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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
COUNTERHEGEMONIC
ENVIRONMENTAL-ECONOMIC PROJECTS
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE UNITED
STATES

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by

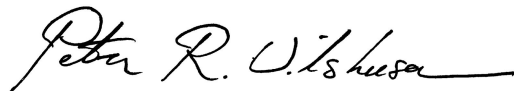
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A Thesis Submitted to the Honors Council
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Approved by:

Adviser and Department Chair:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter R. Wilshusen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Peter R. Wilshusen

Second Reader:

Clare Sammells

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Introduction: *Transition Discourses and the Notion of Community*

“Antipolitical, asocial, individual, disembodied, rational, efficient, short-term, calculable, incontestable—these are the qualities associated with economic transactions mediated by the (capitalist) market.”

(J. K. Gibson-Graham in *Postcapitalist Politics*)

In contemporary environmental and political discourse, the prevailing view of the Economy is that of an unchangeable, governing entity that is inextricably rooted in capitalism and its systems of wealth accumulation and environmental degradation (Escobar, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2006). The power of this paradigm may lead us to believe that capitalism is, has always been, and will always be the only imaginable form of economy. However, it is important to recognize the fact that our market system, what we commonly think of as the human nature of buyers and sellers, is in fact a quite recent development (Kirkpatrick, 1991, pp. 83). Recognizing the adolescence of the modern capitalist epoch, situating it in a broader historical context, is an important first step if scholars are to challenge the contemporary norms that have emerged as part of its framework. We must perform the sometimes difficult task of avoiding the conflation of capitalism with “The Economy,” and recognize that alternatives are possible (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Our current capitalistic era, though seemingly primordial, in fact has its American roots in the early 19th century. Sellers (1994) notes that following the war of 1812, the revolutionary force of the capitalist market was “wrestling the American future from history's most

conservative force, the land” (pp. 4). The battle between the culture of the land and the culture of the market distinguishes itself as the birth of modern American capitalism, given the victory of the latter over the former. The market revolution signified the eradication of civic humanism from the American imaginary, and a movement away from relative self-sufficiency and communities based in mutual aid toward individualistic values centered on the accumulation of wealth (Ibid.).

We see this shift reflected in today’s globalization discourses, which assume that the entire world exists as a delocalized, fully economized space, one that will inevitably be fully occupied by capitalist modernity (Escobar, 2011, pp. 139). And yet, when we take a historical view, we see that over the course of human history more societies have operated on barter and other principles of communality than have ever relied on money, printed and minted (Kirkpatrick, 1991). The recognition that alternatives to our current system have existed—and continue to exist—is part of the force that has driven the development of what are called transition discourses, a way of articulating alternatives for future societies, economies, and ecosystems.

A number of aptly-named transition discourses have emerged in an attempt to articulate a set of radical transformations to a new kind of world, “variously conceptualized in terms of a paradigm shift, a change of civilizational model, or even the coming of an entirely new era beyond the modern dualist, reductionist, and economic age” (Escobar, 2011, pp. 138). The concept of localism, an ideology that prioritizes “a set of pure, conflict-free local values and local knowledges in resistance to anomic and contradictory capitalist forces,” is often a key component of these discourses (DePuis and Goodman, 2005). In contrast to prevailing

globalization discourses, contemporary transition discourses in many ways represent a return to ways of life centered on the local, or the community.

Community, a word frequently used but not often defined, is commonly taken to refer to a group of people living in a specific area (a community) or to the conviviality they share (community). During the colonial wars in the United States, white settlers taken captive by Native American tribes sometimes refused to return to their families upon their rescue, saying they preferred Indian life for its strong sense of *community* (Sellers 1994, pp. 8). Here, the word community takes on a more nebulous essence; what exactly does a *sense* of community entail? To an ecologist, a community might be defined as a self-sufficient, self-perpetuating collection of different species that have adapted to live in a certain habitat. However, this notion of the community, that of an “abstract elaboration concocted by biologists or imposed by ecologists,” fails to encompass the nature of a community as the observable reality of a place, rooted in interaction, connectedness, and communal independence (Kirkpatrick, 1991, pp. 62).

The aforementioned characteristics explain why community, both as a sort of intangible essence and a concrete living arrangement, is something still sought after, even in today’s increasingly cosmopolitan, globalized world. Part of our human fascination with the idea of community lies with the inability of capitalism to completely satisfy the myriad needs we have by virtue of our humanity. People do, in fact, have desires outside of those that the market registers as demand, needs and wants that cannot apparently be met by consumption in an impersonal economic system alone (Stahler-Sholk, 2007). One might argue that these other needs, seen as externalities to globalized, neoliberal capitalism, could be better met in economic systems that focus on the role of the community.

The idea of the community therefore figures heavily in counter-hegemonic economic narratives, less as an abstract aspiration and more as a blueprint for future ways of constructing economies differently. Alternative economic systems, arrangements that might better fulfill people's interpersonal needs while simultaneously prioritizing environmental stewardship, are needed now more than ever. Evidence of environmental degradation is all around us; and yet, in many ways we have never been so far removed from the consequences our actions have on the world. We might look at two levels to understand how people are reconstructing economies and ecologies in unconventional ways with a focus on community (Wright, 2010). First, it is important to understand the discourses around new and different economies, and the theoretical and ideological foundations that support these alternative economic arrangements. Second, we must also observe at least a few of the various ways in which alternative, community-centered economies behave on the ground, focusing on the ecological specifics of their counter-hegemonic practices. In examining these two aspects of alternative economic arrangements, it is important to note that community-focused economies exist both in theory and in practice, not as independent entities but as moving parts of a dialogue between their stated ideological orientations and observable outcomes.

Chapter 1: *The Community Economy and Other Alternative Economic Discourses*

“The ethos of economics... obscures the social and environmental implications of such behavior for “us all.” An ethical discourse of the community economy would highlight the inherent sociality of decisions made in defining necessity, and the various forms of interdependence (the trade-offs or flow-ons) that are enacted when such decisions are made.”

(J. K. Gibson-Graham in *Postcapitalist Politics*)

1.1 The Community Economy

Human beings have always lived by community, constructing their lives and economies accordingly. The community as the locus of human civilization is also practical in an economic and ecological sense: the small community has historically been the most efficient in terms of energy usage, recycling of wastes, reducing drawdown, and accounting for carrying capacity (Kirkpatrick-Sale, 1991, pp. 65). These efficiencies encourage us to seriously consider the framework laid out by Gibson-Graham (2006) for the community economy.

Gibson-Graham (2006) define the community economy as one that aims to imbue qualities of sociality and conviviality in economic relations, qualities they believe have been undernourished in our contemporary economic system. These principles contrast sharply with the qualities they associate with economic transactions mediated by the capitalist market, which are normally “antipolitical, asocial, individual, disembedded, rational, efficient, short-term, calculable, and incontestable” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, pp. 83). At the core of the community economy is a common ethic that encourages care for the local community and its environment,

and an acknowledgement of and appreciation for the “sticky” cultural and social ties that capitalist economics removes from the equation. The project of the community economy is therefore to “make the invisible visible again,” to make room in economics for politics, ethics, and sociality, a task Gibson-Graham (2006) call re-socializing the economy.

In addition to efforts to view “The Economy” in a more comprehensive, interconnected light, discourses around community economies often include substantial emphasis on recontextualizing certain economic terminology, namely the concepts of labor, transaction and surplus. The goal in doing so is to construct a language of economic diversity, expanding beyond the boundaries of our monolithic conceptualization of global neoliberal capitalism to recognize alternatives that are in many cases already occurring. Take the case of labor as an example, which is in our current society is commonly assumed to be wage labor for a capitalist firm. And yet, as Gibson-Graham (2006) note, “the most prevalent form of labor the world over is the unpaid work that is conducted in the household, the family and the neighborhood, or the wider community” (pp. 62). One focus of the community economy is therefore to recognize and appreciate the diversity of types of labor, regardless of whether or not it is compensated by a monetary wage.

Additionally, the community economy seeks to make visible the plethora of types of transactions that are possible beyond the market exchange of equivalents. These incommensurable, non-market transactions include things like gift giving, indigenous exchange, hunting, fishing, gathering, and even theft (Gibson-Graham, 2006). They serve to remind us of the various and numerous types of exchange that occur in the absence of formal capital, quotidian practices that an economic system rooted in the community seeks to highlight. Finally,

the community economy aims to make surplus visible. When surplus is invisible in an economic system, it makes it easy to obscure the ethical dimension of decisions regarding that surplus (Gibson-Graham, 2005, pp. 18). To increase the transparency around surplus is therefore integral to the notion of the community economy, in the hope that doing so will lead to distribution decisions informed by politics, society, and ethics and not simply money.

