Performing the community: representation, ritual and reciprocity in the Totonac Highlands of Mexico

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However important they may be as performances and expressions of communality, rituals do not in their own right create communities. Neither does a shared world-view and morality or interdependencies between people in networks (cf. Blokland 2003:208-210). To create and maintain mutual bonds, social actions are required that are framed in a multi-layered structure of reciprocities. It is through actual behaviour and exchanges that bonds between villagers are constituted and feelings of belonging to the village are substantiated.

Exchanges come in different forms: exchanging information and views (be it on household and family affairs or economic, religious, and political matters) and exchanging labour and other forms of mutual help are everyday and obviously important ways in which co-resident villagers interact. Even so, ritualised forms of exchanges performed at major occasions in individual lives and the annual cycle of community life have a symbolic quality that carries crucial meaning and weight. These forms of reciprocity have become even more crucial since the lives of villagers, through migration and communication have expanded beyond the geographical boundaries of Nanacatlan. It is through such exchanges that the community as a complex of networks, memories and morality, and rituals comes together and is symbolically constructed as a social space to which people feel attachment and belonging (cf. Cohen 1985).

As we have seen in the preceding chapter(s), keeping a balance within and between the three domains of the social, natural, and supernatural is the leading thread in everyday life as well as in ritual. The mechanism through which these relationships are affirmed or restored and the well-being of individuals and the community is assured is a system of ritualised exchanges. If a community wants to thrive and misfortune is to be avoided, participation in such rituals and exchanges is vital. We have also seen that even though modernity has broadened the spatial and socio-cultural horizons of villagers and brought new obligations and priorities, Nanacatecos have been keen on keeping up costumbres – albeit with their form and scale sometimes changed.

Ritual exchange involves a two-way transaction between givers and recipients as well as material objects that are being exchanged. As elsewhere, the most universal medium through which exchanges are being channelled is food. It is extensively shared among relatives, compadres, neighbours, co-villagers and relevant others, or offered to the supernatural beings. Compared to other goods, food is more readily shared and employed instrumentally as a starting, sustaining, or a
destroying mechanism of sociability (Sahlins 1974: 215). Because women are most intimately involved in preparing and distributing food, a closer look at the exchange patterns will also throw light on their social and religious roles in family and community – roles that tend to be obfuscated by the more visible and public religious roles of men (Van Esterik 1998).

In an early study of symbolism and rituals in Nanacatlán, Masferrer (1984) pointed out that the social construction of the community (what he calls “the social incorporation in the village”) takes place through the communal systems of cargos and faena, while “individual incorporation” (or the social construction of the individual) is achieved through the web of kinship and compadrazgo ties. I want to add that we should distinguish between female and male social roles and include the extensive food exchanges taking place at many occasions over the year as another major factor of community construction.

When studying food, anthropologists look at and seek explanations as to how food can help us understand a society (Fischler 1988; Messer 1984). From such a perspective, the observation that it is mainly women who are responsible for exchanging food may tell us something about the communal roles of women in Nanacatlán, their position and performance in the complex networks of village households, and about the gendered organisation of village life. Although women’s autonomous role in exchanges has long been underexposed (cf. Weiner 1976; Komter 1996), there is now growing attention to the significance of gender in food-centred activities and the social and cultural implications of women’s roles (e.g., Bynum 1987; Counihan and Kaplan 1998; Van Esterik 1998). In a similar way, studying the parties involved in food exchanges and the types, frequency, directions, and quantities of the food being distributed as well as the occasions this takes place, may reveal important dimensions of ethnic and socio-economic stratification as well as of political and religious divides and tensions. In Nanacatlán this means looking at the food exchanges in the light of the new religious and political pluriformity and the new social differentiation which emerged in the 1990s, and how this changed compadrazgo from a primarily local and patron-client centred (encapsulated) network to an integrated network (Hannerz 1980); including regional and urban (migrant) compadres, but excluding Protestants and, more recently, political opponents.

