

# Development and the Temporality of its Exchange. How an Eastern Yucatec Village Made Cash Transfer Promises Accountable\*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores how three temporalities of exchange amend the reception of cash transfers for development in a village in Eastern Yucatan, Mexico. Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews of recipients of cash transfers from Procampo and Oportunidades, this study reveals that ritual promising functions as a means of temporal regulation in most transactions of this sort, and that the recipients hold their government accountable for promises and commitments regarding cash transfers. In assessing the temporal ranges and effectiveness of these transfers by alluding to previous stipulations that sustain the exchange and make it understandable and bearable as a promise, the people in this village consider the objectives of the Procampo and Oportunidades programs to be implausible. Accountability with respect to the long-term effects of these transfers is not, however, based only on local impressions of a state that procrastinates in its “engagement” with peasants. As the timetable established for the accumulation of human capital also exceeds the time limits of responsible promising, these cash transfer programs cannot be evaluated in terms of their fulfilled or unfulfilled promises.

**Keywords:** Exchange, development (Thesaurus); ritual, cash transfer, promise (author’s keywords).

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## **Desarrollo y la temporalidad de su intercambio. Cómo un pueblo del Oriente de Yucatán evalúa las promesas de las transferencias monetarias**

**Resumen:** Este artículo explora cómo tres temporalidades del intercambio modifican la recepción de transferencias monetarias en un pueblo del oriente de Yucatán, México. Con base en observación participante y entrevistas a profundidad a los beneficiarios de Procampo y Oportunidades, esta investigación revela como las promesas rituales funcionan como regulaciones temporales para la mayoría de las transacciones que las transferencias monetarias implican. Sus destinatarios hacen responsable al gobierno de sus promesas y compromisos. Al calificar sus rangos temporales y su efectividad aludiendo a estipulaciones previas, que subyacerían al intercambio y que lo harían comprensible como promesa, la gente de este pueblo evalúa como improbables los objetivos de Procampo y de Oportunidades. La evaluación con respecto los efectos a largo plazo de estos programas de transferencias no se basa, sin embargo, solamente en las impresiones locales sobre un estado que pospone su “compromiso” con los campesinos. En la medida en que el calendario establecido para la acumulación de capital humano también excede los límites temporales de las promesas responsables, estos programas de transferencias monetarias no pueden ser evaluados en términos de promesas cumplidas o incumplidas.

**Palabras clave:** Intercambio, desarrollo (Thesaurus); transferencia monetaria, ritual, promesa (palabras clave del autor).

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## **Desenvolvimento e temporalidade do intercâmbio. Como um povoado do leste de Yucatán avalia as promessas das transferências monetárias**

**Resumo:** este artigo explora como três temporalidades de intercâmbio comprometem a recepção de transferências monetárias num povoado do leste de Yucatán (México). Com base na observação participante e nas entrevistas em profundidade com os beneficiários do Procampo e do Oportunidades, esta pesquisa sugere que as promessas rituais funcionam como regulações temporais para a maioria das transações que as transferências em dinheiro implicam. Seus destinatários tornam o governo responsável por suas promessas e compromissos. Ao qualificar seus intervalos temporais e sua efetividade aludindo a estipulações prévias que se submeteriam ao intercâmbio e que o fariam compreensível como promessa, as pessoas deste lugar avaliam os objetivos do Procampo e do Oportunidades como improváveis. A prestação de contas dos efeitos em longo prazo dessas transferências não somente se baseia em impressões locais sobre um estado que adia seu “compromisso” com os camponeses do povoado, mas também que, ao exceder a consecução de capital humano, os limites temporais das promessas responsáveis, as promessas das transferências monetárias não podem ser avaliadas em termos de promessas cumpridas ou não cumpridas.

**Palavras-chave:** Intercâmbio, desenvolvimento ritual (Thesaurus); transferência monetária, promessa (palavras-chave do autor).

In this paper, I discuss three temporal macro-schema and their calibration as promises in an Eastern Yucatec village in Mexico. Proposed and perpetuated by different types of expertise, these three anticipations regulate the lives of peasants and their children. The first follows the ritual calendar of the village, which is focused on the regeneration of maize and is reenacted on a yearly basis. The second schema, which coincides with Procampo (Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo) cash transfers in the region, has emerged as a long-term engagement and is expected to facilitate the conversion of the peasants to the new economy that NAFTA has envisioned for the rural sector in Mexico. Mexican and Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) economists have speculated that this generational transition should take approximately 20 years (Dapuez, forthcoming). A third temporal schema, extending well beyond a single generation, has emerged from the “human development” model promoted by international organizations. The focal point of this model, which is applied to the women recipients of Mexico’s Progres-a-Oportunidades conditional cash transfer program, is the accumulation of human capital in the children of the poor.

While the process of abstracting distinct cycles of exchange into only three different categories may adversely affect their inner workings as promises, it is nonetheless necessary to represent these cycles heuristically.<sup>1</sup> Tearing these promissory structures apart conceptually does not necessarily imply the existence of two opposite temporalities: i.e., an archaic one based on ritual exchange versus a modern one in line with a developmental economy. On the contrary, the local promissory repertoire studied here, as it has been deeply imbued with the contemporary circulation of money, emerges as a privileged interface in which transactions of many kinds take place. Beyond merely identifying the particularities of these schemata, the villagers explain and grasp them through their shared understanding of exchange. For them, exchange always implies a promise. They point out that a promise should have real, enforceable temporal limits. Moreover, they classify exchange pledges in two discrete categories: fulfilled and unfulfilled promises. In this sense, one of my findings has been that the local language of gift giving, based on Maya-Catholic promissory exchange, has produced a very efficient way to hold the government accountable.

