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FROM THE PEASANT MOVEMENT TO RURAL ASSOCIATIONISM IN CENTRAL VERCRUZ

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to analyze the historical factors that had an impact in the origin of the collective action of smallholder coffee farmers, and to study the process they followed to shape their peasant identity through agroecology to become constituted in the civil association *Vinculación y Desarrollo Agroecológico en Café* (VIDA) and to consolidate their collective work. The research is both theoretical and practical, and it was approached through literature review and field work by applying fifty-two semi-structured interviews and eight testimonies of social stakeholders. The emergence of VIDA was induced by the union, *Unión General Obrero Campesina y Popular* (UGOCP), in Ixhuatlán del Café; the merger with social leaders from Cosautlán de Carvajal; and the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, who worked jointly to characterize coffee-producing territories and traditional agricultural knowledge, and to systematize the agroecological management of the coffee plantation. The result was the procurement of differentiated coffee for alternative international and national commerce. The mobilization of coffee farmers through their collective action allowed them to connect to other national and international institutional stakeholders, which provided organizational and economic efficiency and strengthened their political position in defense of the agrocological peasant way of life.

Keywords: agroecology, collective action, peasantry, modernity, peasant organizations.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of VIDA can be better understood through the historical analysis of the origin of peasant organizations and mobilizations connected to political parties in Mexico. During the Mexican Revolution of 1910, peasants were against labor exploitation, politics of privilege and property concentration, and in favor of land distribution.

After the triumph of the Mexican Revolution, the State was influenced by imperialist countries and the expansion of the capitalist system, establishing "mass politics" where the increase in agricultural production through exploitation of the peasantry was encouraged (Córdova, 1977). The local peasantry would resist until becoming united and constituting the National Peasant League (*Liga Nacional Campesina*, LNC) in 1926, "the first national peasant organization in Mexico" (Mercado, 2010: 29), which was allied to the Mexican Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Mexicano*, PCM) that emerged in 1919. In 1930, the LNC was divided since many leaders of the LNC were seduced by government sectors, fragmenting the alliances and controlling the local peasant organizations to continue with the project of proletarianization of the peasantry according to the rising capitalist system (Rivera, 1992).

A fraction of the LNC remained with the PCM, while another adhered to the National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, PNR) and to the Mexican Peasant Confederation (*Confederación Campesina Mexicana*, CCM) in 1933, both created by Elías Calles, which supported Cárdenas towards the presidency of the republic in 1936. A third fraction of the LNC joined the National Peasant League "Úrsulo Galván" (Mercado, 2010: 30). In 1933, the rural organizations nominated General Lázaro Cárdenas for president of the republic, who had a clear victory in the year 1934 (Rivera, 1992). In 1938, the PNR changed to the Mexican Revolution Party (*Partido de la Revolución Mexicana*, PRM), strengthening its legality as representative of the State (Garrido, 1986).

From the correlation between the CCM and the official party, a new form of organization and political manipulation of the national peasantry emerged, which was consolidated with the creation of the National Peasant Confederation (*Confederación Nacional Campesina*, CNC) in 1938 (Rivera, 1992; Mercado, 2010), but furthermore with the transformation of PRM into the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI) in 1946. The State politically controlled the popular masses in general and the peasantry in particular through the CNC, resulting in agrarian corporatism that generated a political culture of dependency on the peasantry (Durán, 2008).

The corporatist model was always under tension and several peasant organizations demanded being independent from the government and the PRI. They became organized and formed the General Union of Workers and Peasants of Mexico (*Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México*, UGOCM), serving as the social basis of the Popular Party (*Partido Popular*, PP), founded by Lombardo Toledano in 1948. In 1971 the peasant organization was fragmented into three factions and the "Jacinto López" fraction was linked to the PRI in 1976 (Durán, 2008; Mercado, 2010). Within the context of the National Liberation Movement in which different groups participated, such as *cardenistas*, *lobardistas*, members of the PCM and leftist thinkers, they manifested for the autonomy of *ejidos*, agrarian distribution and democracy, driving the creation of the Independent Peasant Central (*Central Campesina Independiente*, CCI) in 1963, formed by dissident peasant groups from the CNC, the UGOCM, members of the PCM and other peasant groups without political alliances.

In the electoral year of 1964, the CCI was divided into two due to ideological issues, and the conciliating group joined the PRI. The radical CCI-Red was linked to the PCM, although its leaders were repressed and incarcerated. Even so, in 1975 they would transform into the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (*Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos*, CIOAC) (Mercado, 2010). On the other hand, in 1979 the National Plan de Ayala Coordinator (*Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala*, CNPA) emerged, made up by many organizations integrated by poor and landless peasants (Mercado, 2010). It was built as independent and, under a pro-peasant ideological scope, fought for cultural autonomy and for obtaining land in a radical way, for backing for production and commercialization by the peasantry (León and Marván, 1984).