In addition to an understanding of the theoretical frameworks behind concepts like the community economy, it is important to describe the counter-hegemonic practices employed by people and communities on the ground. Common to most of these practices is their shift away from western philosophy's focus on the individual towards collective ideas of "being in common," a state of coexistence and acceptance of difference rooted in systems of mutual support (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The early United States provides a useful historical example of practices mutual aid practices, which at the time constituted the country's dominant paradigm. Prior to the United States' market revolution of the early 19th century, people did not render services to an impersonal market. Instead, they worked to help meet the needs of their lifelong neighbors and the larger community. The only commerce that existed involved a constant network of barter and exchange of labor and commodities; for example, one person might furnish another with raw materials and receive labor in return (Sellers, 1994). The community economies of this time also contained a social component (Gibson-Graham, 2006) integral to their functioning : "Through sociable communal labor, neighbors lightened each others' most onerous tasks—raising houses and barns, cutting logs and splitting rails, harvesting wheat, and shucking the corn crop" (Sellers 1994, pp. 13). Informal systems of reciprocity and mutual aid,

such as those found in the early United States, are one way that the community economy operates in practice.

1.2 Other Types of Counter-Hegemonic Economic Discourses

Another way that community economies construct counter-hegemonic economic systems is through practices of commoning, which combines the task of self-provisioning with responsibilities of mutual support. In his famous 1968 essay “The Tragedy of the Commons,” Garrett Hardin argued that people’s inherent selfishness leads to the exploitation of any resource accessible to the people at large, and that the commons, through privatization or government takeover, is something that needs to be protected *from* the people. Dana Nelson (2015) argues against Hardin’s assumption that people can only degrade a commons, and his simplistic view of the term that conflates the commons with a natural resource. Commons are, she writes, “a complex admixture, created from natural supplies plus the labor, social values, rules, and norms of the people in communities who participate in and draw on them...[they exist] precisely *because of* the local stewardship, labor, practices, and traditions of governance of people” (Nelson, 2015, pp. 4). The commons might also be seen as a sort of “community stock” that needs to be maintained and replenished so that it can continue to constitute the community by providing its direct subsidy to survival (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 97). Regardless of the definition, management *by* humans, not merely protection *from* humans, is clearly key to the cultivation of a healthy commons. The practice of commoning, combining the sharing of ecological materials and labor with processes of meaning-making, represents another viable set of alternative economic processes. Embodying pragmatic principles of use-value and the

sociality of face-to-face negotiation, commoning practices might reasonably have a place in any community economic arrangement.

Another type of counter-hegemonic economic practice revolves around the redefinition of the term transaction, and a cultivation of non-monetary forms of exchange (Gibson-Graham, 2006). A gift economy, one based upon voluntary collectives that allows people to produce and distribute their work as gifts, is one alternative system that seeks to reform the market or state's impersonal and bureaucratic provisioning of goods (Leah, 2013). Key to the notion of a gift economy is the idea of total services: acts where all kinds of institutions, social, economic, juridical, and moral, are expressed at once (Mauss, 2003). In other words, total services are the real-world manifestation of "seeing the whole picture" and acting in a way that reflects the multiplicity of implications of a seemingly isolated action. In his breakdown of the gift economy, Mauss (2002) explores "primitive" societies whose system of exchange is different from ours; these societies allow us to see the market as it existed before money proper, minted and printed, and before the market inventions of contract and sale that we today consider modern and standard. The gift economy provides another valid example of an alternative economic framework. It pushes us to redefine transactions and look beyond buying and selling to see a more comprehensive view of our interpersonal economic engagements.

1.3 Reasons to Explore Counter-Hegemonic Economic Discourses and Practices

One might be compelled to ask: what is the utility in characterizing these counter-hegemonic economic relations? For one, enhancing our recognition of self-organizing behavior that is currently occurring can allow us to foster this behavior when possible.

Cultivating alternative community economies might also have global implications, especially if the ideological frameworks guiding these alternatives are broadcast beyond the confines of the community itself. Escobar (2009) argues that small-scale anti-globalization movements at the grassroots level might contribute to a collective intelligence that opposes what he calls “the sociology of absences of neoliberal globalisation,” a body of knowledge communities could then draw upon in promoting their own locally emergent behavior as a model for society as a whole (pp. 401). A willingness to make visible and promote the economic diversity that already exists would therefore allow us to value its contribution, compelling us to reimagine the engrained, hegemonic structures at work in the neoliberal development model (Gibson-Graham, 2005).

A paradigm shift such as the kind articulated by these various transition discourses is not without challenges. The strength of the neoliberal ideology has, in the past half century, cultivated the now widely-held belief that waged labor, the commodity market, and capitalist enterprise are the only “normal” forms of work, exchange, and business organization. This model has visibly degraded not only the environment, but also people’s rhetorical capacity to imagine a diverse economy, to “read a landscape we have always read as capitalist as consisting of various capitalist and noncapitalist actions” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, pp. 54). How can we begin to read this landscape in new ways? What practices can we observe in existing counter-hegemonic economic projects, and how might they be relevant to the movement growing around transition discourses, that is at once local and global? My objective here is to observe, describe, and analyze the counter-hegemonic economic arrangements occurring in three specific cases. The goal of the research is not merely to describe the revolutionary acts occurring in these spaces, but also to identify the practical applications of local living, small-scale agriculture, and

beyond-capitalist exchange in building community resilience at a time when environmental and social futures are increasingly uncertain.

In the following sections, I will seek to illustrate the ways in which local communities in the United States and in Latin America are already embodying the principles of discourses such as the community economy in concrete ways, and to draw transferrable conclusions about what we might learn from the sustainable acts occurring in the explored cases. This is an area of the literature that has not been explored in such specificity, but one that I believe deserves more attention. I will aim to show the ways in which the broader theories described previously are applied on the ground, drawing upon my first-hand experience in the North Country of New York State and a review of two examples from Latin America. This work fits into a larger narrative of beyond-capitalist futures, bringing specific examples to light so that the concepts they exemplify might occupy more space in the larger discourse around the ways in which human beings construct our worlds.

My thesis builds on research that I conducted during the Winter of 2017 and 2018 concerning a site known as Better Farm, which distinguishes itself as “a 65-acre sustainability campus, artists' colony, animal sanctuary, and organic farm” located in Redwood, New York (www.betterfarm.org). Better Farm functions as a locus for the surrounding community of roughly 600 residents, connecting a variety of persons interested in both formal sustainability education and informal systems whereby community members support each other economically. This work aims to combine my past research in the North Country of New York state with an analysis of similar initiatives in Latin American Countries. The Latin American cases I will analyze are the autonomous Zapatista communities of rural Mexico and the Instituto Ouro

Verde's activities in western Brazil. The first case study that I will explore in depth in the following chapter centers around the community of Redwood, New York, a small, rural town located near the Canadian border and in proximity to the state's Thousand Islands and the tourist town of Alexandria Bay.

Chapter 2: *Embodied Community in New York's North Country: The Case of Redwood, New York*

2.1 Redwood, NY: A Post-Agricultural Community

Redwood, New York is a census-designated place of roughly 600 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The community is situated on the Canadian border near the Thousand Islands Region of northern New York, an area known for its natural beauty and historically robust tourism industry. Redwood, however, is not unlike other places in rural America in that it has experienced significant decline in recent decades, especially with regard to agriculture. Brown et al. (2005) summarized changes in settlement and cropland patterns in the U.S. between 1950 and 2000 using census data, with results that directly apply to New York's North Country. Appalachia, for example, is a region that has experienced significant population decline in recent decades, which can be attributed to the fact that by 2000, 81% of people lived either in metropolitan areas or areas that would become metropolitan (Ibid.). In the "Northern Forests" USGS ecoregion, which includes Redwood, NY, many counties lost population between 1950 and 2000; over the same period, total cropland in this region also declined by nearly 50% (Ibid.).

The decline of total cropland in the state is connected to the subsequent decline of agriculture as a way of life in northern New York, factors that have had heavy implications for people's lives that are visible today. In an interview with Addie Jenne, the former Assemblywoman for New York's 116th district, which stretches from Watertown to Massena along the Canadian border, Ms. Jenne expressed a widely-held concern for the impact of agricultural decline on the region's overall economic state: "The upstate economy always

struggles. Ag is the largest sector, so when ag is down, the entire economy sags.” Ms. Jenne also described a regional “aristocracy” in which a powerful few own land and are able to outcompete smaller producers who are consequently unable to retain their farms. Often times, large dairy operations have secured and retained the best lands, leaving other types of operations artificially excluded from the local and regional economy.

