸ Federico Mendoza Mendoza 07-04-09, Interview

⁸⁹ Jose Canajay Cholotio 29-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁹⁰ Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 18-03-09, Informal Conversation

⁹¹ Pedro Nicolas Ixtamer Ujján 01-04-09, Informal Conversation

administration, was further expanded after the visit of the man from Transfair, as described in the previous chapter. His explanation of the production chain strengthened the desire to search for a better price and his plans for sale in the United States brought new enthusiasm to existing ideas about improving the cooperation.

In this chapter we have seen that organic production is an important part of the group identity of the farmers of La Voz, and therefore also a source for their personal identity. Working your fields well organically is what is expected of fellow members and complying with these prescribed behaviors can provide a feeling of pride. Even more so because the work with organic coffee is thought to be very tough. Their group identity, in which there is a lot of positivism about organic production, can be concluded to be influenced both by outside demands and by a wish to go back to more natural modes of production which their ancestors practiced. Their high valuation of organic things can thus be seen as an interaction between the influences of the values of their international coffee buyers and their cultural heritage. This relation that is being forged with their cultural heritage could also be conceptualized as a way to make these international values and outside influences their own, by giving them a new meaning which makes sense to them.

Conclusion

In this thesis the impact that being part of a cooperation has upon the identity of coffee farmers in San Juan La Laguna has been explored. In the first chapter a theoretical framework was provided in which relevant information and theories on identity, fair trade, and indigenous identity and coffee in Guatemala were discussed. After setting the scene by describing the town of San Juan La Laguna in chapter two, chapter three explored the production process of coffee farmers from their fields in the mountains until the coffee cooperation called La Voz. Attention was also paid to the inner workings of the cooperation and its history, including the bad administration, to provide a background in which the following two chapters could be understood.

In line with the argument from Bosma and Kunnen (2001) being part of a coffee cooperation impacts upon the identities of the coffee farmers in so far as they attach meaning to this specific contextual aspect. This is why chapter four focused on the reasons that the coffee farmers mention to join the cooperation, how they conceptualize the cooperation, and specifically on their opinions about working in a group. Since the price that the farmers receive for their coffee in the cooperation was singled out as one of the most important reasons to join the cooperation, more attention was paid to this. Their membership in the cooperation is by many seen as a necessity because in the street the prices were lower and less constant. In reference to this they mention the need to provide for their families and to pay for the education of their children. Since working in a group comes with expectations and obligations, the chapter took a look at this as well, linked to the theory of Hogg and Terry (2000) about the prototype-member. The coffee farmers expect from each other that they work their fields well, that they attend the general assembly, choose the *Junta Directiva*, and participate in it when they are elected. Another important obligation identified was to check the administration in order to keep it transparent. Such expectations about how members of a cooperation should behave altogether form a sort of a prototype with which the individual members can self-identify. This is said to give them a sense of security in their lives because they know what is expected from them, and what they are to expect from their environment. In line with the argument from Ashfort and Mael (1989), the farmers are also thought to be able to obtain a sense of pride when they conform to idealized prototype behavior. In the case of the coffee farmers in San Juan La Laguna this is best reflected in the constant reference they make to the hard work that their coffee production involves, while they at the same describe working your fields well as a quality of good membership.

The fifth chapter focused on opinions about organic coffee, because this seemed to be one of the main characteristics of the cooperation with which they set themselves apart from other coffee