The CNPA was formed by different organizations and some were influenced by the "revolutionary left", since in 1976 several political groups with Trotskyism militancy

joined, which had been formed in the heat of the student movement of 1968, giving rise to the Revolutionary Workers' Party (*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*, PRT). This incipient organization approached the task of constituting a peasant sector, groups from northern Puebla, center and north of Veracruz, Colima, Sinaloa, Fresnillo Zacatecas and Morelos in the Independent Revolutionary Peasant Coordinator (*Coordinadora Campesina Revolucionaria Independiente*, CCRI), which had an important role in the CNPA (Mercado, 2010, p. 42).

This diversity created ideological and political rivalries that would fragment the CNPA. "In 1986, organizations that integrated it under the hegemony of the PRT abandoned the Coordinator arguing that the autonomy of the regional organizations obstructed their advancement and opted for the formation of a new organization, the General Worker, Peasant and Popular Union (*Unión General Obrero, Campesina y Popular*, UGOCP)" (Rojas, 1998, p. 108). This was made up mainly by peasants and indigenous people, farmers, day laborers and *ejidatarios*. With a collective General Secretariat, represented by Margarito Montes Parra, José Luis Díaz Moll and Luis Javier Valero, the UGOCP was a plural organization and each of the regional organizations that it was established by had its ideological line, basically linked to the PRT, the Democratic Revolution Party (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) and the Socialist Revolution Party (*Partido de la Revolución Socialista*, PRS). The most radical ideological line was led by Díaz Moll and linked to the PRT (Mercado, 2010).

The connection between regional peasant organizations and political parties responded to the form of control imposed by the State's corporatism based on its social welfare approach in exchange for the electoral vote, generating a political culture of dependency that was rooted in the national peasantry (Duran, 2008). In the 1990s the imposition of the Neoliberal model led to radical peasant organizations driving the productive and economic direction of their regional and local groups, with the new cause being the struggle against "the market". The National Coordinator of Coffee-Producing Organizations (*Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras*, CNOC) promoted the formation of social businesses in the main coffee-producing states (Mercado, 2010).

In the last decade of the 20th century there was great uncertainty in the farmland, since there was a strong social resentment over economic crises, generated by the change in regime for capitalist accumulation –from the Welfare State to Neoliberalism–. The CNC and the PRI would lose their leading role with the end of the century, and the UGOCM would occupy the official representation of the peasantry and become directly linked with the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN). The UGOCP led by Margarito Montes would align to the new government. The continuity of the public policy of neglect of the farmland and migration of workers made the peasantry lose hope on the new government, which is why in the year 2003 the peasant movement called "El campo no aguanta más" ("The farmland cannot stand it any longer") emerged as well as the National Peasantry Organizations Council (*Consejo Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas*, CONOC), which was in charge of training social businesses in administrative and economic autonomy (Mercado, 2010). The objective of this study is derived from the context described, which is: to analyze the historical factors that impacted the origin

of the collective action of smallholder coffee farmers from central Veracruz, and to study the process they followed to forge their peasant identity through agroecology when the civil association called "Vinculación y Desarrollo Agroecológico en Café (VIDA)" was constituted and to consolidate their social organization until today.

Social movements or collective action

From the consolidation of the corporative PRI-CNC Alliance in Mexico, the peasant organizations and mobilizations maintained formal and informal connections with political parties, and such strategies can be understood through the theory of social movements and collective action, so it is important to define each one of them. Social movements are considered the largest and most radical form of collective action, par excellence, and unit and identity are established in them (Revilla, 1996). One of the main characteristics of social movements is confrontation or the contentious (Tarrow, 1994). That is, they seek social and political conflict, and a social movement can even become violent between two adversaries that seek the control of a vital social element that interests both (Melucci, 1995).

On the other hand, the other various manifestations of collective action contain different degrees of intentionality, but above all they are not counter-systemic or disruptive, and they are rather proactive. In addition, they can be institutional or not and their interest lies in entering the political and economic system of privileges. It is concluded that social movements are part of the collective action, but not all collective action has characteristics of a social movement (Jiménez and Ramírez, 2010). That is, the institutional collective action of a political party, union, cooperative or any other type of association is broadly separate from social movements (Revilla, 1996).

The theory of collective action after the 1970s focused on the study of methodological individualism from two viewpoints. The first determines the importance of individual and instrumental rational choice, which leads it to benefit from collective action (Olson, 1992). The second does so in the mobilization of resources, theory that integrates rational choice but does not make it a determinant of collective action, which does happen with the organizational process: the solidary interest in the formation, cause, and strategies to follow in the presence of existing opportunities in time and space to carry out collective action (Tilly, 1978). The approach of resource mobilization, when integrating rational choice, strengthens its foundation and does not reduce it to the economic scope but rather also covers the political sphere (Aslı Öçal, 2015).