Food is not only a means of creating, maintaining, or restoring sociability, it is also a good loaded with meaning and symbolic value. People do not just eat anything to appease their hunger; there are many rules and taboos regarding what to eat and what not. Some concern the ways in which food is prepared: in Nanacatlán, men generally are not supposed to cook, certainly not tortillas or ritual meals. Other rules are more specific as certain dishes and occasions require or proscribe special types of food: beef for instance, is not to be used in the main ritual dishes prepared for life cycle events such as weddings or for calendar rituals such as Todos Santos or Christmas. As Lévi-Strauss (1992) and Mary Douglas (1966) have con-
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vincingly argued, such rules and taboos tend to be closely related to underlying systems of thought and world views.

In this chapter I want to look at the social networks of food exchange (what types of food are given by whom at what events), at the symbolic value of the food being exchanged (why are specific dishes and ingredients being used), and at the types of reciprocity between the exchange partners (generalized or balanced) to see how exchanges produce and reproduce social networks and the community at large as well as how these exchanges are embedded in the cultural outlook of the Nanacatecos.

There is a clear difference between ritual food and daily meals. The composition and quality of a daily meal depends to a large extent upon the economic means of the households, the seasonal availability of ingredients, and a woman’s skills as a cook. In general, daily meals are simple with only a few basic ingredients, more often than not without much animal protein as meat is expensive for the majority of people, while for the poor even beans as a source of vegetable protein are costly. Ritual meals on the other hand, are elaborate and varied and eaten with pleasure; preferably in the company of many relatives, friends, and acquaintances; they are a source of pride, not only to the cook but also to the community as most villagers readily agree that Nanacateco food tastes better than anywhere else.

As we saw in the previous chapter, rituals have increased over the past two decades and so have food exchanges, particularly since migrants return regularly to the village. When they come to take part in the rituals of the religious calendar or in life cycle ceremonies, they are being served the ‘typical village food’, most notably mole and tamales. While these dishes are part of an all-Mexican cuisine, migrants appreciate their real taste “as only Nanacatecos know how to prepare them”. The local tortillas are always freshly made unlike the industrially-produced ones eaten in the cities that are thin and dry, and the local fruits, vegetables, but especially the herbs cannot be had in the cities. They have become a source of nostalgic memories (cf. Sutton 1992) when migrant villagers are away and an obvious reason for delight when they return to the village – except of course for the few migrants who have grown accustomed to city food and primly complain that they can’t digest the ‘greasy and heavy’ village meals. Nanacatecos consider them arrogant, spoiled, and condescending. Being back in the village first and foremost means eating together, and the villagers take great trouble to feed everybody well (as the case of Odilia illustrates).

After don Gustavo, the local shopkeeper and coffee farmer, and his wife doña Lucinda had died, their daughter Odilia became the focal point of the family. When her parents were still alive, she was the one to help them out in preparing meals when they had

1 For a critique on the a-historical and static nature of their work on food see Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo (1992).
invited all members of their extended network of *compadres*, workers, and traders to
their house during the village *fiesta*. She and her youngest brother who recently came
back to settle in his parents home, are the only ones from the large family of don Gustavo
and doña Lucinda who live in the village. Odilia is now the one to keep her brothers and
sister together and she is proud of her role. It requires a lot of work for her to have them
around but it also brings her new status, and as managers of the coffee lands and the old
family house on behalf of her absent siblings, she and her husband earn some extra
income. Because her sister and brothers are all married and have children, the family
circle has grown rapidly and they all come when village feasts are held in Nanacatlán or
one of its neighbouring villages. They will stay for a few days in their old family house,
often bringing along a number of their *Serrano* friends from the city, who join the bas­
basketball competition. At times like that, Odilia is extremely busy but she likes the bustle
very much and proudly says: “My family now comes to me and I feed them. The last
time they came with a chartered microbus from Mexico City. I thought that they would
be with six, and I had enough food for that many people, but they turned out to come with
30 and one after the other came in. I barely could find enough food for all of them and in
the end; I just gave them eggs and beans. They went to the *fiesta* of Zongozotla (Decem­
ber 8) and will also come again in January to go to that of Tuxtla”. (Odilia Ramos
1997)

Being together or being together again, means sharing a meal – a strong symbol of
sociability. Before turning to the analysis of food exchanges and food symbolism,
I first discuss the major dishes prepared in Nanacatlán and the variety of occasions
on which food is being cooked and distributed that turns kitchens into the centers
of community life (Christie 2004:23), and of social networks.