cooperations and producers. Organic coffee production could be seen as an integral part of their group identity. First the chapter looked at the positivism surrounding organic coffee production. The farmers say that organic production is better, because it is better for your health since it does not contain chemicals. For this reason organic production is also said to be better for the environment of which some say that it protects it. Another benefit is that organic coffee has a better production and delivers high quality coffee which keeps its stronger taste in the cup. Overall there is a strong identification with nature and naturalness, also amongst those farmers that do not work their own fields, but hire others to do so. They still conceptualize themselves as farmers because they have grown up farming coffee and other subsistence crops with their fathers. Many still own plots of lands on which they grow these subsistence crops and they often work on these fields themselves. A few discontinuities were found however. The farmers for example do not drink their own, 'healthy' coffee, and the *gerente*, who was also very positive about organic coffee, is thinking about processing conventional coffee in the cooperation because of a market demand. On top of this many farmers mentioned that organic coffee is good because everybody, meaning the international buyers and tourists, wants it. So it seems that these outside demands impact upon the positive valuation that coffee farmers have of organic production. On the other hand there is a connection made as well with Maya ancestors who also practiced a more natural mode of production. Therefore the chapter concluded that it is very likely that the farmers in San Juan La Laguna make these outside influences, which demand and value organic coffee, their own, by relating it to something that stands close to them. They incorporate it into their lives, and they give meaning to it by linking organic production to their own cultural heritage. Their high valuation of organic production can at the same time be linked to their prescribed group behavior, because working your fields well means working your fields well organically.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, identities are rather complex and often made up from different, seemingly incompatible aspects. We have seen this as well with the coffee farmers from San Juan La Laguna. Even though they strongly identify with organic coffee production because this is said to be healthier, they do not drink their own coffee. And even though they single out the better price of the cooperation as the reason to become a member, this is also their main topic of discomfort because the price is said to be insufficient and by some conceptualized as unfair. As argued by Epstein (1987) and Ghorashi (2001), identity is a 'concept of synthesis', and different aspects of identity might be conflictive as long as the narrative makes sense to the individual.

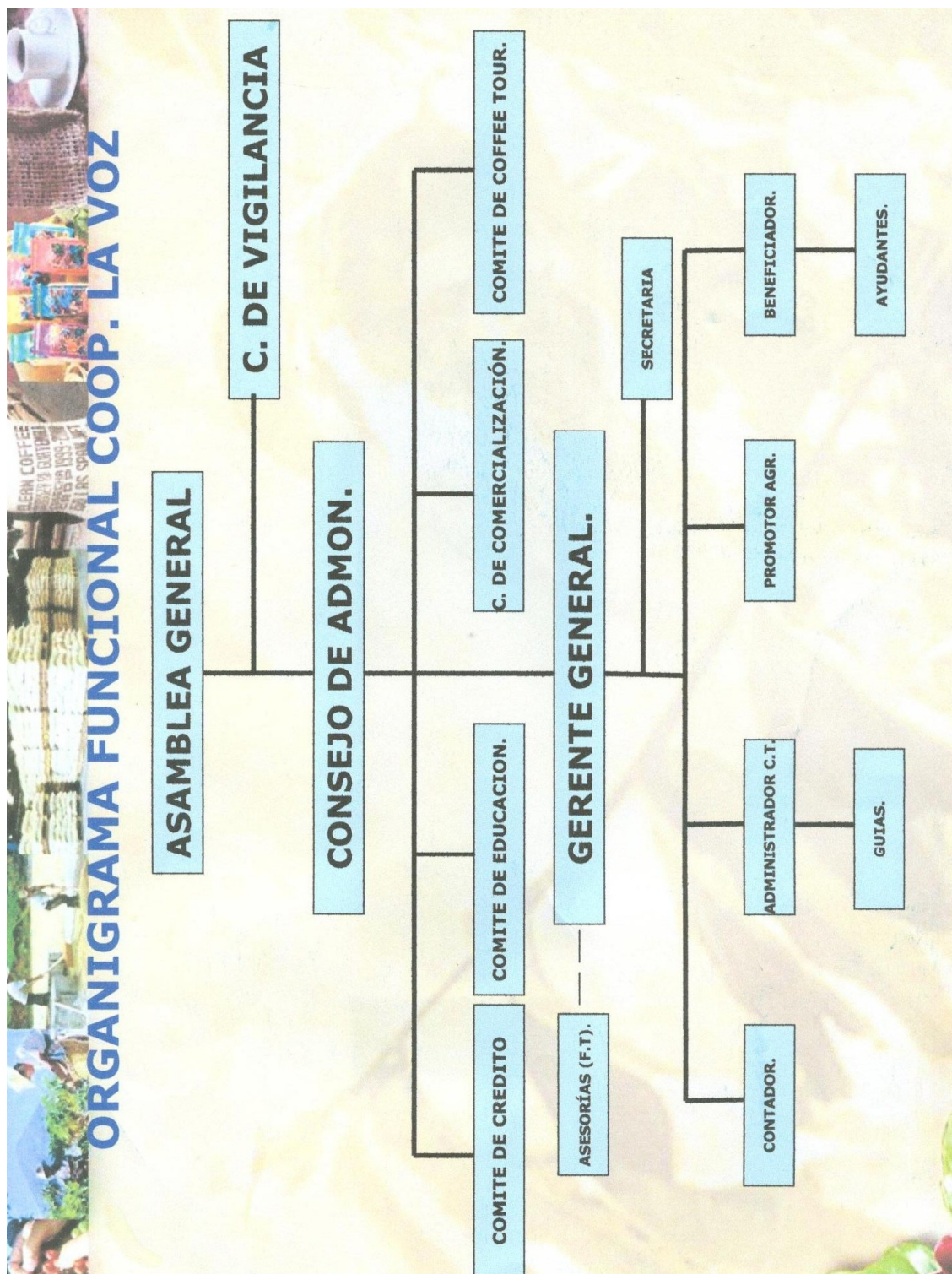
This thesis has therefore not tried to portray a coherent story about the identity of coffee farmers in a small village in Guatemala, but solely wanted to explore the possible ways that being part of a cooperation influences upon their personal identities. In this way I hope to have generated some