The organization and mobilization of the group seeks the control of resources both tangible –material resources, money– and intangible –logistic support, workshops, organizational training–, which are in dispute. The context is of threats and opportunities, where there is political inclusion or exclusion, although collective actions seek to modify power relations and to comply with the objective set out (Tilly, 1978). For Tarrow (1994), it means that there is a political panorama permeated by different elements that foster or obstruct social movements. That is, a structure of political opportunities where costs decrease and which could provide external resources to the group in action, in addition to finding allies that affect the weakness of power elites at the time, such as the State or the official political

party, which serve as the adversary.

In the presence of such a scenario, a repertoire of confrontation unfolds as a form of struggle that the social movement performs. This serves as significant and peculiar social strategies to the group in action. Such a tactic can be reproduced in another time and space, by other social actors that face a contentious situation, which Tarrow (1994) called modularity. The demands can be different, but a prior model of social mobilization is reproduced by other collective groups in very diverse scenarios in face of the political conflict (Kuri, 2016). On the other hand, the European school is focused on Touraine's actionalist sociology (1984) and Melucci's constructivist position (1986) which studies contemporary "New Social Movements". These are based primarily on issues such as identity and conflict, elements that promote social action, exalting social and cultural aspects in collective facts (Ibarra, 2015; Kuri, 2016).

For Melucci (1999), social movements are social constructs that develop between the social and political conflict. Solidarity is fundamental for stakeholders who congregate and identify at the same time that they recognize the conflict and its adversary, in a specific environment, through a social medium that interests both. Within the confrontation there are frontiers of coexistence between stakeholders, where rupture can take place, going beyond what the structure could withstand. Thus, a social movement can become quite violent in face of conflict, although in reality it seeks to become inserted into the structure of institutional representation to obtain the benefits that this can provide. That is, to be part of redistributive stimuli by the system (Melucci, 1995).

The main stakeholders that have carried out both social movements and collective actions in the rural world have been smallholder and landless peasants. The cause of the peasant struggle in Mexico had been land as vital element of the reproduction of their culture, although the change in economic model that went from Welfare State to Neoliberalism made the peasantry seek access to the conventional market through collective action, and then to enter the differentiated market through agroecological production (Ibarra, 2015; Aslı Öçal, 2015). Therefore, it is important to define peasantry and agroecology as a pairing of new social movements.

An accumulation of knowledge resides in peasants, based on their life experience; it is a historical subject –always linked to nature– from adaptation to their ecosystem to resilience in face of industrialization processes, colonization, westernization, and reproduction of capitalism in the current regime of Neoliberal accumulation. Through their work they appropriate the environment from which they obtain objects and cover their basic needs of subsistence (Arenas, 2016), since they have a family economy based in the value of use, not in the exchange value of the capitalist system (Chayánov, 1974).

The dramatic technological and commercial development comes from the paradigm of modernity, which caused massive environmental contamination and drove the peasantry towards their proletarianization (Ibarra, 2015); however, peasant livelihoods and traditional forms of reproduction have persisted until the current contemporary world (Moro, 2009).

The historical peasant movement in Mexico struggled and achieved agrarian reforms to obtain land as a vital element of its cultural reproduction –family agriculture–, although

many others also sought economic and social reconstruction through commercial agriculture (Houtart, 2014). In the presence of marginalization and social exclusion, peasants that started mobilizing acquired political training and were identified as a social class (Bartra, 2006).

Peasants can have land or not; sell their labor or not; practice family agriculture and collect seasonal food; work in commercial agriculture, both monoculture and polyculture. At the same time they are individualists, although they also organize in groups to exert their citizenship, and above all they are historical subjects that resist culturally modernity, capable of becoming political actors and promoting social transformation (Sierra, 2019).

In the last decade of the past century, peasants became organized to fight for the market, as is the case of smallholder coffee farmers, who through associationism gave an added value to their raw material and climbed the value chain, moved from conventional production to agroecology, offering a product of quality, improving their income, and preserving biodiversity within their territories (Sánchez, 2015). Peasant cultures are millenary, pre-modern, contemporary to modernity and trans-modern in a near future (Dussel, 2014). The diversity of agriculture resides in them, which include ancestral farming knowledge that has remained throughout time, managing to conserve the ecosystems where they are settled (González, 2008). Such practices were analyzed by Efraím Hernández Xolocotzi (2011) and taken up again by Gliessman for the emergence of agroecology in Latin America (Altieri, 2015), as a critical and proactive perspective in face of the environmental crisis that is product of industrial agriculture (Lugo and Rodríguez, 2018).

Agroecology, by recognizing the understandings and practices of traditional agricultures, could be known as a science that goes against the current or which is part of the ethnosciences (Toledo, 2012). It is a multilinear or pluriepistemic agroecology different from classical westernized agroecology, which is reduced to an ecologized productivist agronomy that make it part of sustainable development or green capitalism (Escobar, 2015).