### The Village and the Research

Situated nine miles from Valladolid, the second largest city in the state of Yucatan (48,000 people in 2008), the village I call Ixán here has approximately two thousand inhabitants. It is one of the places where the Caste Wars and the “new religion”

1 From the short to the long term, these cycles entail commercial exchanges, but they are also comparable to personal curing rites (frequently named after traditional forms of transactions, e.g. *kèx* “exchange” and *loj* “redemption” and measured in hours, days or months). Over a longer period, the ritualized yearly rebirth and the socially organized biennial cycle of ritual sponsorships come later. In the medium-to-long-range are eschatological frames that anticipate the end of life. This impels communal rituals to postpone decay and to attain yearly renewals of life. Finally, in the very long term, modernization narratives, such as investment in human capital and the propagation of economic development, appear.

(Bricker 1981) of Cruzob were initiated in the 19th century. Approximately ninety-eight percent of the population consider themselves Catholic. Not until the late 1980s, when electricity and running water were introduced into the town, did the authorities allow Pentecostals, otherwise known as “the brethren,” to regularly visit Ixán. Until the late 1990s, it was considered a typical example of a population dedicated to a ritualized form of slash-and-burn agriculture. In the last two decades, as economic activity in this area of the peninsula has changed from full-time agricultural activity to temporary employment in tourist centers (mainly in Cozumel, Cancun, Playa del Carmen, and Tulum). An inner fragmentation of the “ecological time” (Evans-Pritchard 1939, 189) of maize has led to a dual pattern in their living and migrating temporalities (outside and inside the village).

In 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2011, I did fieldwork in Ixán, ranging from a period of one week in 2011 to six months in 2009, for a total of approximately 14 months. In all of my fieldtrips I observed and participated in cargo rituals (in the Agriculturalist Guild Festival in 2003, 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2011, and in the Village Festival and the Changing of the Robe of Christ, among other festivals, in 2005 and 2009). I have participated in many cargo sponsorships, usually contributing beer, liquor, soft drinks and food to the main sponsors. I have conducted in-depth interviews with approximately 60 recipients of Procampo and Oportunidades cash transfers to understand how they framed them in temporal terms and prioritized their use.

Outside the village, I also traveled to the nearby city of Valladolid to interview Procampo and Oportunidades officials, among other research errands. Drawing on a total of twenty-six months of ethnographic fieldwork, archival research and in-depth interviews with development officials in Yucatan, Mexico City, and the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington DC, I also explored how conditional and unconditional Cash Transfers and cargo-ritual exchange patterns contribute to a series of enforceable or labile “promises” (Dapuez 2013; 2011; Dapuez, Dzib and Gavigan 2011).

### **Ritual Promises, Their Calendrics and Short-Term Expectations of “Rebirth”**

I found that Procampo’s yearly payment (around US\$100 per hectare)<sup>2</sup> and the monthly and bimonthly Oportunidades payments not only produced masculine and feminine moneys and that they could provoke different types of “turbulences.” Maya terms such as *xèek’* and *xa’ak’* (mess, jumble, mix-up) constitute an ample semantic domain, which ranges from the morally wrong to the ill formed, the sick, the decomposing, and those undergoing other processes of fission. People in Ixán frequently use these terms to qualify the effects of money coming in from outside the village. In the case of Procampo and Oportunidades transfers, however, most

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2 In 2008, according to the official documents (Procampo 2008b) 192 people received Procampo cash transfers, in these ratios: one hectare, 11 people; two hectares, 144 people; three hectares 27 people; 4 hectares, 7 people; and 5 hectares, 3 people. However, this is only half of the number of people who should have had the right to this transfer in 1994, according to the village Procampo official. In contrast, the majority of households receive at least one Oportunidades subsidy.

men used these terms to describe social turmoil associated with the cash while the women recipients applied them to the destabilizing effect that the cash had on the equilibrium of their bodies.

As in most parts of Mexico, Oportunidades recipients in Ixán spend the transferred money on everyday needs such as buying maize flour or paying exorbitant costs of medicine and traveling to the nearest medical centers. Procampo recipients, on the other hand, told me that they used the cash transfers to buy fertilizer and food. Nevertheless, ritual activity is a part of everyday life in this village and consumes a good share of people's resources, even more so when they are village leaders. The *kuchòob* (ritual supporters) are constantly called on to propitiate the regeneration of life (*kaà s'ijil* or "rebirth"). As future-oriented intentional action (see Dapuez 2011 for more detail), most people in Ixán consider ritual practice to be consequential for obtaining "even," congruent, "sustainable" livelihoods and, therefore, a means of coping with turbulences. Ritual activity in Ixán thus tends to recompose not only social relationships but beings as well.

With that aim in mind, the ritualists weave a very complex net of "promises" and "commitments" or *mookthan*. Such a promissory web stabilizes the village's annual social calendar, the main goal of which is to ensure the regeneration of life. People regard *mookthan* ("engagement" or "commitment") to be an ongoing, prospective relationship, which is both the cause and effect of exchange. Going from the long-term past to the short-term future, sanctions of promises, pacts, and exchanges come back from the natural realm, especially from the reproductive cycle of maize, as their expected returns. Festival sponsors, for instance, consider themselves to be exchanging with powerful non-human masters (*yùuntsilo'ob* in Maya and *dueños* or *señores* in Spanish) in terms of responding to obligations that are not reciprocally enforceable. In this sense, shamans have taught humans to engage humbly with masters, first, by making a request, then propitiating it through self-obligation and promises, and, finally, compelling the piousness of the powerful. This is the only way, they say, that human persons can hope to receive something in return from the more powerful but invisible masters. Therefore, before giving, receiving, and giving-back (the three Maussian obligations (1925) according to which almost all gift analyses are framed), requesting emerges as foundational to the initiation of every exchange in this Mayan-speaking village.