Individuals I spoke to during my time in Redwood expressed similar observations concerning the transformation of the region’s agricultural landscape and the concentration of farmland and operations into fewer and fewer hands. One man I spoke to, who had long been good friends with a number of local farmers, stated:

All the farms, a lot of them are dissolving, the road front properties are being sold off as lots and people are building houses. The rest of the land is being bought off by big, big farms. In Jefferson County you can probably count on two hands the big farms that have come in.

The changing size and number of farms in recent decades is especially visible in the evolving nature of New York’s dairy industry. Many people I spoke with described the once-thriving local dairy industry that used to exist in the northern part of the state, which supported a great number of small, family-owned farms of 30-60 cows. In 1925, the value of all dairy products consumed from the five North Country counties of the state was estimated at a whopping \$21,387,707, making it the region’s key industry (“The Development of Agriculture and Industry”). At this time, the region was the most notable cheese producing area in America. With the growth of dairy came a number of cooperative cheese factories, and cheese boards where representatives from each cooperative offered their products to bidders from distant places. Today, people say

these structures have been largely replaced by industrial scale operations that milk up to one thousand head of cattle under one roof, a change that has necessarily meant the loss of countless family farms in the previous decades. Also key to the decline of northern New York's dairy industry is its increased globalization in the wake of NAFTA. Since the policy's implementation in 1994, an influx of Canadian imports has resulted in a drop in prices that has only harmed New York dairy farmers since, many of whom are unable to compete in global markets (Colver, 2017).

In addition to these factors, the agricultural outputs themselves have shifted away from dairy to reflect an increased demand for commodity materials, driven by global demand for crops to be used in processed foods and non-comestible industrial products. Many people I spoke with on this topic described how abstract economic forces beyond their understanding have driven the rise of massive corn and soy operations across the region, largely to fulfill the demands of "the marketplace." They told stories of how outsiders have gradually come in, bought up portions of 10-15 other farms, and established huge monocultures of corn and soy. Though none of the people I spoke with about this process explicitly mentioned the ecological impacts of the industrialized, monoculture farming they were describing, namely the use of pesticides, herbicides, and artificial fertilizers, there was a general sense of the new paradigm as somehow "bad for the land."

One interviewee, a woman who works as a realtor in the local area, connected the downturn of farming to another factor: the 1984 expansion of a military base in nearby Watertown, NY called Fort Drum. She explicitly linked the decline of small-scale agriculture to the amplification of the military-industrial complex:

The other factor here is the Fort Drum expansion, which began in the fall of 1984. Since that time, there were some farms that may have been marginally profitable where the bank held a mortgage on the farm. However, during the expansion there was a shortfall on housing for a time, and the banks could make more money foreclosing on the farms and turning it over into real estate or other types of development.

Together with the other factors highlighted by those I spoke with in Redwood, Fort Drum has contributed to the absorption of once local, small-scale agricultural operations by the forces of a globalized, neoliberal capitalist mindset. As the interviewees touched on, the implications of this shift are at once social, ecological, and economic. To use Sellers' (1994) terminology, the agricultural transformations of the last few decades can be characterized in terms of a second market revolution, in which the concrete logic of the land, that of small-scale, polycultural operations, has again given way to the rules of an abstract marketplace that promotes monocultural landscapes.

These visible local changes, driven by seemingly invisible global forces, have had clear impacts on local people's perceptions of the world around them, and have arguably worked against the principles of conviviality, ecological sustainability, and sociality that are key aspects of what we call the community economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In the following section, I will discuss Fort Drum as well as a number of other factors that have shaped the current economic situation of Redwood and the surrounding area in greater detail. In exploring the roots of region's current economic situation, I hope to highlight the inability of globalized, neoliberal capitalism to provide true, sustainable prosperity for residents of New York's North Country, a

void that might be at least partially alleviated by a return to a focus on economies and ecologies rooted in the local.

2.2 Boom and Bust: The North Country's Transient Economies

“Well we don't have the businesses we used to. And things aren't as available as they used to be. We have fewer stores, maybe a drugstore and dollar store... these things peaked right after WWII in the late 40s or early 50s. That was a big time for tourism here.”

(Redwood resident, local historian)

The above quotation, taken from an interview with a longtime area resident and the town historian for a community adjacent to Redwood, is quite representative of people's general perceptions of the current state of the local economy and the challenges facing it. When asked what the most pressing issue is facing area residents today, nearly everyone I spoke to mentioned employment and a lack of opportunities to make enough money to get by. Official statistics echo people's perceptions—Redwood's median household income in 2016, \$33,333, was well below the annual median income for Jefferson County (\$49,911), New York state (\$60,741), and the nation as a whole (\$55,322) (Data USA, 2019). The primary drivers behind the local struggle to earn income, according to my interviewees, relate to a history of dependence on transient influxes of external capital to prop up local economies. This phenomenon is visible in two areas: a longtime reliance on seasonal tourism as a core industry, and, more contemporarily, the growth of a service sector to fulfill the needs of the expanded military base at Fort Drum.

The area surrounding Redwood, NY is known for its natural beauty, a fact the community considers to be a great asset. In close proximity to the state's Thousand Islands, Redwood has long relied on seasonal tourism as a source, however inconsistent, of economic stimulation. As of 2016, over half of the community's jobs were in the service sector, with 33.8% of people working in food and serving, and another 18.8% in the personal care and service sector. The Thousand Islands' status as a summer vacation destination often means that many local people go unemployed in the winter months, as they struggle to make a living in the absence of opportunities supported by summertime tourism. In one man's words:

The winters are difficult. If people decide to be teachers they can get a job here. Of course there's any kind of family business that people can step into and take over... In Watertown the medical industry is big. But if people want to do anything else with their lives, they probably move someplace else... I mean some people have businesses that thrive, they're very successful here. That being said, a lot of people who do seasonal work here go south for the winter if they can, and either live off unemployment or find a job there. Alexandria Bay is a tourist town, so in the winter the population is a whole lot smaller. The teachers, a certain handful of businesses, grocery stores, banks, hardware stores, a few restaurants but not too many, and maybe one hotel. And I'm sure they all have much smaller staffs than in the summer. College students are employed in the summer a lot, so they go back to school. But other people... that's their career.

In my interviews with residents of the local community, I got the sense that people have, through the years and over multiple generations, become accustomed to the annual ebb and flow of the tourist economy, in spite of its accompanying difficulties. In addition to this seasonal "boom and

bust,” a second, more long-term factor relates to the expansion of Watertown’s Fort Drum in the early 2000s: the service sector’s growth over the past decade to meet the needs of a larger population, and the accompanying uncertainty over the future of this arguably ephemeral economy, which compel us to consider Fort Drum as a powerful economic force.

In addition to its impact on agricultural foreclosures discussed in the previous section, Fort Drum’s broader influence on the patterns of the regional economy is profound. Following the events of September 11, 2001, Fort Drum transitioned from a training facility into an actual army base, a shift that meant an influx of people and new opportunities to provide services for them. However, one interviewee expressed a certain skepticism concerning the growth of this service economy:

The people who somewhat have an ability to create an economic structure here saw Fort Drum [in nearby Watertown] as a golden egg. In their economic basket they put almost all their eggs in that basket. So the economy shifted and it became one of a service industry and retail. So all of the sudden they built the mall and you saw restaurants popping up because of the soldiers in the area who had all this extra money they could spend. What’ll happen when this shifts back and the [Department of Defense] starts pulling out some of the brigades, is that Fort Drum will go back to being a training facility. But it won’t be big enough to support the economy of the area in the way that it has.

This individual’s foresight underscores a key insight into the future of the regional economy: as it is, it is not entirely sustainable in the long term. Though differing temporally, both of the aforementioned economic factors compel us to consider what alternative models—perhaps

arrangements that depend less on external factors—might be possible. Might the strengthening of a community economy in Redwood, NY promote an ecological, social, and economic “being in common,” and in doing so promote sustainability in all its forms? (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In the following section, I will discuss the work of Better Farm, a space dedicated to cultivating discussion and inspiring action in the realm of sustainable, local living.

2.3 Better Farm: A Locus for Ecological and Social “Being In Common”

In this section, I will explore the ways in which a site known as Better Farm posits alternative ways of living, a model that I believe takes us closer to “being in common” in a sense that is at once ecological and social (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The farm, situated in Redwood itself, functions as a sustainability campus, organic farm, and artist colony dedicated to fostering a sense of community in the local and regional area surrounding the hamlet of Redwood. I first visited Better Farm in August of 2017. During this time, I volunteered labor in the farm’s organic gardens and participated in an Audubon-sponsored shrubland restoration project meant to create habitat for an endangered species of warbler. While there, I also established a relationship with the organization’s founder, Nicole Caldwell, along with a growing desire to return to Redwood to conduct research into the local economy, community, and ecology.