Something that has been demonstrated is that multilinear agroecology "brings with it environmental, economic and political benefits for peasants and their communities, as well as for the urban populations in the region" (Altieri and Toledo, 2011: 165). It also unfolds as a transforming peasant movement (Wezel *et al*., 2009), which advocates for the following: collective action for the conservation of biodiversity in the territories; alternative production, distribution and consumption which is different from the one established by agroindustries; agroecological practices in the plot; equitable social relationships; feedback of peasant to peasant knowledge; food security and sovereignty; social and solidary economy through short trade chains; gauging the local over the global; strengthening biodiversity and endogenous sociocultural dynamics (Sevilla, 2011).

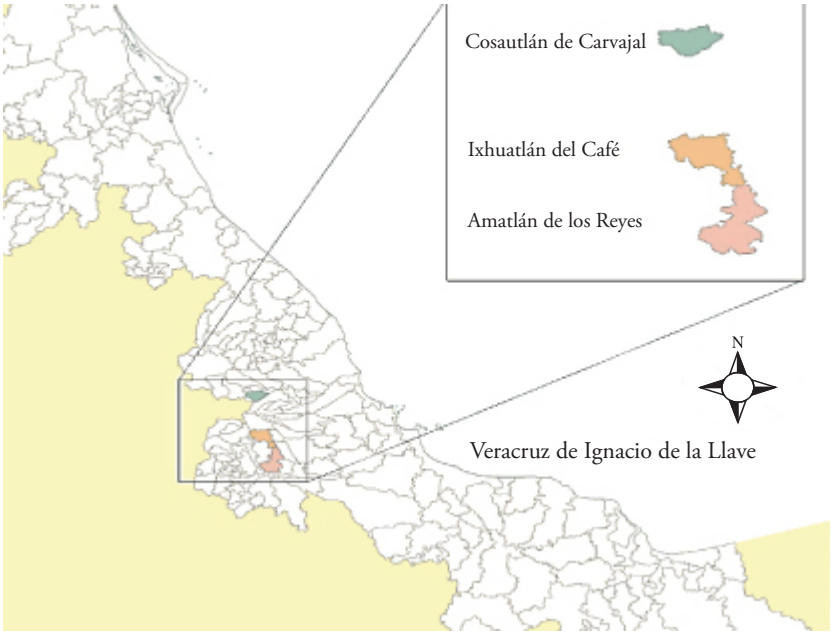
In all of Latin America there are different studies on coffee-producing organizations under various methodologies and even approached from the viewpoint of "systematization of experiences" where stakeholders identify and recognize their social actions; these systematizations are carried out in a segmented way for those involved to recognize wise choices and errors, helping them to define the strategies that they will carry out in a near future (Virginio, 2011; Instituto Nacional de Innovación Agraria, 2019; Flórez, 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Of all the associates of VIDA, 593 are in the communities of Plan de Ayala, Guzmantla, Crucero, Zacamitla, Ixcatla, Opatla, Ocotitlán, San José de los Naranjos, Presidio, Potrerillo, Ixviontla, Moctezuma, la Tranca and Álvaro Obregón from the municipality of Ixhuatlán del Café, which belongs to the coffee-producing region of Huatusco. However, another 17 of its members are located in the community of Cruz de los Naranjos in the municipality of Amatlán de los Reyes, belonging to the coffee-producing zone of Córdoba. In addition, 176 coffee farmers are located in the communities of Limones, Naranjales, Piedra Parada and San Miguel Tepexcatl, which belong to the coffee-producing area of Coatepec (Figure 1).

The research was characterized by being both theoretical and practical. A literature review was conducted, which helped to contextualize the historical, political and economic stage, focalizing the problems that coffee farmers faced through their collective action.

The practical research was approached through the proposal by Harris (1995), according to the *emic* vision, which consists in social actors describing the experiences they lived and explaining the process of their historical collective action. The information was collected through ethnographic method techniques, such as: field work, which was carried out intermittently during eleven months, between 2020 and 2021; participant observation; 8 testimonies (local leaders); and the application of 52 semi-structured interviews (to 2 managers and 50 coffee farmers) with 35 questions subdivided into the following blocks: i) origins of coffee production and the impact of the Mexican Coffee Institute (*Instituto*



Source: orepared by Severiano (2021).
Figure 1. Localization of the municipalities visited in Veracruz, Mexico.

Mexicano del Café, INMECAFÉ); ii) local peasant mobilization and its emergence; iii) support and connection networks with other social stakeholders; iv) formation and projection of the social enterprise; v) productive diversification and services by the organization; and vi) commercialization strategies and perspectives of the organization. The selection of informants was done based on the non-probabilistic sample by networks (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 2006).