### Rituals Making Requests and Exchanging Gifts

The people of Ixán apply the verb *máat* (demanding, asking for, begging or ordering) to a variety of contexts, from asymmetrical requests made by invisible lords called *yùuntsilo'ob* to humble supplications in human prayers addressed to them. They also frequently use the transitive form *máatik* to refer to accepting or receiving a gift or offering, while the requested gift or offering is referred to using the past participle *máatan*. In this sense, prayers take on a familiar but hierarchical form. When I was taught to pray by an elderly sponsor, for instance, he suggested that I ask for favors from divine entities by affectionately calling them "little-father" or "little-mother." Making requests, therefore, appears to be the most important obligation in many

contexts. Everyone in Ixán is expected to make requests of masters and gods in a humble way by praying to and respectfully engaging with them, but it is the task of *kuchòob*, the festival sponsors, to act as representatives of the family and the entire community in crucial calendric festivals.

Through these celebrations, sponsors seek material regeneration —of the maize cycle and of the health and power of the people of Ixán— within a time frame of less than one year. The social engagements between sponsors are arranged in biennial terms while the resulting development of a class of “elders” or ritual specialists (those who have learned a particular function through these sponsorships) is nested in the medium and long term. The formation of *yùuntsiloòb*, a mostly invisible class of lords who inhabit the realm of nature, extends to the very long term. Each of these temporal schemas is marked by anticipatory transactions that seek to address and answer uncertainties over what is to come next (in time).

The *kuchòob*, or sponsors, expect material rebirth following four major calendric festivals in Ixán:

- February 15 to February 20, The *Gremios* or Guilds Festival.
- May 3 and 4, *Fiesta de la Santísima Cruz Tun*, Festival of the Most Holy Cross Tun.
- July 23 and 24, *Cambio de traje del Santo Cristo de la Transfiguración* (Changing of the Robe of the Holy Christ of the Transfiguration) in odd-numbered years) and *Virgen de la Asunción* (Virgin of the Assumption) in even-numbered years.
- July 31 to August 7, *Corridas* (Bullfights) or *La Fiesta del Pueblo* (The Festival of the People) with a new host every day. Each day of the Bullfights is propitiated by one *nojoch kuch* (major supporter) and his helpers.

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The *kuchòob* sponsor these festivals for their own prosperity and that of their families, crops, and animals. The shamans point out, however, that the prosperity of the entire village also depends on the successful performance of these sponsorships. In this context, the act of “buying” future “life” and “rain” can be partially compared to local ideas of *loj*, meaning “redemption” and “getting power” through exchange, as they put it, during particular rites in these festivals. Here, buying is based on the purchaser’s intentions or on the ex-post evaluation of the result produced by these intentions as a transcendental act, i.e. the change in the possession of an object. People also imagine power, *poderiil* or *paajtalil*, to be a material but invisible return that enables some forms of futurity (generally called “rebirth” or *kaà sijil*) and avoids others (categorically called “punishment,” *castigo*, *jaats’* or *toop*).

A skeptic might suggest that this power supposed to be inherent in objects is nothing more than the expectations of the people of Ixán transferred onto the objects being exchanged. Nevertheless, the Mayan-Catholic villagers expect their redemption to be material; it should take place in events of “this” world. To that end, their festival sponsorship is not aimed to produce a heavenly segregated form of what has been called an “economy of salvation” (Parry 1986; 1994; Cannell 2005; 2006). Indeed, the economy of redemption that sponsors in Ixán pursue is not premised on one-directional transactions. Ixán villagers believe that lords “receive” offerings and gifts (here they frequently use the verbal phrase *chà’*, meaning “appropriate” and *máat*, in the sense of “begging”). While

masters are mostly situated in the forest outside the village and although they are not exactly coeval with the people, they are still said to reciprocate the people's offerings. After the masters receive these offerings, the ritualists expect them to be pleased, calm, and satisfied. If this is the case, it is expected that the lords will not only take care of the people, the animals, the fields, and the weather, but that they will administer and successfully "work" for the people as well. They believe that rain, health and prosperity result indirectly from their timely human exchange with *yùuntsilo'ob*, and also directly from the acts of *yùuntsilo'ob*. Poverty, tragedy and disgrace on the other hand result from human neglects or refusals to exchange with these lords as well as the lords' neglect of humans. In these unequal exchanges, most of the offerings are explicitly aimed to "appease" or "feed" the masters.

Reciprocally, sacred lords, Mayan-Catholic crosses, images of the virgin, the saints and the Christian God do not just respond to offerings if they are rightly and timely addressed; they have the ability to "request" (*k'áatik*) offerings as well. These requests take the form of "warnings" or "punishments" sent through natural events such as illnesses, hurricanes or accidents. After people recognize these warnings or punishments, they make promises to reestablish a virtuous exchange cycle. That is to say, the *yùuntsilo'ob* will reciprocate in a positive way only if the practitioner has a committed "engagement" with them, i.e. only if the one making the promise really means to fulfill it. Furthermore, many people also request the work of a shaman called *j m'èen* to help trade with *yùuntsilo'ob* (for a spatial depiction of *yùuntsilo'ob*, see Vapnarsky and Le Guen 2011). However, rather than just seeking "redemption" of their bodies, animals and land, ritual sponsors actually put themselves at stake with promises. Dexterity in promising is fundamental for balancing elements in a turbulent milieu in which demands can turn into turmoil and disaster.