**Dishes and drinks: the Nanacateco cuisine**

Food is a favourite topic of discussion among women who like to talk at length
about what to serve on what occasion and how to prepare it. Like the returning
migrants, they are as proud of the basics of their cuisine: the daily *tortillas* with
*salsa*, as of the most elaborate dishes served at celebrations and commemorations:
*tamales* and *mole*. While women can prove their cooking skills better in the prepa­
ration of these special dishes, the quality of their daily *tortillas* is probably an even
more crucial criterion: eating without *tortillas* means not eating at all and they
could hardly understand how others, including me, could survive without them.
These maize pancakes require a careful and lengthy preparation and are a major
part of women’s daily chores. Maize – the staple food of classic Mesoamerica as
well as present-day Mexico² – has different names at different stages: as a plant it

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² Most of the local food today however, is a mix of indigenous Mesoamerican and Spanish/Mediterranean products and customs (Coe 1994; Cartay 1992; Long 1997; Martínez et al. 1994). Maize was domesticated around 5000 BC in the Central Highlands of Mexico (Tehuacan Valley). The first evidence of a *metate* dates back to that period while the oldest *comal* is dated at appr. 3000 BC (Bryant et al.
is called milpa (T. xawatl, just like the maize plot), the fresh cob is called elote (T. tlakgtla) and after it is dried mazorca (T. kuxi). The maize kernels (granos de maíz, T. kuxi) are processed into nixtamal (see below) and this is ground into masa (maize dough), from which tortillas, tamales or atole are made. Maize is hardly eaten on the cob, and rarely are elotes used for masa, because people need to dry and store their elotes to last until the next harvest.

The main dishes consist of either meat or beans. Cooking, stewing, and steaming, often combined with frying, are the standard ways to prepare them. Meat, fish, eggs, and vegetables are usually fried in lard (sometimes also cooking oil) first after which water with herbs, salsa and, if any, vegetables are added. Beans are boiled first and can be fried later. Dishes are always spicy because of the abundant chillies used. Drinks are often sweet through an abundant use of sugar, and the sweet tooth is also satisfied through sweet squash, cake, and increasingly with factory-made sweets, jellies, or sweet bread (pan dulce).

The kitchen is the central place in a wooden or zacate house, while modern houses have an outdoor kitchen because cooking is done on an open fire; even those with a stove will always cook tortillas that way. Pots and pans are placed on three stones (tenamaztle) or a metal rack under which a fire is made, either on the floor or nowadays more often on a brazero, a wooden container on legs filled with fine sand and covered with ashes (see figure 7.1). Mestizos and well-to-do Totonacs have an additional stove inside their house but more people gradually start buying a small single-burner cooker for dishes such as beans that take a long time (and a lot of wood) to cook or for parboiling something quickly. Every kitchen has a mixture of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ kitchenware. Every household at least owns some plastic buckets and a large plastic container for water, a bucket for boiling maize into nixtamal, a hand mill for making masa, a metate (see figure 7.2) for grinding masa and ingredients for sauces, a clay or metal comal to bake the tortillas (see figure 7.1), a few high clay pots for cooking beans, some broad clay pots for dishes such as mole and tixmole, one or two frying-pans, and a few casseroles. For daily meals one needs at least a gourd to keep tortillas warm, squash spoons (although most household nowadays also have metal spoons and forks to eat with and larger enamel ladles), knives, plates, and bowls as well as plastic, enamel, and china mugs and glasses.

1985:47). Maize is relatively easy to grow, it can be dried and stored for long periods and is easily transported. A crucial invention that helped maize become a staple food (and perhaps was also the basis of the rise of Mesoamerican civilizations) was nixtamalization: a process in which the maize grains are soaked and cooked with lime or (alkaline) wood ashes. In the process, the hard skin is softened and removed making it easier to grind the kernels but at the same time it makes the proteins in them digestible. Without this alkaline processing, the niacin content of the maize remains chemically bound and inaccessible to the human metabolism (Katz et al. 1974; Bryant et al. 1985:42-47; Coe 1994:9-16; Visser 1986:33). When maize was introduced to Europe in the sixteenth century, it was consumed without nixtamalization, causing widespread dietary deficiency diseases like pellagra and kwashiorkor (Brandes 1992).