For the analysis of the information obtained, the study used the proposal by Harris (1995) under the *etic* aspect, which consists in the academic interpretation of the researcher or external observer –about what is narrated by coffee farmers– based on the theoretical categories of social movements and collective action (Revilla, 1996; Jiménez and Ramírez, 2010). According to the theory of rational election, under the stance of *mobilization of resources* (Tilly, 1978) and what for Tarrow (1994) meant a *structure of political opportunities*, strategy that can be replicated in time by other social actors, conceptualizing it as *modularity*. The study was complemented with the constructivist theory by Melucci (1995), since it points to the formation of solidary connections that give rise to a collective identity at the same time that it identifies the adversary and the conflict, as well as the strategy to follow. When it comes to the study of the peasantry and its characterization, various authors were used, both classical and current, such as: Chayánov (1974), Bartra (2006), Sánchez (2015) and Sierra (2019). Meanwhile, for the theoretical approach of agroecology, the dissertation was supported by: Altieri and Toledo (2011), Escobar (2016), Wezel *et al.* (2009). With these concepts, it was possible to understand the historical and collective experiences that coffee farmers implemented since the decade of the 1980s and until today.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the 1980s, under the context of the Welfare State and the agricultural policy through the Mexican Coffee Institute (INMECAFÉ), peasant coffee farmers were left in uncertainty, since they were used to a production system based on the technological packages of the Green Revolution, the forms of raw material stockpiling –coffee cherry– under Production and Commercialization Units (PCUs), and financing to harvest their product. This was a dynamic of dependency and control exerted by the public agency (Carton de Grammont, 2004; Díaz, 1996; Renard, 2012).

In the Neoliberal model of economic regulation, the economy would cease to be in the State and was left in the hands of the free market, in accordance with the inertia of economic globalization (Aguirre, 2005). Based on those events, the crises in coffee prices continued in the following years, affecting coffee-producing regions.

During the last decade of the 20th century, in the coffee- producing region of Huatusco, Veracruz, smallholder coffee farmers were organized into Social Solidarity Societies (*Sociedades de Solidaridad Social*, SSS) with the possibility of obtaining credit from the National Rural Credit Bank (*Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural*, Banrural) and the National Solidarity Program (*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*, Pronasol). The societies were supported by the UGOCP, which was influenced by the ideological line of the PRT (Mercado, 2010), and had presence in 15 communities of the region, particularly in the

municipality of Ixhuatlán del Café, although the peasant enterprises disappeared due to the lack of administrative experience, leaving coffee stockpiling and processing in the hands of large agribusinesses (Rojas and Olguín, 2018; Olguín and González, 2021).

The UGOCP supported many members of the PCUs, who after the end of INMECAFÉ had been left without payment from the public agency. Coffee farmers under the representation of UGOCP managed to obtain their payment through the National Indigenous Institute (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista*, INI) and PRONASOL (Olguín and González, 2021). This circumstance motivated more coffee farmers from the communities of Matlaquiáhuitl, Guzmantla, Ixcatla, Ocotitlán and central Ixhuatlán del Café to join the UGOCP (Illescas, Olguín and González, 2022).

Coffee prices were decreasing and smallholder coffee farmers mobilized through the UGOCP and demanded better conditions for coffee production from the government of Córdoba, Veracruz (Severiano, 2021). Thus, they joined the "exodus for democracy" in 1991, protest going from Tabasco to Mexico City, which was led by López Obrador. Since the 1960s, peasant and left-leaning political organizations manifested in the same way, seeking interstices to obtain some legislative representation in favor of popular classes (León and Marván, 1984; Mercado, 2010; Rojas, 1998; Rubio, 1987).

During the peasant mobilization, social stakeholders became aware of the government support to rural women, under the program of Women's Industrial Agricultural Units (*Unidades Agrícolas Industriales de la Mujer*, UAIM). Groups of fifty women per community were rapidly formed and negotiated support for productive projects through the UGOCP. In the end, the communities of Guzmantla, Zacamitla, Matlaquiáhuitl were backed, as well as the Moctezuma neighborhood in the municipality of Ixhuatlán del Café. Within this context there was a structure of political opportunities, allowing them to confront the State through social mobilization and to demand the procurement of resources in benefit of the collective in action (Tarrow, 1994).

Coffee farmers backed by the UGOCP continued to mobilize, facing power abuses from the PRI municipal chiefdom and solving both social and environmental problems in Ixhuatlán del Café. In the presence of any social injustice, peasants would protest and occupy the government palace, guided by the coffee producer and local leader Ernesto Illescas Marín, who would take the reins of the UGOCP in the region.

The UGOCP was linked to the Revolutionary Workers' Party (*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*, PRT), from whom coffee farmers received political training. This would set the bases to compete for the municipal presidency in 1991, under the political representation of PRT and the regional leadership of the UGOCP. The pressure from militants of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) towards their opponents was very aggressive and intimidating, managing to achieve the triumph again. However, a third of the electoral population (800 votes) backed the alliance and strength of the PRT-UGOCP.