### The Result of the First Promise: Commitment or Engagement

The people of Ixán are not only particularly careful in the art of engaging people and divine entities but also in the logical opposite of this procedure. As Vapnarsky (in personal communication) has encouraged me to note, there is a whole series of polite linguistic and non-linguistic modes of procrastinating "engagement" in social activities. In using polite excuses to reject or deflect engagements, people maintain a social art of non-commitment. This is a fundamental tool for keeping oneself centered in one's own business but still appearing to be responsible in the eyes of others. The polite deferral of requests can also help to give particular engagements the importance they deserve. Otherwise, a person who engages in too many sponsorships or ritual activities might be regarded as incapable of performing any of them in a sufficiently committed way. Having already channeled one's energies into another task can be a perfect excuse to avoid contributing to a common sponsorship. Most people understand that other people are also highly intentional beings and that coordinating wills is not an easy task. Furthermore, people usually prefer not to engage unduly or to coerce others into common business, because an ill-formed agreement is sure to end badly.

There are many codified strategies both for requesting and deflecting engagement among ritual sponsors. Alcohol and tobacco, for instance, always serve a purpose in formal requests. They are widely associated with the task of asking another person to engage in ritual or social activities (Gabriel 2004), but they also work as tokens of engagement. So much so that a friend of mine jokingly told me that when he sees someone carrying a bottle of liquor and cigarettes approaching his house, he hides. In bringing alcohol and tobacco as gifts to the host's house, the giver may ask the host if he would be willing to engage in a major gift-giving enterprise. Once the parties have smoked tobacco and consumed shots of liquor, the conversation turns towards the main purpose of the visit. At this point, the host might find it difficult to reject the visitor's request outright and will therefore usually say that he or she is not feeling well or suffering from a long illness or, while tentatively agreeing to provide the service or the object requested, will also make it clear that he or she is not sure of being able to fulfill the request for various reasons. Having to work outside the village or having too much work to do in one's own field plot is always an effective excuse for deferring engagement. However, engagement sometimes turns out to be the desired result of such a visit, in which case, the typically incremental series of engagements occurs in the following way:

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- Minor gifts of liquor and cigarettes produce engagement between the giver and the recipient, who in turn...
- Gives away a much more substantial quantity of services and resources (major gifts) to the masters, which in turn...
- Engages these masters to support regeneration (the beneficiaries of which will be the human givers).

Commitment or engagement is thus a central institution in Ixán. So much so, that the villagers use a lingua franca or translanguaje (Hanks 2010; 2014) of *promesas* and *compromisos* to express almost every aspect of their political and ritual life. However, it should be noted that the English terms “commitment” and “engagement” lack the forceful images that *promesa* and *compromiso* in Yucatec Spanish and *mookthan* in Maya Yucatec call to mind. These words would be more accurately translated as “entanglement” (lit. “knot word” but also “word that knots”) or *k'aax than* (lit. “tied word” but also “word that ties”). Indeed, contractors bind themselves through words, using verbal phrases such as *mook than* to make promises, engagements, alliances, pacts and commitments. It is important to note that when cash is introduced into these self-enforced agreements, it embodies some “tying” qualities as well.

While many anthropologists consider the acts of selling, distributing, and gift-giving as different phenomena, the expressions for these transactions are almost interchangeable in Ixán. The Maya speakers I worked with referenced an exchange logic that was far more complex and integrative than the discrete categories of commodity and money or their popular anthropological counterparts: gift and reciprocity (Gregory 1982). In almost every situation —political, economic, etc.— the people of Ixán tend to allude to a previous stipulation that both sustains exchange and makes it understandable and bearable: the promise.



## Developmental Cash Transfers and Current NAFTA Expectations

Mexico's first cash transfer program, Procampo, was implemented in 1993 to promote the decline of popular agrarianism and radically transform the rural sector in Mexico as the Mexican state adjusted to NAFTA. The cash transfer program was initially designed to last 15 years, from 1993 to 2008, accompanying the full enforcement of NAFTA's liberalization of crops such as maize. However, in 2006 Felipe Calderón promised a new Procampo to increase voter support and the program was thus renewed for 6 more years in 2008. Cash transfers for development were initially distributed to help usher in an envisioned time horizon called NAFTA. This horizon has since arrived and, for those who have lived and experienced it, has entirely lost its promissory glow. For many, the free market is no longer a promising future but part of a difficult present reality.

In Ixán and other villages with rain-fed field plots, the Procampo calendar entails a yearly disbursement. The people to receive news from Procampo in April, May or June, informing them of the year's particular disbursement schedule through press releases issued by the Secretary of Agriculture (SAGARPA). When cash transfers were made in the past, people in Ixán would have to cash their checks, but nowadays they can withdraw the funds from ATMs. The transfers usually amount to almost US\$200, which is the amount given for two hectares of land, the number that most *Procamperos* have been allowed to declare since the program was first implemented twenty years ago. They spend this money almost immediately on food, exchanging it primarily for bags of maize ready for consumption. Every year since 1994, the Procampo comptroller in Ixán has filed complaints and received requests from villagers who are not enrolled in the program but who want to receive the cash transfer. There are around 200 Procampo beneficiaries in Ixán, yet there are more than twice that many villagers who were eligible but did not enter the program in 1993 and now want to get into the program and receive their money for working at the Ejido like the *Procamperos* do. Moreover, Procampo has also actualized the ritual repertoire of *promesas* and *compromisos* as a way of maintaining a relationship with the government.