knowledge about local perspectives of coffee farmers on being part of a cooperation, which could possibly provide to be useful for social movements such as Fair Trade that are devoted to improving the living conditions of marginalized producers. I hope my research invites others to do similar research in various locations, since I acknowledge that being part of a cooperation forms only a small part of all the different factors interesting for exploration, that are impacting upon the lives and identities of small scale coffee farmers.

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Appendix 2: Construction of the coffee price in La Voz; an example

An example of how the price that the coffee farmers receive for their bags of coffee in the cooperation is made up according to the *gerente* Andres: 'First you have the minimum price, established by Fair Trade, that the company pays (110 dollar) [per quintal *oro*]. Then you have the extra price with which the companies can compete (say 60 dollar). Then an amount (16 dollar) has to be deducted for transport. The remaining amount is multiplied by 7.8 to convert from dollars into quetzal. Then it is divided by 1.3 because this is the factor for *pergamino* to *oro* (for one quantity of *oro*, 1.3 quantity of *pergamino* is needed). Then they deduct 38 quetzal for the work in the cooperation, to pay the workers. Then the amount is divided by 4.8 which is the factor to get from the picked red coffee beans to *pergamino* (for 1 quantity of *pergamino*, 4.8 quantities of red beans is needed). This number is an average; in the beginning of the harvest it is about 4.6, at the end about 5 (the coffee fruit gets smaller when end of harvest approaches). Then, if they have the Fair Trade certificate they deduct 5 quetzal to pay for the certification costs (depending on the quantity of coffee produced this amount could be less). Then, for organic certification payment they deduct 3 quetzal. Then, again if they would have the Fair Trade certificate, they deduct about 5 quetzal for the extra amount of money that has to be invested in social projects. Another 10 quetzal is deducted to pay for the administrative work in the cooperation.'⁹²

America pays 110	\$ 110
110 + 60 with which the company competes	\$ 170
170 - 16 which Exporcafe, their exporting coop, charges for transport	\$ 154
154 times 7.8 to convert dollars into quetzal	Q1201.20
1201.20 divided by 1.3 to convert to pergamino	Q 924
924 minus 38 to pay the workers in the beneficio	Q 886
886 divided by 4.8 to convert to fruits	Q 184.58
184.58 minus 3 to pay for organic certificate	Q 181.58
181.58 minus 10 to pay for administrative work	Q 171.58

This can only be seen as an example however, because I learned this information from the *gerente*, without seeing any actual documents. Also the general feeling I get is that the farmers receive Q 70 per quintal which is a totally different figure.

⁹² Andres Isaías Cotuc Mendez 18-03-09, Open Interview

Appendix 3: Reflection

Even though I had my ups and downs, I quite enjoyed doing research. Approaching complete strangers to tell them that you are interested in what they do and that you want to spend your time hanging around with them is rather scary. But the positive reactions that I just about always received made it very worthwhile. It is amazing how much time and patience people have when you tell them that you are interested in their lives and opinions.