In subsequent years, the UGOCP-PRT continued its dissemination work and was able to attract community leaders and to form local political cadres to compete for the municipal presidency of 1994, although under the political representation of the Democratic Revolution Party (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD). This alliance drove a political

strategy and electoral campaign of conciliation, through the formation of the Ixhuateco Citizen Front (*Frente Ciudadano Ixhuateco*, FCI) made up by members of PRT-UGOCP, PRD and the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN), political factions in opposition to the official party, PRI. Together, they proposed the Citizen Consultation Council (*Consejo Consultivo Ciudadano*, CCC), organization created to supervise and confirm the destination of public resources, prioritizing the needs of the population. This strategy was conclusive for the elections to favor Ernesto Illescas in 1994, and for him to become municipal representative of organized society. These circumstances restructured the collective imaginary of the public and political sphere, which allowed demonstrating the possibility of conducting democratic processes that allow decentralization of power, qualities demanded historically by peasant organizations in Mexico (León and Marván, 1984; Mercado, 2010; Rojas, 1998 and Rubio, 1987).

The new municipal government was made up by members of the UGOCP-PRT and the CCC, who directed the budget to favor the most marginalized communities of the municipality; the renovation of coffee plantations was supported and the transition towards agroecological processes promoted (Bolos, 2003); various training workshops were conducted, focused on women and their roles; child malnutrition was analyzed and recorded; a census of traditional medicine men and women was generated with the aim of forming an alternative health center; and the population was informed about the municipal duties and responsibilities. The intention was to give continuity to those social programs for the next three-year period, although the new municipal president from PRD in 1998-2000 set himself apart from the UGOCP-PRT and the continuity of social work in the municipality was lost.

The peasant (UGOCP) and political (PRT) organization was fragmented in the region. It was not until the year 1999 when a contingent led by Ernesto Illescas would join UGOCP-Conciliadora by Margarito Montes. In this same period, the leaders from Ixhuatlán del Café met again with leaders from Cosautlán de Carvajal, who had their own history in social and political training driven by a multidisciplinary group from Mexico made up by laymen and Jesuits, under the ideology of Liberation Theology and the Guerrilla Jesus, called "Cultural and Educational Promotion (*Fomento Cultural y Educativo*, FCE)". One of the women leaders from Cosautlán constituted the Civil Association "Community Self-management and Education" (*Autogestión y Educación Comunitaria*, AUGE), which other women leaders would join, and together formed "groups for community savings" to train rural women in gender equity, finance, human rights and social organizations in both coffee-producing regions.

At the same time, regional leaders were connected to researchers from the Eastern Regional University Center (*Centro Regional Universitario de Oriente*, CRUO), with headquarters in Huatusco, from Universidad Autónoma Chapingo (UACh). They implemented Participatory Action Research (PAR) to approach the role of women in the family and in coffee production, and the preservation of peasant knowledge and their territory. Peasant smallholder coffee farmers preserved cultural traits and practices based on the value of use as reproduction of their subsistence (Arenas, 2016; Chayánov, 1974).

Under the guidance of researchers from UACh, coffee farmers carried out a diagnosis of coffee production in their plots, activity that consisted in the analysis of soils, coffee varieties in the plots, typology of shades for coffee plants, biodiversity of the territory, and landscape for coffee production. This dynamic extended from year 2000 to 2002, which allowed the implementation of the agroecological system of the coffee plantation. Pluri-epistemological agroecology (Escobar, 2016) allowed retaking ancestral knowledge and practices of coffee farmers in terms of conservation of the ecosystem (González, 2008), which in the short term brought environmental, economic and political benefits for coffee farmers and their communities (Altieri and Toledo, 2011).

During that same time, the coffee crisis was severe, smallholder coffee farmers did not manage to sustain the production costs, but the call for backing from the government program "Alianza para el Campo" was made and productive projects were managed through the UGOCP; this was an alternative to the meager prices of the aromatic, aiming for productive diversification in various communities of Ixhuatlán del Café, which allowed preventing migration, fragmentation of families, and the depart from peasantization. As other peasant organizations, the UGOCP through its historical mobilizations had been able to be part of the redistributive stimuli that the system gave them (Melucci, 1995).

Support for the UGOCP from coffee farmers continued in the peasant mobilization "El Campo no Aguanta Más", collective action carried out in favor of defending peasant agriculture and against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). The movement was joined by all the organizations adhered to the Permanent Agrarian Congress (*Congreso Agrario Permanente*, CAP) (Illescas, Olguín and González, 2022). Diverse peasant organizations were part of the structure of political opportunities granted by the system, under a strategy that Tarrow (1994) called modularity: mobilizations and protests reproduced in different times and spaces, performed by other social stakeholders that allow obtaining resources and benefits for their organizations.

On the one hand, coffee farmers from Ixhuatlán distanced themselves from the UGOCP. On the other hand, women leaders and cultural promoters would leave AUGE because of conflicts of interest, although they would continue to work independently with community savings groups of women, men and children, in the communities of the municipalities of Ixhuatlán del Café and Cosautlán de Carvajal. The collective action of coffee farmers led them to know the cooperative Cafetos de Neria, which at the same time linked them to the civil association REDCAFES, through which they moved towards organic production until attaining certification for their coffee. Under the circumstances described smallholder coffee farmers endured the coffee crisis and continued to train organizationally.