Through funding from the Dalal Creativity and Innovation Grant for Student-Faculty Innovation, I then continued background research into the region under the direction of Latin American Studies Professor David Rojas, and received support to return to Redwood to conduct ethnographic research. In December of 2017, I conducted two weeks of fieldwork in Redwood, during which I carried out 13 semi-structured interviews of individuals affiliated with Better

Farm, municipal officials, and residents. These interviews focused on lived experiences of recent rural transformations, memories of bygone rural times, and anticipatory thoughts concerning alternative food production networks. I returned again this winter, supported by Bucknell's Center for Social Science Research, to continue my fieldwork.

During my visits to Better Farm, I have gained an understanding of the ways in which the sustainability campus exemplifies a certain ecological consciousness. During the summer months, Better Farm operates a one-acre, organic, no-till mulch gardening operation. The type of mulch gardening employed on the farm is a layering method that mimics a forest floor, combining soil improvement, weed removal, and long-term mulching, while improving nutrient and water retention in the dirt, encouraging favorable soil microbial activity and worms, suppressing weed growth, and improving the well-being of plants (Caldwell 2019). From April to November, Better Farm also offers a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that offers local residents a weekly share of fresh local produce. Providing people with access to fresh, locally grown food is a key component of Better Farm's mission.

Environmental and sustainability education is another key component of Better Farm's work. More than anything, the farm aims to model alternative, more sustainable methods of living in a way that is accessible to others, who might gain transferrable skills and knowledge from witnessing and participating in Better Farm's methodology. Better Farm founder, Nicole Caldwell, states:

A lot of my efforts have been setting up these smaller systems so that people travelling here can bear witness to alternative ways of doing things. I am on that track because I've gotten into boots on the ground activism. I understand we need high level change to

happen, but I can do major ripple effects. People that come through these walls... to see that having a compost bin means that your kitchen doesn't smell bad... If people can see that we can grow fresh greens out of the top of a fish tank, people can change something when they get back home. People often reach out to me after they've left to express how they're now doing something differently in their own lives.

Better Farm accomplishes this goal in a myriad of ways: producing workshops on specific skills related to self-sufficiency, hosting WWOOFers (Worldwide Opportunities On Organic Farms is a network that pairs small, organic farms with volunteer laborers), and partnering with local restaurants to collect and utilize compostable waste.

At the social level, Better Farm cultivates a space of open dialogue on sustainability that everyone who passes through is encouraged to join, whether they be an Airbnb guest from New York city, an artist-in-residence from Iran, or a neighbor from down the street. This conviviality, centered around the ideology and practice of self-sufficiency, imbues Better Farm with a sense of community. As Kirkpatrick (1991) writes, the promotion of self-sufficiency in this way “fosters a more cohesive, more self-regarding, more self-concerned populace, with a developed sense of community and comradeship as well as the pride and resiliency that comes with the knowledge of one's competence, control, stability, an independence” (pp. 78). Better Farm, in both its exemplification of the ideals of sustainability and its active encouragement of an inclusive dialogue around this very theme, provides for a “being in common” that translates ecology into sociality (Gibson-Graham, 2006). This being in common is not limited to ecological and social dimensions; it extends into concrete economic behaviors and communal expectations of local residents as well. In the following section, I will explore the ways in which Redwood's informal,

non-capitalist systems of mutual support and exchange exemplify Gibson-Graham's (2006) notion of the community economy as well as ideas of the gift economy, one that broadens and resocializes our conventional understanding of "The Economy."

2.4 Systems of Noncapitalist Exchange and Mutual Support in Upstate New York

"Some people are good at one thing and other people are bad at it and good at doing this or that. If you kind of get everyone together, it's really a brotherhood. I have noticed that... The barter system has always been and always will be, 'you watch my back I'll watch your back. You help me with this I'll help you with that.'"

Redwood resident

In my first phase of research during the winter of 2017, I identified an unspoken "barter system" which connects community members in a non-monetary exchange of services. Though the experiences described by my interviewees may not always align with the conventional definition of the term barter, I will use the word when referring to these networks to provide a narrative that is most true to how it is seen by those who participate in and depend on it.

The essence of this informal system rests on the principle of co-dependence, in which individuals provide each other with needed services in the understanding that others will support them in their own time of need. For example, in a conversation I had with one Redwood resident in 2017, a skilled carpenter recounted how he helped a neighbor build a wooden fence for his

goats; months later, said neighbor returned the favor when the first man's home required electrical rewiring. People I spoke to in Redwood note with regularity how locals "come out of the woodwork" to support each other in difficult times. Though some individuals mentioned this "barter system" explicitly, most spoke about its virtues without mentioning it by name.

Regardless of whether or not the systems of mutual support that exist in Redwood can be technically characterized as barter, I believe that an examination of the counter-hegemonic economic practices at play in Redwood and in the region at large will contribute to a broader, perhaps transferrable, understanding of these types of arrangements.

The stories of non-capitalist exchange and mutual support that emerge in the case of Redwood help lead us to a conceptualization of economies as something diverse and multiple (Wright, 2010). They also lead us to an intimate understanding of Gibson-Graham's (2006) notion of the community economy, a system that seeks to highlight the sociality of all economic relations while recognizing the interdependence of a variety of activities; when surplus labor is distributed as it is by participants in Redwood's barter system, community is produced or at the very least potentiated. As Gibson-Graham (2006) write, "each allocation allows for a becoming, a new way of being" (pp. 91). One man highlights the community that stems from, and that ultimately underlies, the local culture of mutual support and exchange that exists in Redwood:

I run into people from the North Country here who definitely live by the barter system, and they'll ask me two questions: You keeping warm? You eating good? If you answer no to any one of them, they're coming live. Not a week later, not two months after the hurricane hits; they're showing up the next morning. If you said [yes] to being hungry, well you might get beaver saddles, venison tenderloin... hard telling. You might get some

fish, some stuff they've gone out and killed. If you say 'I'm not staying warm,' they'll look right at you and say, 'what do you got? Oil, wood, kerosene?' And they don't wait, they're there the next day with whatever you told them you're heating with.

This quotation, from a local man I spoke to on a few occasions during my time at Better Farm, exemplifies the economic "being in common" at the core of Gibson-Graham's (2006) definition of the community economy.

The economic "being in common" supported by Redwood's informal barter system is also steeped in a sense of necessity. Multiple people I spoke with emphasized this fact; people support each other because they need to in order to survive, a pressure heightened by the lack of a grange hall economy (which once provided a formal structure for supporting farmers' needs), the decline of small farming in the region, and the simple fact that printed, minted currency is often hard to come by. The community's unspoken contract of mutual support also possesses a certain foresight that the capitalist economy often lacks. There is a responsibility to the people involved that extends beyond the transaction itself, beyond a mere exchange of equivalents (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Better Farm founder Nicole Caldwell touched on this:

Once you spend the money it's gone, but once you help someone here you can see how it helps them, and you almost get a refund down the road, and there's accountability because there's no privacy; everyone would know; a place like Redwood is ground zero for accountability, you can't change where you hang out, you can't burn so many bridges, it's a good way to ensure you keep paying it forward.

The system described by Caldwell distinguishes itself in a number of ways. It ensures that people's immediate physical needs do not go unmet and sustains itself to provide for future

needs, all while potentiating a broader sense of community. Redwood's informal barter system, therefore, gives rise to an interconnectedness that epitomizes the notion of economic "being in common."

The systems of mutual support and non-capitalist exchange that exist in Redwood also align with Mauss' (2002) articulation of a gift economy. Like in the primitive societies Mauss analyzes, Redwood's informal barter system creates a local economy of total services, in which what otherwise might be "solely economic" acts are broadened to encompass ideas of sociality, morality, and even justice (Ibid.) At the simplest level, this system is not unlike gift-giving in the sense that eventual reciprocation of the service is understood. Better Farm founder Nicole Caldwell articulated this understanding to me during a recent conversation on the theme: "You do a favor and they just kind of owe you, and you just call upon them at some point...It's just inherent." In the same way that old currency used to be backed by silver, she says, the barter system is backed by a trust in the reciprocity of helping when one can and in being helped in one's own time of need.

In a theoretical sense, Redwood's barter system also opens the door for a reconsideration of what we conventionally see as valuable in a capitalist society. The dialogue potentiated by the community's non-monetary exchange of goods and services creates room for a world in which wealth can come to mean more than capital itself. Caldwell, for example, describes the trading of information by community members as "their own form of currency." She asserts the value in bartering not simply with material goods, but also with knowledge. Depending on the circumstance, this sharing of wealth might take the form of showing a neighbor how to plant a garden, or teaching them to skin a deer or catch a fish. It is in these interactions that a community

economy is strengthened, and through which the essence community itself, the social, economic, and ecological components of “being in common,” are promoted.