In 1999, a few years after Procampo was first implemented, villagers from Ixán who received seasonal money transfers from Procampo traveled to the nearby city of Chemax to claim an alleged "engagement" regarding a transfer that failed to materialize. In Chemax, the state governor promised to pay the total amount of the subsidy without charging any "interest." Since the stipend money was paid by check, the government had authorized banks and other financial institutions to retain a percentage for the service of cashing them. According to the villagers' narratives, trucks loaded with money arrived. After giving his speech, the governor left and farmers from many nearby villages ended up receiving only half of what they had been promised. According to the diary of the *Comisario* of Ixán, when the farmers realized that the "promise" had not been completely fulfilled, they tried to lynch the official in charge of making the payment (Terán and Rasmussen 2004, 105-106).

From this example and others concerning Procampo cash transfers, it is possible to conclude that the recipients have always considered Procampo's promise of money insufficient to promote a desired evenness (*toj*). Nevertheless, when the

promised amount is not forthcoming, villagers respond with sanctions of unfulfilled promises, and there have indeed been many such episodes, even in recent years. In all of these instances, the villagers have incarcerated or threatened to incarcerate politicians and state officials until they make good on their promises. As in the Procampo case in which the mob tried to kill the official, there is a logic of compensation at work here which stipulates that transfers (or promises of gifts) have the potential to liberate or incarcerate, to entangle or disentangle.

However, according to many young people from Ixán, these practices are no longer as common as they were in the past. They have discovered that even if this particular course of action might ensure that the villagers get what they feel is owed to them in the promised exchange, it also results in strained relationships with the world outside the village. For instance, a candidate campaigning for election as a Federal Representative came to the village in 2008 seeking to win its support. The *Comisario* at that time was from the opposition political party and remembered a promise the candidate had made while he was the mayor of Valladolid, the city on which the village depends in many ways. The *Comisario* mobilized soldiers and other people of the village to incarcerate the candidate, who fled rapidly when he learned of their intentions.

Cash transfers have thus entered into the beneficiaries' lives at the same time that an intergenerational change was taking place in Ixán. Many of the Yucatan villagers now describe themselves as moving away from agriculture toward "easy employment" or "smooth jobs" in the service sector. Temporary jobs are said to be abundant, especially considering that the tourism industry in nearby Cancun, which underwent major development in 1973, continues to grow exponentially every year. The majority of the workforce, however, does not succeed in obtaining these "smooth jobs" but are hired as manual labor instead. Most young people leaving the villages imagined that they would be leaving behind physically intensive activities and moving on to less demanding work attending tourists in the service sector. Among the most successful have been those who could afford to buy their own cars and become taxi drivers. However, some of these migrating workers also portray the process as a "return to servitude" (Castellanos 2010). Instead of leaving physical effort and tiring tasks in their past, they only find more of the same in their new temporary jobs on the so-called "Riviera Maya."<sup>3</sup> Most male workers leave the field plots for construction sites where new hotels, neighborhoods and restaurants are being built, only to come back again after their contracts expire to burn, to sow seed, or to harvest their field plots. The generation that was in school while these changes occurred, even if they did not get the easier life they were promised, still believes it is possible for their children to do so.

While most Procampo support has been given to older male farmers, Progreso-Oportunidades was later implemented as a cash transfer program aimed at their children and almost exclusively administered by the mothers. It is devised to identify

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3 The constant political discourse expounding upon the potential of the tourism sector for employing an "indigenous" workforce has led the Commission for Indigenous Development and a variety of NGOs to finance "indigenous tourism" ventures all over the peninsula, some of which are analyzed in Alcocer, Lloyd and Vela Cano, 2010.

the “beneficiary holder” or *la titular de la familia beneficiaria* as a mother over the age of 15 (Oportunidades 2012, 17). On behalf of her family, each beneficiary holder receives the whole amount of the “monetary support” or *apoyos monetarios*. Recipients of Oportunidades cash transfers are supposed to spend the money strictly to support their children’s nourishment, health and education. Women are not only required to manage the Oportunidades cash transfer money, they are also made responsible through *obligaciones* and *co-responsabilidades*, which are also translated in terms of *compromisos*, for ensuring the success of the transfer’s goals: i.e. the transformation of the life and the economic conversion of future individuals.

### **The Moral Imperative to Invest “Human Capital” in Humans with No Capital**

NAFTA has liberalized the investment and commerce of almost everything, including staple foods such as maize and beans in Mexico. It has also helped to accelerate expectations of development in the present. The children of the poor, who receive Progres-Oportunidades cash transfers as they grow up and prepare for the future, stand as both objects and subjects of greater development expectations than those envisioned through idealized NAFTA labor market. The more open-ended objective of the Oportunidades program works towards investment in “human capital” for the next generation. Therefore, the temporal images the program provokes in beneficiaries and developers do not simply end in a long-term progressive transition such as that of NAFTA, but also imply a great transformation marked by its human development goals.

Considered exemplary in the transnational development industry, Progres-Oportunidades has served as a model for many similar programs all around the world. The reasons for the program’s perceived success are many, but one of the most important is its sanitized depictions of the canonical transformation of poor children into bearers of “human capital.”

In short, Oportunidades’ promises of “human development” will materialize with the end of “the new generation’s inherit[ing] poverty and the impossibility of generating incomes to allow them to overcome their [poverty] condition” (Oportunidades 2012, 2). To this end, its action is considered transformative, discrete and measurable. It is believed that once normal brain development in children is secured via hospitals, food, and care, and their choices are broadened through education, they will become productive youths. As youths, they will engage in economic activities that will lift them out of the cycle of poverty demonstrated and otherwise perpetuated by their parents. Such development programs thus take for granted a transformation of youths from support-receivers into support-givers.