In the year 2009, social leaders and promoters from coffee producing regions, together with researchers from CRUO, determined the constitution of the civil association "Agroecological Outreach and Development in Coffee" (*Vinculación y Desarrollo Agroecológico en Café*, VIDA). Smallholder coffee farmers were integrated immediately, from Ixhuatlán del Café, Cosautlán de Carvajal and Amatlán de los Reyes. Currently the organization is made up by 786 members, of which 417 are men and 369 women. Associationism catapulted their capacities in multiple directions (Table 1).

Table 1. Agroecological associative dimension of VIDA.

Sustainable production	Agroecological system of the coffee plantation, biocultural calendar, family gardens, seed bank, production of biological inputs, edible coffee plantation, eco-techniques, nurseries, weeding.
Collective identity	Agroecology, Food Sovereignty, gender equity in families, collective brands (FEMCAFÉ and Mujer que Sana). Social Movements. International: MAELA and Slow food. National: "Alianza de mujeres en café".
Exchange of knowledge	UCA-SOPPEXCCA and UCA-San Ramón de Nicaragua. Tosepan Titataniske Puebla and El Grupo Vicente Guerrero in Tlaxcala.
Institutional outreach	Academic: University of Santa Cruz, California, USA. UACh, UNAM, UV, UIEM, COLPOS from Estado de México. Civil Society: UGOCP, Cafetos de Neria, REDCAFES, CAN, Agro-Eco, Coffee Kids, Conecta Tierra, INANA, CORECAFECO, ERA, SENDAS Public: FAO, INCA-Rural, Sistema Producto Café (SPC), Asociación Veracruzana de la Cadena Productiva del Café (AVERCAFÉ)
Organizational effectiveness	De-pulping and artisanal drying of coffee in the communities, stockpiling in parchment, toasting by quality. CLA (organic certification and exports). Peasant Tourism, Alternative Tianguis-barter. Commercialization of toasted and ground coffee (FEMCAFE-community), products (food), and medicinal byproducts (Mujer que Sana).

Source: prepared by the authors based on field work and information contained in Illescas, Olguín and González (2022) and Severiano (2021).

In 2009, supported indirectly by the UGOCP, four cooperatives were constituted through which public resources were managed to give continuity to productive and organizational processes in the communities. In the end, they only kept the cooperative "Peasants in the Agrarian Struggle" (*Campesinos en la Lucha Agraria*, (CLA), through which they carried out organic certification and commercialization of export coffee.

The institutional representation that they acquired as an association positioned them to move up the value chain, by giving more value to their raw material through coffee processing and by pledging to export it through an agreement with a civil association called Community Agroecology Network (CAN), created by research professors from the University of Santa Cruz, California, and linked to the solidary consumer and roaster Agro Eco, located in USA. The collective action through associationism formalized various activities that had already been developed informally, such as: artisanal coffee processing and drying, in sun-driers and sieves, process that was improved and homogenized in its practice; the traditional backyard gardens were complemented with the project "youth for food sovereignty", provided by an international organization called Coffee Kids. This completed the most self-sustainable livelihoods, helped with obtaining eco-techniques (firewood-saving stoves, ferrocement cisterns, henhouses, and rainwater capture, dry restrooms, and installation of 150 family gardens) by the National Institute for the Development of Capacities of

the Rural Sector (*Instituto Nacional para el Desarrollo de Capacidades del Sector Rural A.C.*, INCA RURAL) and CAN. The peasants mentioned practice family agriculture and collect seasonal food; they work with polycrops, and are identified by their economic activity (Sierra, 2019) and as agroecological coffee farmers.

In the year 2012, with the support of CAN, a diagnosis of the agroecological coffee plantation system was made and facing the appearance of coffee rust, nurseries were installed for the production of coffee varieties that are tolerant to rust and of high quality in the cup; they were prepared for the elaboration of micro-batches of a single coffee variety, which were traded as specialty coffees and reached capital gains. The collective action of coffee farmers through associationism provided the tools to move up the value chain, improved their incomes and at the same time provided environmental services in their territories (Sánchez, 2015). In the year 2014 they were able to obtain ecological modules for coffee de-pulping, thanks to negotiations by the UGOCP with public institutions. In that same year they created the brand "FEMCAFÉ", making women's work in coffee growing visible and entering the national market through the sale of toasted and ground coffee. Three years later they created "Community FEMCAFÉ" for peasants of the localities to have access to consuming quality coffee.

The accumulation of knowledge of coffee farmers increased due to the exchange of knowledge with peasants' associations such as Agriculture and Livestock Cooperative Union (*Unión de Cooperativas Agropecuarias*, UCA) from San Ramón and UCA-SOPPEXCCA from Nicaragua, Tosepan Titataniske from Puebla, and the "Vicente Guerrero" group from Tlaxcala. In addition, they trained with other institutions of civil society such as: *Conecta Tierra*, regarding the conservation of ecosystems and local cultures; *Iniciativas para la Naturaleza A.C.* (INANA), learning about the care for biodiversity through agroecology; *Consejo Regional del Café de Coatepec A.C.* (CORECAFECO), with which they understood and implemented agroecological meliponiculture; *Estudios Rurales y Asesoría Campesina A.C.* (ERA), from which they received feedback in community organization and various aspects of coffee production sustainability; and with *Senderos y Encuentros para un Desarrollo Autónomo Sustentable A.C.* (SENDAS) they shared topics about management of the forest and ecotourism.