Chapter 3: *Sowing Seeds of Community Resilience: Brazil's Instituto Ouro Verde*

3.1 Neoliberalism, Agriculture and Brazil

The 20th century was a period of economic transition for the Latin American region at large. As Amman and Baer (2002) note, “the old paradigms of development... were jettisoned in favour of an open economy for the state, with an exit of the state through massive privatisation and the predominance of market forces” (pp. 945). The 1980s, for example, were a decade of transformations. After the debt crisis in the early part of the decade, Latin American policy makers were under pressure to accept the “prescriptions” of multilateral international financial institutions, backed by the major industrial countries and the principal creditors of the region (Ibid.).

By the end of the 1980s most Latin American countries had adopted the so-called 'Washington Consensus' neoliberal policy orientation. According to Chasteen (1995), neoliberalism can be defined as an economic doctrine with an emphasis on free trade, export production, and the concept of competitive advantage (p. 330). At its core, the ideology favors free-market capitalism, a laissez-faire approach to the market in which government intervention is kept to a minimum. In Latin American countries such as Brazil, the Washington Consensus' principles manifested in a combination of neoliberal measures meant to reduce inflation, promote the privatization of state-owned enterprises, and liberalize trade through declines in tariffs and other non-tariff protections. Additionally, the neoliberal era has been characterized by the prevalence of market interest rates, and the opening of most sectors to foreign investment and decreasing regulations on the actions of foreign capital. This shift toward neoliberalism has

impacted a number of aspects of Latin American societies; in the sections that follow, I will focus on the changes impacting agriculture in Brazil specifically.

The economic shifts of the 20th century predictably resulted in a number of agricultural changes. In the 1980s, economic crises pushed large farms to abandon farming and establish ranches, signalling the coming domination of meat production in Amazonia (Rojas, 2018). One area of Brazil, often colloquially called The Portal of Amazonia, epitomizes this transition. It represents a large area of several thousand square miles located at the southern edge of the Amazon basin and at the northern edge of the state of Mato Grosso. To the south of this zone, one finds extensive ranches and agro-industrial plantations. To the north, one finds areas in which native forests stand (Rojas 2018, pp. 3). One crop that has played an enormous role in these transformations in recent decades is soy. In the following section, I will explore Brazilian soy's commodification as evidence of a new neoliberal paradigm, one with great ecological impacts.

3.2 Commodity Soy: An Agro-ecological Paradigm Shift

This year, Brazil will surpass the United States as the largest soybean producer in the world (Samora, 2018). The country's contemporary prominence in this industry is a recent phenomenon. During the 1990s, the development of a low-latitude soybean germplasm by EMBRAPA, Brazil's national research agency, was widely considered to be "one of the most important technological innovations in agriculture since the green revolution" (Goldsmith, 2008). At this time, soy was "tropicalized" for use in the Brazilian Amazon, selected to be amenable to mechanized planting and harvesting, and adapted to longer photoperiods, higher temperatures,

and more acidic, low-phosphorus soil conditions (Nepstad et al., 2006). These aforementioned technological developments have allowed for the explosion of soy production in Brazil as an industrial crop in recent decades.

In the early 1990s, economic liberalization drastically reduced government subsidies for domestic soy producers while opening the domestic soy market to foreign competitors (Monteiro et al., 2012). This deregulation of the Brazilian economy, combined with soy's newfound ability to tolerate the Amazonian climate, encouraged transnational corporations to invest in production, storage, and transport infrastructure in the region (Nepstad et al., 2006). In Brazil, this corporate control has promoted the existence of monocultural agro-ecosystems, in which soy production is practically inextricable from the environmentally destructive fleet of chemicals and practices marketed by some of the world's most powerful multinational corporations. Soy farming also directly impacts the country's diverse rainforest ecosystems; widespread deforestation, both to clear land for fields and to pave highways to reach remote lands, is easily the most visible environmental change driven by soy production (Boerema et al., 2016).

The environmental impacts of soy production have grown since the crop's introduction to Amazonia. By 2008, the Brazilian soybean area required for export to the European Union alone was 6.2 million hectares; of this, 2.2 million hectares represented former grassland and savannah, while 4 million hectares of soybean farming took place in fields created by the clearing of tropical rainforest (Boerema et al., 2016). In addition to the direct relationship of land use with habitat destruction and fragmentation, Oliveira and Hecht (2016) observed the propensity for soybean farming to dramatically alter regional hydrologies by shifting stream flow, contributing to water warming, and increasing runoff. Additionally, the widespread use of the

likely-carcinogenic agrochemical glyphosate to maintain the soy crop raises concerns about both human and environmental health (Ibid.). As of 2016, the total loss of natural capital due to the region's diminished ecosystem services was estimated at 1.7 trillion dollars at least (Boerema et al.).

Further complicating soy's ecological footprint is the high degree of control that big agribusiness has over the practices of individual farmers. Partnerships between powerful seed and chemical manufacturers and soybean trading companies such as Cargill and Monsanto have enabled large corporations to essentially dictate the inputs and farming practices of most soy farmers, providing them with their "prearranged provision of fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides and seeds" (Oliveira and Hecht, 2016, pp. 260). Wealthy corporations also directly influence local land use decisions by investing in infrastructure projects that promote more soy production, funding the construction of ports to incentivize the paving of federal highways to link the ports to agricultural areas (Nepstad et al., 2006). These investments promote further deforestation by increasing access to previously unreachable lands.

The environmental degradation caused by current agro-economic practices leads us to consider what alternatives might more sustainably meet people's needs. In the next section, I will discuss the work of the Instituto Ouro Verde, an organization whose Seeds of the Portal program embodies the principles of Gibson-Graham's (2006) community economy among other concepts.

3.3 The Instituto Ouro Verde: Cultivating Alternatives in Amazonia

The Instituto Ouro Verde (IOV) is a grassroots non-governmental organization (NGO) that advances programs designed to help smallholder farmers. The IOV describes itself as "a

non-governmental organization founded in 1999 that has as its focus [social participation] as a basis for sustainable development. Part of the idea that development does not involve ready-made models, but rather something in permanent construction” (Instituto Ouro Verde, 2019). The IOV acts directly with farmers and their representatives, through partnerships with public and private entities that focus on sustainable development. It acts by encouraging participation and the creation of a critical and politicized vision of the rural man, valuing his culture and strengthening social structures, and enabling his technical, economic and institutional growth, thus respecting his specific way of seeing the world (Ibid.).

The Institute’s largest initiative is the Seeds of the Portal project, which brings together smallholder farmers who are in the process of establishing agro-ecological sites on their lands by planting native species together with cash crops and produce to be consumed locally (Rojas 2018, pp. 2). The sites are often referred to as agroforestry systems (AFS). The first phase of the initiative had two concrete goals prior to its completion in 2013: “To recover a 1,200-hectare area by means of agroforestry systems, contributing to the generation of income, meeting environmental, legal and quality requirements in small properties that are benefiting from the project” and “to foster forest product sectors with broader aggregate value by structuring and developing a market for forest seeds” (Amazon Watch). Taken together, these would develop sustainable production activities in seven municipalities in the the north region of the state of Mato Grosso, an area known as the Portal of the Amazon.

At the most basic level, the concrete outputs of the program that addressed the first goal of forest recovery were: participative planning and monitoring implementation for projects to environmentally recover properties, the creation of a base for technical services to provide

support in implementing agroforestry systems, capacity-building for rural producers, and the supply of inputs for planting in the agroforestry systems and fencing areas for recovery (Ibid.). To address the second goal of building a forest seed market, the IOV implemented capacity-building for farmers and the Terena indigenous community to collect seeds while structuring communal seed houses (Ibid.) The immediate beneficiaries of this first phase of initiatives were a group of family farmers from six municipalities in the northern part of Mato Grosso.

The second phase of the Seeds of the Portal initiative, which was contracted and began in December of 2013, proclaims its goal is to be the following:

...support the recovery of damaged areas and the strengthening of family farming in the Amazon Portal region, in the state of Mato Grosso, through the implementation and consolidation of agroforestry systems (AFS), with activities that include planting trees and improving agroforests, structuring channels for selling products and trees, and conducting research.

The second phase of the initiative will conclude in August of 2019, so at this time it is difficult to speak in much greater detail on it as a completed project.

As Rojas (2018) notes, this agro-ecological work certainly does address both urgent ecological and economic problems; the IOV has objectively been successful in many of their goals. During the first phase, for example, forest recovery activities reached 1,246.8 ha (just above the goal of 1,200 ha), with an orbital analysis verifying that there was a 139.5% increase in forest covered area and a decrease of 47.23% in the exposed soil areas (Anache et al. 2016). With regard to economic aims, the project's first phase was successful at establishing a network

for the collection, processing, storage, and marketing of forest seeds, the installation of 10 seed stores in operation in 2016, and a growth in the general interest in agroforestry initiatives (SAFs) as a productive process for reforestation efforts (Ibid.).