Most of the younger generations in Ixán are expected to undergo a process of transforming themselves into definitive economic agents, either by switching from agriculture to another economic activity or by leaving high school to engage in whatever full-time work they can find. However, unlike unconditional cash transfers such as those of the Procampo program, Oportunidades transfers imply some responsibilities. Spoken in the behavioral economic language of conditions and incentives (Deeming 2013), conditional cash transfers such as those provided by Oportunidades entail the fulfillment of obligations and commitments. Mothers who

receive and administer the transfers must respond by fulfilling their “obligations” or “commitments” (Oportunidades 2012, 11). Furthermore, they must also enforce or comply with their children’s obligations and engagements in school and health centers to facilitate their proposed life transformation.

Item 3.6 in the program’s Rules of Operation specifies these “rights, co-responsibilities, obligations and suspensions of the beneficiary families” (Oportunidades 2011, 28). Item 3.6.2, titled “Co-responsibilities,” states, “The fulfillment of co-responsibility” by the beneficiary family is “essential for the fulfillment of the program objectives,” but it is also the sine qua non condition for receiving the monetary support (Oportunidades 2012, 10).

These co-responsibilities are itemized as follows:

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

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

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- Use the cash transfers for the “improvement of the family’s wellbeing,” especially for children’s food and education.
  - Support the basic education of students so that they attend classes in regular fashion and improve their educational advantage.
  - Present the national health card at every health check.
  - Participate in health talks.
  - It is the “mother’s responsibility, or that of the person responsible for an under-nourished child,” to attend the health center every time the child’s health requires it.
  - Give the “older adults” the monetary support assigned to them.
  - Receive and consume food supplements.
  - Keep information on the family updated.

Once a month, Oportunidades promoters and health personnel monitor and sanction recipients’ compliance with these co-responsibilities and obligations, which I refer to more generally as conditionalities. Benefits are suspended for one month if recipients do not attend the required health talks and health checks, if a student misses classes (4 or more unjustifiable absences) or if he or she is suspended from school. Indefinite suspension occurs if the beneficiary fails to collect cash transfers more than once, does not use her bank account for four months, does not fulfill her own or her family’s health co-responsibilities for four consecutive months or six alternate months, if it becomes impossible to verify the survival of the beneficiary, or for other administrative reasons. Definitive suspension occurs if someone “sells or exchanges” food supplements received from the program, presents false documentation, uses the program for electoral purposes, religious proselytism or profit-making, surpasses the socioeconomic

conditions established by the program, does not allow surveys of the family's socioeconomic and demographic condition, does not accept its certification, or if the sole member of the family dies (Oportunidades 2012, 14)<sup>4</sup>.

### Modeling the Responsibilities of a Typical Course of Life

In Oportunidades, the course of every individual life has thus been modeled as a universal temporal curve where human capital accumulates in childhood through constant transfers of money, health care and education, while at some point in youth the individual starts making incremental returns to the community that has fostered her or his growth. This “dual model” of development implies first, an “outside-in investment in individual human development” and later, “inside-out returns in socioeconomic development” from the individual to her community (Worthman 2011, 447). As a normative model it patterns the human life course as a process in which human capital is a necessary condition for the creation of economic capital. The “dual” human development model with its two marked stages in the course of human life (one from infancy to youth, the other from youth to adulthood) implies the functioning of at least two generations. According to the direction of various transfers (receiving in the first stage, giving back in the second) it constitutes a sort of intergenerational exchange model that always lasts more than 20 years. In September 2014, the name Oportunidades was officially changed to Prospera and the deadline for achieving the program's objectives was extended to 30 years<sup>5</sup>. Within this time frame, cash transfers would accompany the first 20 or 30 years of a person's life as an investment in human capital.

The transfer nexus, or the relationship the state expects to establish with the mothers who receive the transfers, must incentivate and condition behavior, but not oblige. For such reasons, Oportunidades' *compromisos*, although administered by state promoters, cannot be fully grasped and controlled by the village people according to the framework of promises. The 20+year cycle proposed by Oportunidades for the regeneration of life may extend too far into the future to be easily evaluated by the program's beneficiaries. Another reason for the program's lack of accountability to the people can be explained in terms of gender. Since local women are considered “mere conduits” of policy (Molyneux 2006, 439), Oportunidades promoters prospectively and implicitly blame mothers for failing to break the intergenerational reproduction of poverty due to insufficient care of their children. Some promoters

4 “Conceived as an instrument of human development” (Oportunidades 2011, 21), the program's major aim was “contributing to break with the intergenerational cycle of poverty” (Oportunidades 2012, 12). In 2012 for the first time the booklet included possible exceptions to mandatory attendance at the regular talks which had been held five times a week in Ixán during the 2008 and 2009 period. Families with a member in one of the following categories are not required to attend: an anemic or undernourished child, a diabetic, a “sexually active woman” using a long-term contraceptive method, a “sexually active man” with a vasectomy, a pregnant woman having periodical health checks, or an undernourished pregnant woman. In this sense, it would be very interesting to ask the program designers if two of these exceptions in particular —sexually active men with vasectomies and women using contraceptives— are considered to be sufficiently motivated or to already be effectively “contributing to the break with the intergenerational cycle of poverty” (Oportunidades 2012, 12).