3 For an overview of cultivated and wild plants in Nanacatlan, with English, local Spanish, and scientific names, see annex 7. See also annex 5 (medicinal plants) and table 7.2 for food classification.
Figure 7.1 Brazero with comal

Figure 7.2 Metate
Preparing food is a time-consuming affair; this goes in particular for the tortillas, as they have to be freshly made for each meal. Making a good tortilla is considered an art and a skill that women should have: girls are taught at a very young age how to make them as this skill is a prerequisite for even thinking about getting engaged. Every other day, the women take the maize cobs for several meals from the storage, husk (desgranar) them, and cook them into nixtamal. Twice a day she goes to the local mill to have it ground into dough (masa) for each meal separately. Bringing the masa home, she still has to grind the dough again on her metate to refine it, shape each tortilla by hand and bake them on the comal. If she has run out of maize, she may use industrially-produced flour (harina de maíz). This is cheaper and faster but most villagers don’t like the taste of such tortillas. Because the preparation requires a lot of time, mestizo families tend to hire someone for the job, or buy them ready-made at the shop in Zapotitlán. Totonac women will also buy tortillas during the busy coffee harvests when they have no time to spare; they are sold during that period in one of the village shops.

Tortillas are eaten as a staple food but are also the basis of other dishes like enchiladas (a wrap tortilla filled with salsa or egg), gorditos (thick tortillas with salsa, beans and herbs such as Mexican tea (epozote) mixed through the dough), or tacos (fried tortillas with a topping of salsa and fresh herbs).

Maize is also the basic ingredient of tamales that come in a variety of shapes and types. The basic way of making tamales is to fill small portions of maize dough with meat and a sauce or with beans, to wrap them in Indian shot leaves (papatla) or maize husks, and steam them for some time in a bucket with some boiling water at its bottom. The variation among tamales comes from whether dried or fresh maize is used and what kind of filling they have. It can be whole fresh beans, minced cooked beans (tamales de frijol), turkey, chicken or pork (but no beef) with specific herbs and a red or green salsa. Nowadays people often add lard (or occasionally the more expensive butter) to the dough as that makes the tamales softer. The ones made from dried maize with pork, chicken, or turkey and those with whole black beans (tamales pintos) are generally used in food exchanges as well as in offerings on the house altar.

In addition to tortillas, chillies are universal ingredients in Nanacateco dishes.

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4 Because the maize has gone through the process of nixtamalization, it turns into dough, not flour. See also the previous footnote.

5 Tamales are considered to be of Mayan origin (Taube 1989; Coe 1994). In the classic Maya period, they were the principal maize dish and the principal sacrificial offering in post-classic and contemporary Mayan ceremonies. Among present-day Maya, the Central Mexican tortillas (much thicker than the ones made by Nahua and Totonac) have supplanted tamales as staple food and they are called with the same Mayan name. For Coe (1994: 145-152), the difference between the two is negligible because they are made from the same dough and are prepared in so many ways, that they can actually look much alike. The fact that tortillas can either be toasted on a heated stone slab or directly in the ashes of the cooking fire means that they could have been available among the Maya much earlier than presumed, because as Coe suggests, the absence of a comal does not mean the absence of tortillas.

6 Capsicum annum is the species originating from Mexico from which most of the chillies grown today are derived. They now come in such a variety of colours, shapes, sizes and degrees of pungency
They add flavour and taste to all other food and are a source of vitamins (A and C). The red and green chilli sauces (salsa rojo and salsa verde) are essential parts of daily meals. The peppers are ground very finely on a metate – and nowadays sometimes in an electric blender, usually after first roasting them. Red sauce comes from chilpotles, large dried and smoked and therefore wrinkled, warm brown-coloured jalapeño peppers, and from tomatoes and cumin seeds. The green sauce is made from chile verde, tomates de cascara, and either guias de espino or coriander. Other varieties of chillies go into other dishes: chiltepín is often used in daily food and chile ancho is the pepper that is a required ingredient for the famous mole.