The significance of the Seeds of the Portal initiative goes well beyond these formally stated aims. The Seeds of the Portal initiative also distinguishes itself as “a political effort to the extent that it supports smallholder farmers’ land claims and helps them create strategies for succeeding in conventional agriculture” (Rojas, 2018). Part of this success could be measured in economic terms. Though it was not possible to measure the gross annual income of the beneficiaries, the purchase of seeds alone injected almost one million reais in additional income, plus the sale of other agroforestry products into the regional economy (Anache et al. 2016).

Additionally, the IOV’s activities in Mato Grosso clearly embody concepts such as the community economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006). As part of this framework, Gibson-Graham (2006) propose that we repoliticize the economy, reclaiming it as a contested space. The Seeds of the Portal project clearly seeks to accomplish this through its construction of local economies based entirely around forest seeds (Anache et al. 2016). The Seeds of the Portal initiative leads us to question what kinds of economies we have come to view as standard or customary, a necessarily political topic. The community economy created by the IOV’s Seeds of the Portal initiative is also centered around environmental conservation. In addition to its nontraditional nature as a currency, the forest seed economy stands to directly promote ecosystem health through reforestation efforts, having allowed for the environmental recovery of over 1,200 hectares of degraded areas (Amazon Watch, 2019). Thus, the Seeds of the Portal project reflects the community economy’s emphasis on localism, while simultaneously raising bigger-picture

questions about economic systems at large (Gibson-Graham 2006, pp. 80).

The Institute's Seeds of the Portal project also epitomizes practices of commoning. Gibson-Graham (2006) define the commons as "a community stock that needs to be maintained and replenished so that it can continue to constitute the community by providing its direct input (subsidy) to survival" (p. 97). In the case of the IOV's work on the Seeds of the Portal initiative, the commons in a concrete sense is made up of the community seed banks established and maintained by the project (Rojas, 2018). The notion of the commons also extends to the principles underlying agro-ecological systems, and their dissemination by community leaders as well as by the Institute's technicians. Thus, the commons is at once physical and abstract. The treatment of the commons in the case of the IOV also leads us to question Garrett Hardin's 1968 argument that man's inevitable selfishness leads to the overuse and destruction of commons; in other words, the only recourse for sustainability is either government takeover or privatization (Nelson 2015). The establishment of a thriving commons through the Institute's Seeds of the Portal initiative leads us to question the notion that commons must be protected *from* people. Might a commons constitute something we collectively maintain for the overall betterment of the community, in both an economic and ecological sense?

In their focus on a few municipalities located in one key region of ecological transformations, the IOV's work also epitomizes the concept of bioregionalism. In order to imagine alternatives to the perilous industrio-scientific paradigm, Kirkpatrick (1991) argues that we must become "dwellers in the land." The key to achieving this, according to Kirkpatrick, is "to understand place, the immediate specific place where we live" (pp. 41). The IOV's work clearly aims to contribute to a greater sense of place in Mato Grosso, primarily through its

activities focused on cultivating local seeds and knowledge of the plants themselves. The emphasis on agroforestry initiatives (SAFs) that restore the land in the process of generating incomes for local families, mirror the type of privileged care for the local environment that bioregionalism stipulates. Additionally, at a more abstract level, the Seeds of the Portal initiative's regional scale represents "the scale where ecological consciousness can be developed" and also the scale at which citizens "can see themselves as being the cause for the environmental effect" (pp. 53). Thus, the IOV's bioregional focus has the dual-impact of driving concrete ecological restoration while promoting a regional discourse and consciousness around environmental issues.

Chapter 4: *Resisting Neoliberal Homogeneity: Mexico's Zapatista Movement*

4.1 Neoliberal Exploitation in Mexico post-NAFTA

During the 1990s and early 2000s, Latin America experienced many changes, among them leanings toward democratization, economic paradigm shifts, and growing movements to represent the rights of minoritized groups such as women, people of color, and indigenous peoples. Mexico provides a valuable case through which to analyze the changes that occurred during this time, particularly for its dramatic economic shifts, their subsequent social impacts, and the resulting pushback from groups like the Zapatistas.

One of the most visible shifts to occur in Mexico during this period of change was its radical economic liberalization. The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 brought significant changes to the Mexican economy and society. The agreement, which liberalized the regional economy and opened Mexico's doors to foreign investment, has generally been regarded as beneficial for North American economies and for the average citizen. However, NAFTA's neoliberal economic package in fact had deleterious impacts on a specific segment of the Mexican population. Maquiladoras, foreign-owned companies located in Mexico that focus on the export of manufactured goods, sprung up along the U.S.-Mexico border in the wake of NAFTA. Some estimate that Maquiladora employment in Mexico grew 86 percent in the first five years after the onset of the agreement (Jan, 2017). A downside to this spectacular growth was undoubtedly the poor working conditions in the largely duty-free factories, whose goal was to operate as cheaply as possible. Female laborers were particularly exploited, relegated to low-skill tasks while male counterparts assumed management

and supervision positions. The maquiladoras therefore distinguish themselves not only as a marker of neoliberal economic development, but also of stark gender disparities.

Another fleet of changes that impacted Mexico in the wake of NAFTA are those relating to the country's rural population. In particular, small farmers faced some of the most adverse impacts of the new economic era, their livelihoods threatened by the United States' growing control over the market for agricultural raw materials like corn. Though powerful producers of American corn benefited from NAFTA's generous subsidies, local Mexican farmers struggled to compete with the cheaper product coming from across the border. As prices plummeted in the post-NAFTA era, many found small farmers found themselves unable to make a living. It is estimated that around two million Mexican farmers have been forced to abandon their farms since 1994, allowing their fields to go fallow and desperately seeking employment elsewhere (Carlsen, 2013). In addition to the economic impacts, the availability of cheap American corn began to displace indigenous varieties of maize that had long been grown in Mexico, threatening to replace traditional methods of cultivation with monocultural, agroindustrial landscapes. This period in Mexican history therefore represents a tug of war between tradition and modernity, between the homogeneity of globalization and efforts to preserve distinguishing cultural practices and rural ways of life.

These tensions, between visions of a globalized, monocultural world and those of traditional, sustainable ways of life, are epitomized by the Zapatistas. In the following section, I will discuss the Zapatistas more generally before delving into their specific counter-hegemonic practices.

4.2 Articulating a Politics of Resistance: Mexico's Zapatista Movement

On January 1, 1994, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) rose against the Mexican government and seized several cities in the Mexican state of Chiapas, beginning a period of militarized conflict and occupation of indigenous territories by the Mexican military. In the film *Zapatista*, one Zapatista man notes the rationale behind the timing of the rebellion: “We rebelled against the power in 1994, precisely when they were celebrating the ecstasy and the climax of the globalization process, at the moment when Mexico was erased as a nation and became part of the world supermarket” (MVD Entertainment Group, 26:55). However, this powerful assertion of identity has been met largely with violence in Mexico, an unfortunately prominent social response to the application of structural adjustment policies and other neoliberal policy orientations throughout Latin America.

As the nation-state has become less able to negotiate socially and politically with mobilized sectors of society such as the Zapatistas, it has increasingly imposed violent measures of social control (Sanchez, 2006, pp. 178). In the years that followed the initial uprising, the Zapatistas faced a great deal of violence at the hands of the military. In 1997, in what became known as the Acteal Massacre, the military entered a community in Chiapas and killed 45 indigenous people including 21 women and 15 children, people who were seeking refuge in a town church. The contemporary Zapatista movement is in many ways a response to the direct violations occurring in Zapatista territories; that being said, Zapatismo at large is also a protest against the neoliberal logic driving them.

The Zapatista rebellion itself was in many ways a response to years of tensions between traditional indigenous ways of life and the forces of globalization that had begun to shape the

region. In 1991, for example, a constitutional provision that asserted public ownership of all land and water resources and established the ejido system of communal land tenure was modified to make way for NAFTA (MVD Entertainment Group, 2005, 6:14). Following this change, the buying and selling of any parcel of land was made legal, establishing a clear divide between neoliberal logic and traditional communal land ownership. These are the types of paradigm shifts that the Zapatistas have continually resisted; the formal rebellion represents one point on the timeline of their resistance.

The Zapatista resistance to neoliberalism has broadly taken the form of a movement for autonomy, one where “the protagonists [struggle] for the right to define themselves culturally, socially, and politically” (Stahler-Sholk, 2007, p. 49). Following the 1994 Zapatista rebellion that led to a signed agreement, the only topic that led to signed peace talks was the negotiation over indigenous rights and culture, which led to the San Andrés Accords of 1996. The accords conceded state recognition of *usos y costumbres*, the normative system of decision-making authority through which indigenous communities traditionally governed themselves. For the Zapatistas, this constituted “a fundamental victory for community-based autonomy” (Ibid., p. 53). Their struggle has been to locally maintain this sense of autonomy, one rooted in their capacity to collectively manage their own land, in the face of an increasingly globalized world.