Photo 6: Me in the middle of a coffee plantation

By: Félix Anselmo Cholotio García

Looking back on the research period there are a number of things that I would like to have done differently. First of all this concerns initial contacts that I had with people; because I did not speak Spanish that well yet, and felt a little uncomfortable, I usually immediately asked farmers if they would agree to an interview. I would have liked for these initial contacts to have been more informal. I was held back a little in this because I am not good at small-talk in general. Furthermore the coffee farmers that I have spoken to were all men in their forties, and for me, as a twenty-one year old girl, it did not feel like a natural, casual relationship. Luckily I returned to some of my informants enough times to build good relationships and my Spanish became a lot better as well. My conversations with the farmers therefore went from very interview-like to more and more casual

and informal instead of the other way around, as I expected in advance. Another factor involved is that when I introduced myself as a student that was going to do a research, they expected me to ask them questions and interview them. I do not feel however that this has negatively impacted upon my research data since in those initial interviews I asked a lot of general questions and got to understand a lot of background information upon which I could elaborate later when the relationships were more confident. Because of these initial interviewing I also got to know a lot of coffee farmers and improved my Spanish quickly.

A disappointment that I had to deal with in the field was that my initial research plan and topic had to be changed because the cooperation no longer had the Fair Trade certificate. This made talking about the experiences and opinions of the farmers on Fair Trade difficult which is why I decided to take on another approach. Fortunately this was not a huge change because the core focuses on coffee farmers and their identity remained. This however made my research data a little less focused because I was searching for a new and good direction for a while.

Another difficulty that I faced was the fact that the farmers spoke Tz'utujil amongst each other. I feel that I have missed a lot of interesting information about their in-group behavior because I could not understand what they were saying. This felt for me like a second language barrier, because when I would join a group of farmers who were sitting and joking, I could never just jump in on the conversation and they would have to adjust and speak Spanish, which made me feel uncomfortable and unwanted at times. And even though I was present, amongst each other they always spoke Tz'utujil. Because of this most of my contact with the farmers happened one-on-one.

At times the culture differences got to me, when almost none of the informants showed up at the agreed interview appointments, or attempts to go pick coffee with them never materialized.

Because of the latter I participated in the picking of coffee less frequent than I had planned and would have liked. I decided however that I was not going to spend too much time on trying to arrange meetings that would never take place, but instead observe and participate in other aspects of their daily lives. Waiting in the cooperation for informants that never showed up was not that bad either, because I could always observe or chat with other coffee farmers that were present. I felt very welcome at the cooperation and spend a lot of time chatting and drinking coffee with Lucas who works at the coffee bar and is a member of the cooperation as well.

Sometimes being a researcher exhausted me because I constantly felt that I needed to be representative in the town, especially because San Juan is very small and everybody knows each other. So no matter how frustrated, tired or sad I was, I always friendly greeted everybody despite the fact that some people in town obviously did not like the presence of tourists. And since they kept conceptualizing us as such, some would not greet back when I said hello. Sometimes I almost felt like

my own life was 'on hold' to be totally devoted to emerging into other peoples' lives. During such times it was even more pleasant that Polle, my boyfriend, was there with me in the field. With him I could always find my times of rest and self-reflection on the fact that the research was primary a learning experience. As a non-researcher Polle also helped me remember that your informants are foremost just people, and that contact with them can, and should, be very natural. At times it was hard for me not to think about the researcher-informant relationship and what this relationship should look like. I found that being your polite, interested and curious self usually is enough to come to the wanted relationship. Polle did volunteering work in San Juan La Laguna and now and then visited the cooperation where he was more than welcome. He is a social person and good in small-talk and makes friends easily. At times his presence and his jokes or his photo camera and the request for a portrait turned very formal relationships into informal ones. To have Casper as a fellow student researcher in the field was very supporting as well because we were in the same position and could exchange both negative and positive experiences.