The learning obtained resulted in the diversification of byproducts; the organic certification of eight products inside the coffee plantation and their commercialization; the creation of alternative *tianguis* (street markets) with artisanal, agroecological and organic products, with millenary practices such as barter, which were carried out intermittently in different communities of Ixhuatlán del Café and Cosautlán de Carvajal. The exchange of knowledge generated the systematization of medicinal plant production which resulted in the creation of the brand "Mujer que Sana", and they were able to formalize the elaboration and sale of traditional herb products. This also derived into the service they offered as "Peasant Tourism", activity that is reactivating after the pandemic.

Presently the members of VIDA continue with family gardens for food safety and sovereignty, complementing their diet with the edible coffee plantation, which provides more than twenty seasonal products throughout the year. Since 21 years ago, they became

aware of agroecology, produced composts, made biological inputs, diversified production through the agroecological systematization of the coffee plantation, fought for re-peasantization, which derived into an agroecological peasant identity or, as Ploeg (2010) would define them: "peasants of the third millennium".

The VIDA coffee farmers' association could be catalogued as an alternative agrifood organization that is different from the conventional and global production model, since it has created a direct link between producers and consumers based on the quality of the foods, but which also continues with its sociopolitical mobilization in favor of defending the biodiversity of the coffee-producing territory, peasant livelihoods, creole seeds, food sovereignty, and governance of peoples. Since the year 2005, VIDA participates in international movements such as the Agroecological Movement of Latin America and the Caribbean (*Movimiento Agroecológico de América Latina y el Caribe*, MAELA); the Slow Food movement; and the national movement "Alianza de Mujeres en Café" since the year 2016, through which they sought to have an impact on public policy, by defending the diversity of peasant life. These are essential aspects which multilinear agroecology defends with a transforming peasant movement (Wezel *et al*., 2009). The organization of coffee farmers maintains a critical position regarding the globalized agrifood model and its industrial production forms that contaminate the lifeforms in the planet. In addition, it is part of what Toledo (2017) calls civilizing, referring both to peasants and to diverse stakeholders of the civil society, who have double awareness –both social and ecological– and develop under the same ethics, which makes them mobilize and fight for a better life.

CONCLUSIONS

The success of the coffee farmers' organization presented results from the long historical process of peasant movements in Mexico during the 20th century, protests and confrontations as part of the strategy replicated and known as modularity of collective action, both to gain access to resources in dispute and to reach political representation, which drove more democratic processes that were able to decentralize municipal power. Under the strength of civic responsibility, they focused on social problems and managed to transform outdated relationships between the population and the government.

The collective action was established according to popular education, strengthening their agricultural techniques and their environmental, social and political knowledge, aspects that provoked the exchange of ideas and needs, at the same time that their group cohesion and identity as agroecological coffee-producing peasants increased. Their collective mobilization linked them to other social stakeholders such as public and academic institutions, through which they could surmise their organizational growth and be constituted as a social enterprise.

The coexistence relationship of coffee farmers through the years generated trust, sense of belonging, friendship and solidarity, vital elements that gave continuity to their collective action. They reached consensus on their leadership and the strategy of agroecological production, obtaining eight products certified as organic within the coffee plantation. These aspects led them to be inserted into alternative markets, both national and international, establishing a direct relationship between producers and consumers.

The collective action of coffee farmers was consolidated with associationism, since it gave them an institutional dimension, making peasant work visible (both men's and women's), under the agroecological perspective that sustains it: food safety and sovereignty through family gardens combined with eco-techniques; gender equity through ecofeminism; social and solidary economy with the establishment of alternative *tianguis* (street markets); production of natural articles for health and rural tourism. These aspects have provided governance, and while there are processes of transparency and consensus inside the organization, continuity in their collective action can be envisioned.

Training acquired by coffee farmers, product of their collective action, has created a high awareness of ecological and social aspects. Although agroecology is a lifestyle for them, there are still great challenges, such as: facing climate change; having an impact in the increase of social and ecological awareness of more peasants in coffee-producing regions; maintaining the national and international market in the presence of financial crises; and increasing the consumption of quality products. Public policies are needed in favor of the production and consumption of foods with agroecological quality, both local and regional. The research lines are open for future studies, since agroecological processes are present both in mestizo societies and in native peoples in Latin America. Their experimental and cultural wealth resides in the origin and development of agroecological organizations, which have a series of elements that it becomes necessary to research and compare, and to complete the information necessary both for academics and for the exchange of knowledge between peasant organizations, activities that wager for the movement of the pluriverse towards transmodernity, as a new civilizing paradigm.

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