Because of its use in the salsa, the major vegetable in the Mesoamerican kitchen is the tomato – a confusing name as the tomato we know by that name (solanum lycopersicon) originally comes from South America and is called jitomate in Mexico. The name tomate is used in Mexico for the cultivated variety of the indigenous species of the husk tomato (physalis called tomate de cascara) of which the wild variety is called miltomate (Coe 1994:47). Tomatoes (as I will call the jitomate) are nearly always part of the dishes served in Nanacatlán, and for most of the year people have to buy them in the market or from itinerant traders, because they only grow in July and August in the village.

For the most part, people also have to buy the popular dried black and red beans in the market because they are only harvested a couple of months a year, or not at all as the milpa soil has become poorer over the years. The beans are boiled for hours and make up the standard side-dish for the people who can afford them. Other beans eaten are cow pea (frijol cuerno) and several varieties of runner bean (frijol gordo) harvested from spring to autumn. They are usually fresh and cooked with several kinds of herbs.

A common dish is sopa: a thick soup made of pasta, rice or vermicelli, cooked in water with herbs and tomatoes. For mestizo villagers this is a starter; for Totonacs this is usually the whole meal. Vegetables often replace the pasta or rice, with some herbs to add flavour. Such vegetable sopa is the most common way to eat subsistence produce: squash, cassava, yucca, chayote, cabbage, and French beans; and bought produce: potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, and carrots. Any combination of these vegetables is used; whatever is available. Sometimes vegetables are fried in lard: beans, squash, potatoes, chayote, and also bananas and quelites. Avocados are eaten on tortillas. Paxnica is a favourite dish, made of capote (wild mafafa) leaves that grow in the hills all year round. The leaves are boiled with a mixture of the leaves of peanuts and avocado, barbados nut (piñon), roasted sesame seeds, lime, and chilli.

Eggs are scrambled with chilli, salsa, coriander, curly dock (lengua de vaca) or other herbs and spices. They are sometimes mixed with vegetables such as French beans.

Fish from the Zempoala river is occasionally caught or bought from itinerant

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that it is impossible to name them all (Coe 1994:61).
traders. It is first fried in lard or oil, after which water, onion, tomatoes and a whole chilli is added. The small crayfish are added to fried red chillies with water, or are used to make tortas, round tamales that resemble thick tortillas.

Meat is a rare treat, and appears mostly in the ritual dishes like mole and tamales. People have to buy meat in Zapotitlán as it is only sold in the village during the annual ritual celebrations by villagers who keep a pig, turkeys, or chickens. Few villagers have cattle, and beef is thus rarely sold. Most villagers keep a few chickens, and chicken is most often eaten in small portions as daily food. The most common way to prepare it is as chicken broth, with chilli and herbs, and vegetables. Totonacs eat meat in a stew or soup; only mestizos eat pan-fried meat like steak or pork chops.

Turkey, chicken, or pork are especially eaten as ingredients of mole (also called after its place of invention: mole poblano), which deserves special mention in this overview because it has become famous all over the country. It consists of cooked meat in a dark spicy sauce to which chocolate is added, and is eaten with rice and tortillas. It is the favourite and pre-eminent meal prepared for festive and ritual occasions. Because of the amount and variety as well as the price of its ingredients (particularly the chile ancho is expensive), people only eat it on special occasions.7

Beef is rarely eaten in the village, except as part of ritual dishes such as tixmole, chilposontle, or chilmole. The first is a reddish beef tea coloured by chipotles. Another beef tea, chilposontle, is also made with chipotles to which cinnamon, tomatoes, and lengua de vaca are added. The same dish can also be prepared with pork, but in that case the lengua de vaca is replaced by purslane (verdolaga). Finally, chilmole is a thicker stew of fried beef.