The Zapatistas self-identify as “a guerilla movement that has more political victories than military ones” and “an army that paradoxically calls for peace and not for war” (MVD Entertainment Group, 2005, 26:13). Zapatismo as a social movement consists of various layers: the political-military structure (insurgents and militia) of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army—EZLN) that went public in 1994, the “networks”

of national and international supporters, and the “support-base” indigenous communities in the “conflict zones” (eastern jungle, border, northern zone, and central highlands) of Chiapas (Stahler-Sholk, 2007). Taken together, these layers form the Zapatista movement.

The Zapatistas are deeply attached to the idea of life, ecology, and economy centered on the community. In fact, the Zapatistas actively resist regionalized models of any kind, preferring a community-based model to regional configurations. They believe more large-scale organizing can replicate existing power structures and give too much authority to *caciques*, indigenous leaders. Thus, their model stands in stark contrast to Kirkpatrick’s (1991) bioregional vision from the outset. Interestingly, though the Zapatistas prefer a model of autonomy built from the community level upward, they also remain open to a pluralism of types of autonomy, a “world in which many worlds can fit” (Stahler-Sholk, 2007). In this, they echo Escobar’s (2011) notion of the pluriverse an ontology that emphasizes the profound relationality of all life... [in which] the world is always multiple” (pp. 139).

Escobar (2009) also characterizes the Zapatistas as a “node in global movement networks,” a testament to their plural emphasis on the interconnectedness of the local and global. They have continually set their sights on both global and local means of action. Their powerful opposition to Plan Puebla-Panamá and other development schemes, on the grounds that multiculturalism should not be an ‘asset’ for ecotourism, has “solidified their perspective as an alternative to the logic of global capital” (Stahler-Sholk, 2007). At the same time as they have opposed international development initiatives, the Zapatistas have also emphasized community autonomy at every step. Since 1997, the Zapatistas have continuously worked to organize their

own semi-autonomous municipal governments, often under the noses of occupying military forces.

In addition to this political autonomy, a large part of the Zapatista's cultivated sense of independence is certainly economic in nature. Aspects of the Zapatista ideology and practice explicitly align with Gibson-Graham's (2006) notion of the community economy. The Zapatista economic model is, for example, centered around non-market alternatives, and rooted in the material conditions needed for subsistence. The economic choice to abstain from neoliberal global markets, therefore, is an act of economic resistance with ecologically beneficial results. Stahler-Sholk (2007), describe these practices:

Self-reliant, sustainable development is an important challenge for the Zapatista communities. Since 1994, they have developed a variety of self-sufficient production, exchange, and social service projects: collective garden patches, rabbit raising, beekeeping, candle making, agroecology experimentation, locally controlled schools, networks of health promoters trained in combinations of traditional and modern healing, etc.” (p. 57).

The local culture of subsistence that permeates Zapatista communities is at once economic, ecological, and social in its orientation. While capitalist economic relations attempt to banish the “sticky ties” of culture, the Zapatista's work is to embrace culture's role in transactions that extend beyond the field of economics alone (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In sustainably meeting their material needs, the Zapatistas not only promote healthier ecologies, but simultaneously present us with images of what alternative, more social economies might look like.

One project that epitomizes sustainable, small-scale economic activity is the “Mother Seeds in Resistance” project, established in 2002 by the Mayan Tzotzil community in Oventic, Chiapas (Aguila-Way, 2014). The project, which is a response to the proliferation of genetically modified corn in the region (and thus the decline of indigenous varieties of the crop), exemplifies an act of local resistance to neoliberal, globalizing capitalist norms. The program has a two-pronged focus: the protection of indigenous corn diversity, and the preservation of cultural practices and agricultural knowledge associated with it; as Aguila-Way writes, the seed bank initiative challenges both “the biotechnological practices that are threatening the food sovereignty of the Tzotzil community” as well as “a long-standing tradition of hegemonizing national narratives that persistently mobilize discourses about agrarian rights to promote the use of Mexico’s agricultural resources for neoliberal ends” (p. 67). Thus, the initiative constructs a community economy that simultaneously promotes cultural preservation through the protection of corn seed diversity.

The Zapatista resistance is even embodied in the art produced by the communities. Vargas-Santiago (2016), for example, discusses the significance of mural-making as markers of identity and resistance within Mexico’s autonomous Zapatista municipalities, also called *caracoles*. Essentially, murals defy traditional capitalist notions of art and authorship by encouraging a process that results in distinctly collective, protest art. In the Zapatista community of Oventic three processes are performed on murals that underscore principles of sustainability. Alteration defines the correction or restoration of an original image for the purpose of its conservation. Erasure tends to be more radical, as it essentially involves “rewriting” the story of the mural to most effectively depict its large cultural or political message (i.e. darkening the skin

of a person on the painting to reflect an indigenous individual). Destruction involves the demolition of buildings containing murals, and perhaps the recycling of the wood into new buildings. For the Zapatistas, murals function as works that can reconstruct, forget, or cover up history in search of a depiction of a better future. The democratic and participatory nature of the process behind them underscores their status as a means of protest and promotion of a non-capitalist worldview.

Chapter 5: Commonalities and Differences in Alternative Economies

5.1 Agroecology: A Sustainable Framework for Alternative Economies

Environmental sustainability is undoubtedly a key tenet in each of the aforementioned projects. In each of the cases discussed, there is an emphasis, whether explicit or implied, on the capacity to maintain a certain way of life long into the future. For Better Farm, the Instituto Ouro Verde, and the Zapatistas, this often takes the form of some type of agroecological practice, which can be broadly conceptualized as the application of ecological principles to agricultural processes. Though agroecology features as a theme in each of the cases, the concept manifests itself differently in each, taking a form appropriate to the given context.

In the case of Better Farm, the connection between agriculture and ecology is not immediately apparent; agriculture and ecology do not *appear* to exist side by side in the way that is so obvious in the meshworks created in the Latin American cases. However, I argue that in the presence of today's agroindustrial paradigm, Better Farm's organic gardening operation alone constitutes some form of agroecological practice, if only for its implicit emphasis on sustainability and use of ecologically beneficial farming practices. That is, small-scale, organic gardening is itself inherently agroecological. In another sense, part of Better Farm's ecological focus appears to exist alongside, but distinct from, its agricultural practices. We might take as an example the shrubland restoration the farm undertook in 2017 with the goal of creating habitat for an endangered warbler species. This "purely ecological" initiative took place mere yards from Better Farm's organic gardens. Though the two are not explicitly interlinked in precisely

the same space, their coexistence is evidence of agroecology as a driving principle behind Better Farm's practice.

For the Instituto Ouro Verde, agroecology signifies a near-total integration of ecological principles with agricultural practices of subsistence. Their Seeds of the Portal Initiative, which promotes the planting of native forest species alongside cash crops and produce for local consumption, epitomizes this (Rojas, 2018). The integration of wild Amazonian plants, which provide habitat and improve ecosystem health, with agriculture crops, provides the perfect case to observe agroecology in action. The initiative has a clear emphasis on its ecological sustainability in the conventional sense, having contributed to the reforestation of 1,200 hectares of previously degraded lands (Amazon Watch, 2019). These reforestation efforts constitute sustainability as we often imagine it; and yet, the IOV's integration of these principles into agricultural systems in very nontraditional ways lead us to new conceptions of how ecological thinking can inform our methods of material subsistence through food production.

For the Zapatistas, notions of sustainability are more clearly linked to a sense of territorial autonomy. Unlike Better Farm's efforts to restore shrubland habitat, for example, their processes do not tend to view nature in the pristine sense. Rather, they desire autonomy over their own lands, and thus control over the practices occurring on them; agroecology, in the formal sense, is not intrinsically a concern. However, as Stahler-Sholk (2007) notes, Zapatista communities can sometimes be scapegoated for subsistence efforts unless they explicitly label their practices as "agroecology" (pp. 59). Therefore, the labelling of their own practices as agroecology comes out of necessity, in order to defend their land claims and to continue to practice traditional agriculture that is ultimately sustainable regardless of the label applied to it.

For the Zapatistas, practicing agroecology is critical to preserving their own autonomy, an autonomy constantly threatened by outside forces. The Zapatistas also embrace the political nature of their work, a theme I will explore further in the following section.

5.2 The Politics of Sustainability: (A)political Leanings of Alternative Economic Arrangements

Another means of analyzing alternative economic-ecological projects is in terms of their politics. The three cases I have discussed each demonstrate a unique degree of politicization. Generally speaking, the two Latin American cases appear to be more politically oriented than the Redwood, New York case, largely out of necessity. That is, they are political because doing so ensures their autonomy and ultimately their survival.