5 Prospera, Programa de Inclusión Social. <https://www.prospera.gob.mx/swb/swb/PROSPERA2015/>

have developed a discourse that avoids all possible references to the “prestations” the Mexican state owes its citizens, and uses a language of “co-responsibilities” instead.

This rhetoric of the Oportunidades program prevents any discussion of the Mexican state as a provider of social, economic and medical entitlements. Rather than providing *prestaciones sociales, médicas y económicas*, the state allocates mothers with regular transfers of cash. A second dismissal takes place when Oportunidades documents avoid even mentioning a mother’s prestations to her children. The program’s exclusive focus on specific effects, phrased in quasi-contractual terms, does violence to the complexity of the relationship between mother and child that would generate the desired capacities in the adult. Assuming it is not necessary to consider the complexity of the mother-child relationship, and avoiding any mention whatsoever of the father-child relationship as an enabler of capability, developers prefer to express and legislate the behavior of mothers in quasi-contracts, which do not have legal effects but instead refer to moral tropes of “obligations” and “co-responsibilities.”

Mothers, for instance, are morally obliged to use the cash transfers for the “improvement of the family’s well-being,” especially for the children’s nutrition and education. This is only a quasi-contractual “obligation,” however, because it does not impose a “binding obligation” with any enforceable debt. In short, a mother who does not improve her family’s well-being or spend the Oportunidades cash transfer on her children cannot be sued or contractually obliged to reimburse the money to the state. The state is similarly not held legally accountable for the promises it makes through cash transfer programs since the efficacy of the funding depends on the mother’s ability to manage it properly and to fulfill her responsibilities.

As many researchers have pointed out (Molyneux 2006; Agudo Sanchíz 2010; Saucedo Delgado 2013), conditional cash transfers addressed to women take for granted a gendered distribution of care and they further burden mothers with the sole responsibility of their children’s development (Franzoni and Voorend 2012, 390). Disregarding fathers’ potential to contribute to their children’s future, the state’s only prerogative is to suspend the agreement and stop making payments to the mother if she does not fulfill her “co-responsibilities.” That is the extent of the state’s power to persuade the mother to fulfill the “conditionalities” of the agreement. Under no circumstances can the state actually enforce the fulfillment of such quasi-contractual obligations, so the mother’s prestations cannot be considered to give rise to legal obligations. They can constitute a debt without responsibility (natural obligation) or a moral obligation, but never a legal debt.

Guyer (2012), following Hyland (2009), describes how the law has not only interpreted gifts, but also isolated their contagion under the law of contracts in a market society. Both the Inter-American Development Bank and the Mexican state seem to have purposefully chosen to frame their cash transfer programs within a language of natural obligations, without characterizing them as legal gifts, i.e. gratuitous transactions, nor as transactions that imply binding obligations in the legal sense. The givers justify cash transfers in light of a future well-being. In doing so, the Mexican state dissolves a legally-binding obligation to its citizens in the present. As it attempts to reframe the most important tasks of accumulation of human capital in

the sphere of natural obligations between mothers and children, the new Mexican state also blurs all the temporal terms of its promise to its people.

The term *prestaciones sociales* in Spanish refers in this case to social security services that the Mexican people are supposed to receive from the Mexican state. Under Mexico's Social Security Law, the Oportunidades cash transfer is designated a *prestación* that the state owes to the Mexican people, by virtue of their status as citizens, and is complimented by free medical service in the poor regions. This includes Oportunidades medical service, provided by the IMSS-Oportunidades medical infrastructure. Cash transfers have a legal status as reinforcements of such prestations. By motivating mothers to take their children to the hospital, for instance, cash transfers are meant to create and maintain virtuous links between the people and the state. However, when people perceive that a number of prestations that the state provided to its citizens (including entitlement subsidies, education, health services, social and economic benefits) are replaced by cash transfers, they complain.

Contrary to expectations regarding development, most cash-transfer beneficiaries in Ixán point out that they consider themselves to have been better off before they began receiving the transfers. Thus, they believe that the state has failed to "support them" properly. While development officials promote cash transfers as positive reinforcements for improving the health and education of poor children, many Ixán villagers interpret the cash more as a token of their abandonment by the Mexican state, or as meager compensation for its lack of investment in their economy, health and education, than as the state's indefinite postponement of these basic responsibilities to its people. In Ixán, people often use cash transfer money to pay for food, fertilizer, cab rides to the city hospital, or to pay for private doctors and purchase medicine when free medical assistance and medicine prove to be "insufficient."

### Promises as a Form of Accountability

Despite complaining about having to do so, women in Ixán regularly endure attending the talks and performing the tasks required by the cash transfer program. Today it is considered their duty to do so. However, exchange in Ixán goes far beyond "the indigenous Euro-American understanding of gifts as 'transactions within a moral economy, which [make] possible the extended reproduction of social relations'" (Strathern 1997, 294, also quoting David Cheal 1988, 19). Exchange in Ixán is both a consequence and a reflection of requests, promises, and commitments or engagements. This induces the people towards very sophisticated languages for making requests (Vapnarsky 2013) and promising. This requesting language ranges from the obvious type used in requests for money from a family member or neighbor to that used in formalized oral rites addressed to natural lords and government officials. Indeed, in the ritual genre called *rogativas* in Spanish ("rogations"), the requestor stresses her need and impoverished condition when asking for resources from a specific natural "lord" or "owner" (*yùuntsilòob* or *dueño*) in an attempt to produce compassion, commiseration and empathy. An asymmetrical relationship is thus established between the person making the request and the potential giver.