Among the drinks, not surprisingly in a village surrounded by cafetales, the most readily available one is coffee. A bucketful is always ready on the stove for people to have a cup or to serve to visitors. Other drinks include atolé, a homemade drink prepared from maize dough or fresh maize which comes in a sweet or a sour variety. The sweet atolé is made of masa dissolved in water, sieved, and boiled for an hour after which sugar is added according to taste. The atolé agrio is made of elote (the ground kernels, not turned into nixtamal) that is kept in a container with water for 12 hours during which it grows sour. It can also be made from masa. Alcoholic drinks are rare except for the locally-produced refino (made of fermented sugar cane juice) and some bottled beer. Women hardly ever consume alcoholic beverages. Some men are habitual drinkers and buy their refino at one of the local stores. Refino is also an important ritual drink served to fiscales and dancers who drink from the same glass that is constantly refilled. A richer drink is

7 Mole is said to be a colonial invention (Cartay 1992: 363). It was first made in the eighteenth century in the Santa Rosa convent of Puebla in honour of a visiting viceroy. Over the years, it has become the standard dish of the proudly named 'traditional regional cuisine' of the state of Puebla as well as for festive occasions in many other parts of Mexico. Ingredients for Nanacateco mole: butter, lard, chile ancho, tomatoes, tomates de cascara, almonds, cinnamon, clove, licorice marigold (anis), peanuts, 2 bars of chocolate, salt, sugar. Some also add cookies or sweet bread and bananas.
**ponche** consisting of **refino** with sugar, a whipped egg and fringed rue (**ruda**); occasionally people drink **tepache**, made from fermented pineapple with sugar. Among the local **mestizos**, some drink beer, brandy, or mixed drinks of cola with rum and/or brandy, and in recent years more and more people have become used to buying soft drinks.

We see that the main dishes and ingredients used in the Nanacateco kitchen have a composition of influences and ingredients from all over the world, and range from subsistence crops, wild herbs, and vegetables to industrial products. The more complex the dishes, the more people need purchased ingredients. Maize nevertheless remains central to all meals and even if many ingredients have to be bought, the dishes are still perceived as traditional. After this brief inventory, I now turn first to the meals served in everyday life and later to those served and exchanged at ritual festivities.

**Daily household meals**

There is an obvious – and necessary – difference between the elaborate meals that are part of ritual ceremonies and the food people usually consume. For the majority of Nanacatecos their daily meals depend on what is available from the land, and on what they can barter with others in exchange for their own produce. Cooking is no easy job since the simple daily meals require at least four hours of women’s work; from making the fire, to gathering, bartering or buying the ingredients and preparing the dishes. Eating in Nanacatlan follows the rural Mexican pattern of two meals: the **almuerzo**, usually around 11 o’clock in the morning, and the main meal (**comida** or **cena**) around 4 o’clock in the afternoon (Allen 1992). The majority of the villagers start and end the day with some coffee and have an evening bite consisting of some leftovers from the **comida**. When they go to school, children eat whatever is available in the morning or drink just coffee, come home around noon to have their **almuerzo** and some sweets, and eat their **cena** in the late afternoon with their families; before they go to sleep, they have some evening coffee or milk with a few leftover bites. Mothers will try to give their teenage gluttons some extra **tortillas** in the evening. Children and pregnant women drink milk from milkpowder (provided by the government) rather than fresh milk sold by the few cattle owners in the village. The men engaged in hard physical labour on the **milpa** or **cafetal**, eat more: before they leave for the fields, they have some coffee and tortillas or sweet bread between five and six in the morning. When they work on the village lands, their wives or children bring them their **almuerzo** at noon (usually a huge pile of **tortillas** and sauce, or **enchilladas**); when their work is further away, they take their meals along. Upon coming home at the end of the day, they have their **comida**. If their trees bear fruit and there is an abundance of vegetables in the garden, people eat a lot more. The meals of the well-to-do are not only richer but also more diverse and often include a thick soup (**sopa**), meat, canned or fresh fish, sausages and
eggs, and cheese and milk. Most people eat meat only once a week, beans once or twice a week, and eggs every two or three days. The better-off also eat more often and tend to have three to four meals a day: coffee and sweet bread in the morning, a rich almuerzo and comida and again coffee and sweet bread in the evening. Others will only have an extra evening meal during the months of the coffee harvest when there is more money around.