Appendix 4: Resumen en Español

Esta tesina quiere decir algo sobre la identidad de los pequeños caficultores en San Juan La Laguna en relación con trabajar en equipo; formar parte de una cooperativa. La pregunta principal por eso fue: Cual influencia tiene estar miembro de una cooperativa de café para pequeños caficultores en San Juan La Laguna, Guatemala. Para formar una respuesta de esta pregunta primero he descrito la producción de café de un caficultor. Desde sus terrenos en las montañas hasta el proceso en la cooperativa, que se llama La Voz que Clama en el Desierto. Después he explicado sobre la función y la historia de la cooperativa, incluida la mala administración que fue un tópico central de la historia de La Voz. A continuación he tratado las opiniones de los caficultores sobre trabajar en equipo y los beneficios de estar miembro de la cooperativa. Porque el precio fue indicado como uno de las principales razones para afiliarse con la cooperativa, más atención para este tópico. Finalmente he focalizado en un aspecto principal de la identidad del equipo de la cooperativa, es decir la producción orgánica. Las conclusiones son fundadas en ocho semanas de hacer investigación en el pueblo desde el 22 de febrero hasta el 15 de abril. La investigación tenía la forma de observar, participar y entrevistar. Las entrevistas fueron desde conversaciones informales y entrevistas abiertas hasta entrevistas que fueron más estructuradas. Durante las ocho semanas en el pueblo, he visitado la cooperativa La Voz casi cada día, para observar, ayudar y platicar con los miembros de la cooperativa.

Porque eventos en la próxima ambiente de la gente tienen impacto en sus identidades privados en la medida en que estos eventos tienen significancia para ellos, es importante investigar estas significancias. Mi foco en la investigación fue las opiniones que los caficultores tenían en respecto de estar organizado en equipo. Para ellos que estaban organizados en la cooperativa de café, La Voz, las mejores razones para ser miembro de esta cooperativa fueron los próximos. Primero muchos dicen que la cooperativa tiene un precio más alto que los precios en la calle. Por eso estar organizado en la cooperativa es una necesidad porque ellos tienen que mantener sus familias y quieren pagar para las educaciones de sus hijos. Otros indicaron que el hecho que ellos están organizados es la razón por el mejor precio y el mercado internacional que la cooperativa tiene. Muchos dijeron que ellos no pueden combatir el mercado solo, y que ellos tienen que reunir para ayudarles. Con uso de la teoría de Hogg y Terry (2000) podemos decir que grupos imponen prototipos de actuar para sus miembros. Por eso los miembros identifican con estos prototipos y también tienen expectativas sobre las acciones de los otros miembros. Prototipos hacen obligaciones para los miembros, pero también hacen seguridad por que los miembros saben que los otros esperan de ellos y conformar con las expectativas puede darles un sentimiento de bienestar

y orgullo. Los caficultores de La Voz dicen que miembros tienen la obligación de trabajar sus terrenos buenos, estar presente en las asambleas, participar en la Junta Directiva cuando ellos están elegidos y controlar la administración. El último es importante para no repetir la mala administración que fue la razón por la deuda que la cooperativa tiene actualmente. También esta mala administración ha resultado en menos de confianza de parte de los miembros en la nueva administración. La obligación de trabajar los terrenos buenos tiene relación con la opinión general que trabajar con café orgánico quiere mucho trabajo y dinero. Por eso, cumplir con esta obligación es una manera para los caficultores para obtener un sentimiento de satisfacción.

Pero la producción de café no solamente fue relacionado con trabajar fuerte. La producción orgánica pareció uno de los aspectos principales de la identidad de la cooperativa. Los caficultores les identifican mucho con la producción orgánica que ellos dicen es más sano para la gente y para la medioambiente y que también tiene mejor producción que el café químico. También ellos dicen que les gusta mucho la naturaleza y estar en sus terrenos. Pero al mismo tiempo la mayoría de los caficultores no beben sus mismos cafés y mencionan que la producción orgánica es bueno porque las turistas y los compradores lo quieren. Además, la gerente quiere procesar café químico en la cooperativa, porque tiene mercado. Muchos relacionan esta producción más natural con la vida de sus antecedentes Mayas. Yo he interpretado este fenómeno como una forma para los caficultores para incorporar nuevas influencias en el pueblo, demanda y gusto de los turistas y empresas internacionales por todo ecológico, en una manera que tiene significancia para ellos mismos. Es una interacción entre estos gustos de los extranjeros y el deseo de volver a maneras de vivir que son más naturales y relacionados a sus antecedentes.

En conclusión podemos decir que las identidades de los pequeños caficultores en San Juan La Laguna fueron influidos por la identidad colectiva del grupo. Esta identidad fue influida por las obligaciones y expectativas que los miembros tienen en frente de los otros. Estas obligaciones y expectativas a su vez, fueron influidas por influencias exteriores: por los gustos y demandas de las turistas y compradores de café, que les gustan mucho el café orgánico.