The Instituto Ouro Verde's Seeds of the Portal project epitomizes this. Smallholder Brazilian farmers who are part of the IOV's programs often struggle in conditions that, since the opening of their territory to agriculture, have systematically pressured them off their lands. Seeds of the Portal, therefore, does more than address pressing ecological problems. As Rojas (2018) notes, the agro-ecological initiative is also a political effort "to the extent that it supports smallholder farmers' land claims and helps them create strategies for succeeding in conventional agriculture" (Rojas, 2018). The IOV's Seeds of the Portal program, therefore, supports smallholder farmers in adopting a political orientation to preserve their own land ownership. In this the program embodies the use of a strong politics to ensure the long term survival of a cultural group, and with them a politics of sustainability.

Similarly, the work of the Zapatistas is inherently political. As Stahler-Sholk (2007) notes, the very aim of their sustainable subsistence lifestyle and non-market existence is to

inspire a broader movement capable of changing state politics. As one sympathizer notes, Zapatistas rise up and argue that “there is more to life than the market,” also fighting for the rights of indigenous peoples as non-dispensable human beings with concrete rights (MVD Entertainment Group, 2005). Interestingly, Demos (2016) also argues on behalf of an aesthetic element as a key component of Zapatista politics, exemplified in “impassioned displays of revolutionary collectivism involving music and speeches” and “carnavalesque parades and protests” (Ibid., pp. 155). It is clear politics plays a role in every aspect of the Zapatista way of life, from the ecological to the artistic.

Better Farm’s work is less political in that it does not specifically orient itself as a political operation. This is, I argue, because its politics is not inextricably bound to people’s survival in the way it is for the Zapatistas and the IOV. Though not a matter of life or death, one interviewee did mention the challenges of local politics that Better Farm founder Nicole Caldwell faced when starting the farm:

People here were not incredibly excited about it. You know they weren’t picketing here or anything when she made the decision to do what she was going to do. The vast majority of people were like “we’ll see.” And really they thought she wasn’t going to make the cut. I think there was a component of ‘this city girl isn’t going to be able to make it last.’ And she proved herself, her natural charisma, I mean... Nicole oozes it, you’re just drawn to her. Her ability to put a plan in place and stick to it, that was impressive to the community I think there was a level of respect within the first few years here.”

As this woman's words illustrate, though Better Farm itself is not political due to a lack of necessity, it has not escaped politicization by others. Fortunately, the community has over time come to accept Nicole as one of their own, allowing Better Farm to operate with a healthy level of community support. In the following section, I will continue to expand upon the notion of community, and with it economic concepts like community economy, across the three cases.

5.3 Community and Community Economy in Latin America and the United States

It is clear from each of the three previously discussed cases that the motif of community as an abstract concept and the notion of the community economy as a concrete practice have often gone hand in hand. For the Zapatistas, for example, community autonomy is articulated and emphasized as a collective goal. Stahler-Sholk (2007) describe the important rhetorical and political role of the Zapatista emphasis on community-centered spaces:

Community-controlled social and political institutions—schools, clinics, systems of justice, and regional planning—are part of the struggle to define collective priorities independently of the logic of the market. As global market forces reduce space for self-sufficient development, the importance of the microcosm of Zapatista autonomous communities...is in symbolizing alternative and inspiring new political movements that challenge the state's posture as broker for global capital (p. 61).

Community here appears to be an important contributing ideology to the Zapatista's anti-neoliberal approach, a tool for separating oneself from the logic of the capitalist market. In this, there is also discourse between the concept of community and the necessity of community as practiced by the Zapatistas.

For Better Farm, a center for knowledge exchange, sustainability campus, organic farm, and artist colony located in Redwood, NY, a dedication to fostering a sense of community around sustainability is critical to the organization's work. In demonstrating alternative ways of living, models that take us closer to ecological, economic, and social "being in common," Better Farm potentiates community in almost every aspect of its work (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The community's barter system, though not initiated by the farm itself, even finds an ideological home in the farm as a community gathering space, one which promotes discussion of the system's benefits and implications regarding sustainability.

Lastly, the Institute's Seeds of the Portal project, whose explicit goal is to connect smallholder farmers who are in the process of establishing agro-ecological sites on their lands, creates a sense of community around shared sustainable practices (Rojas 2018). A robust community economy is also supported by the IOV's established network for the collection, processing, storage, and marketing of forest seeds, as well as the installation of 10 seed stores in operation in 2016, and supported by a growth in the general interest in agroforestry initiatives (SAFs) as a productive process for reforestation efforts (Anache et al., 2016). Key to the success of the IOV's seed economy is arguably a sense of what Gibson-Graham (2006) might call economic being in common, exemplifying the principles of the community economy.

Conclusion: *Learning from Alternative, Sustainable Economies*

The cases I have discussed reveal a shared use of agroecological principles in counterhegemonic practices, varying degrees of politicization, and an emergence of economies and ways of life centered on the community. It appears that adopting a political orientation is necessary only in some contexts, while agroecology, rooted in a group's material needs for subsistence, seems to be uncompromisable. Similarly, a return to community-centered economies and societies exists as a common thread in successful counter-hegemonic projects.

Key to the understanding of these three cases is to draw transferrable conclusions from both the ideologies supporting them and the actual practices occurring. As the documentary *Zapatista* highlights, there exists a “double dialogue” between how we recognize the Zapatista struggle and others like it as individual and distinct while simultaneously seeing how to construct a global struggle against a common enemy (MVD Entertainment Group, 2006, 46:40). The challenges facing the Zapatistas, the smallholders involved in IOV projects, and residents of Redwood, NY, ultimately all posit questions about neoliberalism at large that extend far beyond each individual case.

This reckoning is often directly related to some critique of the power of corporations to abuse people and their human rights, albeit more directly in the Latin American cases. The IOV and the Zapatistas explicitly show us the potential for a anti-neoliberal politics of resistance. On the other hand, Better Farm's practices are themselves an act of resistance, despite lack of a formal political platform. Regardless of the context in which they operate, it would appear that some transferable conclusions emerge from each of the three cases regarding how we might theoretically construct and physically operate alternative economic-ecological projects. Among

these are understandings of the ways in which key concepts like sustainability, politics, and community and community economy figure in counter hegemonic projects, themes discussed in Chapter 5.

At a basic level, the previous three cases seem to support the assertion that “individual effort can flourish in a social economy devoted to a collective good” (Nelson 2015, pp. 2). This individual effort, when combined with individual efforts by others, can seemingly create ecological, economic, and social benefits. The idea of “being in common,” a state of coexistence and acceptance of difference rooted in systems of mutual support, is a revolutionary step away from the current hegemonic way of living in many parts of the world (Gibson-Graham, 2006). This transition discourse, to use Escobar’s (2011) term, constitutes a radical paradigm shift from what we today view as “normal” constructions of both economies and ecologies.

This compels us to ask: how might we utilize the frameworks of existing organizations, whether they be in New York state or Chiapas, Mexico, to construct more sustainable futures? The three cases examined here demonstrate the potential for a variety of sustainable agroecological practices, degrees of politicization, and conceptions of both a sense of community and physical representations of community economy. How can we tailor successful blueprints from places like Mato Grosso, Brazil to aspiring alternative environmental-economic projects around the world? How can information about how to construct community economies be disseminated, and existing community economies strengthened? These questions do not have clear answers, though I argue the preceding comparative analysis yields important insights regarding alternative economic-ecological projects in general from a close examination of three specific cases: Better Farm’s work in Redwood, NY, the Instituto Ouro Verde’s work in Mato

Grosso, Brazil, and the Zapatista communities of Mexico. We must continue to analyze cases such as these if we are to better understand how to create economically thriving, ecologically sustainable communities.

In the future, with catastrophic climate change and its associated natural disasters looming on the near horizon, we must begin to think seriously about how we will restructure our communities and economies more sustainably. Though now this may seem like a matter of choice, it will soon become a necessity as climate change creates futures unlike anything we have ever seen. These futures, as Rojas (2016) argues, are not science fiction. A science fiction narrative around climate change, for example, would “offer reassurance that technological investments can recreate previous socioeconomic orders even after the planet is transformed by human actions” (Ibid., pp. 271). This is not the case. Therefore, in order to begin to grapple seriously with how human beings will create new orders after drastic environmental transformations, I argue that now is the time to more closely examine counter-hegemonic economic projects. There must be more widespread research into the revolutionary acts occurring around the world in small-scale, sustainable, community economies, with accompanying efforts to synthesize data on the concrete practices occurring in these spaces. This will surely not preserve the world as we know it neither economically nor ecologically, but may give us a better chance at surviving in the worlds yet to come.

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