A former *comandante* and PAN leader, currently a PRD village representative in Ixán, explained to me why he feels compelled to give money to poor widows and to

elderly people who are hungry. Today, even though he is no longer in office, people still come to his house to ask for a few pesos but he has to tell them that he is no longer working as a “politician” because another political party is now in power. At one point, as a representative of the government of Valladolid, he received enough money to distribute, but now he only receives a small amount for his work in representing the opposition. When those in need come to his house, he explains that they should have supported his candidacy before this and that he has little money to give out now.

In this case, compensatory gifts cannot be drastically differentiated from promissory ones. Nor is it desirable to differentiate the two. The above-mentioned village representative distributes money as a compensation for old age and hunger, albeit only briefly, but also to promise more money and more benefits from the party he represents. Therefore, the neat categories of compensation and promising (or compensatory and promissory gifts) are not pre-determined, but are instead defined in each gift-giving situation and by a larger context. Ideally, different degrees of both qualities —compensatory and promissory, purposeful and necessary— would be combined in accordance with different situations.

174 ■ For those who suffer from hunger, illness, and/or old age, these conditions should make them eligible for monetary compensation. However, in order for the exchange between parties to continue, the compensation must be accompanied by a promise of political community. Being in power or, in other words, receiving enough of the money that flows from the government to the people to participate in its distribution, opens up the channels of support for future elections or events. Nevertheless, these channels do not completely close for those who are not “in power,” or are part of the political opposition. The flow is not cut off; it simply slows down to a trickle.

The recipients always consider the cash transfers from Procampo and Oportunidades to be insufficient. In both cases, compensations and promises work better in concert. Most Procampo recipients say they reinvest the cash transfers in their field plots (paying for labor and/or purchasing fertilizer) and complain about the poor support provided by the state. The program works as a reminder of an unending transition towards ideal horizons that the people can neither fully envision nor evaluate. Oportunidades’ promises, on the other hand, qualify the future livelihoods of the children. Although the Oportunidades conditionalities index uneven distress in the lives of the mothers, they still seem eager to pay this price in exchange for their children’s potential conversion into successful economic agents.

In general, hunger, illness and other imbalances require compensations in the present, as well as more promises in the future. The call of the people of Ixán for evenness, likewise, is similar to that constantly made by those who are no longer human, such as the *yùuntsilo’ob* or “owners.” This call is answered by continual concern over regulating equilibrium within the village through punishment, exchange and promises, but promises imply terms that are fundamental to controlling local engagements. As I have stressed throughout this paper, the object of a promise, or the actual delivery of the promised object, is extremely important. Honoring the temporal limits set by the promise, however, is no less so. It follows that the untimely



delivery or, better yet, the indefinite procrastination of delivery, as in the cases of politicians who continuously make and remake unfulfilled promises, can be sanctioned with punishments or violently brought to an end.

## Conclusions

To conclude this paper, I return to the temporal arcs of engagement analyzed in the opening sections. The first arc, according to the perspective of the village givers, parallels the ritual engagement that is personally requested. It operates within an annual cycle but also invokes more distant horizons of mutual implications and effects. The ritual calendar entails one-year-long cycles of renewal that, in turn, are composed of sponsorships that extend for two years. I elaborate more fully on this particular engagement elsewhere (Dapuez, Dzib and Gavigan 2011), but here it is necessary to point out that ritual engagement does more than simply model ecological time and its reframing of occupational time (Evans-Pritchard 1939). It also helps the people of Ixán to grapple with promises coming from the state, the free trade horizons of NAFTA, and the more abstract developmentalist promise of accumulation of human capital, especially within the shorter time frames of the first temporal arc.

While the list of local exchange temporalities I present here is not comprehensive, it is important to note that a pressing sense of urgency seems to indicate that the development transitions proposed by cash transfer programs such as Procampo and Oportunidades are improbable.<sup>6</sup> The lack of accountability regarding the long-term effects of these transfers is reflected in local impressions of a state that procrastinates its “engagement.” The government demonstrated this lack of accountability once again in 2014 when it postponed the deadline for achieving the objectives of the Oportunidades program to the very long term changed the name of the program to Prospera. The case of Procampo seems to be different, however, and since November of 2015, it has been replaced by a new and improved program called Proagro.

Ritual promising and engagement both work as fundamental gears of a philosophy of endurance, continuity and insistence based on the remaking of time-to-come as promissory. This morality of exchange exclusively reframes cash transfers and it also reminds us that a gift, a sale, or whatever other form a transaction may take, entails a promise. In accordance with Ixán’s highly formalized ritual life, cash transfers to promote development are judged not only in the light of a certain morality but, above all, on the temporal basis upon which this morality depends. Therefore, the results of promises, above all, imply temporal settings. In the end, promises have the potential to be either fulfilled or unfulfilled.

6 Limited space here precludes a proper discussion of Maya rites of renewal and in particular of how their urgency for “rebirth” seem to contrast with Bloch and Parry’s (1989, 2) controlled domain generalizations of short-term and long-term cycles of exchange. While these authors identify the short-term with the domain of the individual “-often acquisitive- activity” and the long-term cycle of exchange with the “reproduction of the social and cosmic order,” in this paper I argue that, at least in the village of Ixán, values of the “short-term order seem have become elaborated into a theory of long-term reproduction” (1989, 29), a domain which Bloch and Parry align with the “ideology of capitalism.” This is an ideology that they contrast with their case studies. Briefly put, as the “human development” normalized life course is becoming both globalized and cosmological, other short-term deals compete for ground in their own cosmologies of reproduction. However, an in-depth discussion of these issues would take us far beyond the scope of this article.

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