More often than not, the ingredients come from subsistence agriculture: maize from the supply people keep in their houses, vegetables, vegetables leaves (such as squash or chayote) and herbs from intercropping on the milpa or cafetal as well as from the house garden (see chapter 3). Sometimes wild herbs and vegetables are gathered in the hills: mafafa (capote) leaves, xocoyol pinto and blanco (begonia), several kinds of quelite and quilltonil(e) (especially prince’s feather) and hierbamora (black nightshade), and watercress, which are considered delicacies. Most people also need to buy food stuff (cooking oil or lard, meat or fish, and sometimes pasta, rice, and beans) in one of the village shops or at the nearby markets. Favourite commercial products are tins of tuna fish or sardines. Those who don’t have any land and those who have run out of supplies need to buy most of their food which means that in the slack season (the months before the harvests) the daily meals of the poor mainly consist of tortillas with salsa or simply with fresh chillies.8

The daily diet has considerable seasonal variation. Between March-April and October-November, most households consume their own vegetables, fruits and herbs. In such periods squash, chayote, cassava, bananas, and a variety of beans come to the table; occasionally also cabbage, sweet potatoes, and French beans. In-between meals people then eat fruits such as bananas, oranges, mandarins, guava, and peach. As households harvest at different times (the growing cycle varies with ecological conditions as well as the use of fertilizer and pesticide), women often exchange or trade fresh vegetables, fruits, and herbs.

Given the strict gendered division of labour, daily meals can be seen as a form of internal exchange in which women provide food to the other members of the household. She is responsible for the ingredients of a particular meal, using the subsistence crop or bartering it for other ones, by gathering or buying food. The husband’s reciprocal obligation is then to grow the main ingredients, to gather when he goes to the fields or hills, to fish and provide the cash to buy food. Whenever possible, household members eat together – but often they arrive at different times and have their meals separately. In exceptional cases, women may refuse to cook. If she is furious, for instance if her husband has been repeatedly drunk, has beaten or mistreated her, she has several options – apart from separation and divorce. She can go and stay with her parents or siblings for a while, she can go out for the day without making arrangements for the daily meals, and she can refuse to

8 This resembles the general rural Mexican pattern, where costly industrialised food occasionally supplements produce from subsistence agriculture and gathering, but does not replace it (see chapter 1).
7.1 Dry chillies at the market in Zapotitán

7.2 Food offering for a good maize harvest
prepare a meal for her husband even though she is at home – the utmost form of marital protest. Socially, the most acceptable solution of avoiding cooking for her husband is to leave the village for some time because she can pretend that her parents or other relatives need her. On the other hand a husband can express his anger by not coming home at all and having a meal elsewhere, not coming home and not giving any notice, or refusing to eat the meal that his wife has prepared for him. Again, the last is seen as a serious sign of contempt and a major insult.  

While the two daily meals tend to be sober for most Nanacatecos this does not mean they are quick-and-simple. Even a standard dish is made with a considerable number of ingredients and requires hours of work in preparing. Maize is the main source of carbohydrates (starch); protein is usually of vegetable origin (beans); vitamins come from vegetables, herbs and fruits; and the omnipresent coffee provides a stimulant. With only a few exceptions it is the women who prepare and serve food, and see to it that it is brought to the men working the milpa or cafetal. They also have to make sure there is enough food at home and manage the household purse (finances). The type and quality of food change markedly when it is not the members of the household who are being served: when meals are prepared as part of ritual occasions in which many others take part. To understand the central role those ceremonial meals play in establishing and affirming social ties among villagers, I now turn to those food exchanges in some detail and look at the occasions of exchange, the people to whom it is given, and the type of meal that is handed over or shared.

### Ceremonial food and social networks

Following the order in which I discussed the costumbres in the preceding chapter, I have classified food exchanges into four broad categories according to their settings. These are successively: labour exchanges and mutual care; life cycle events; calendrical rituals; and finally state rituals. In general, the exchanges involve the households of next-of-kin, compadres, friends, and neighbours either invited to share a meal or to whom food is being sent. Following the food not only gives a clue to the members of someone’s network but also to the cultural messages conveyed through the particular food. Women usually say that they give food to a comadre, or to parents-in-law even when they provide enough food for all the members of the household. Only in specific cases is food given to individual recipients such as meals for the participants in labour exchanges and for someone in need of care (such as a woman after childbirth), the first meal to newly invited godparents, meals to ritual specialists and performers (the fiscals and their helpers, dancers, musicians, and decorators), as well as to official visitors and participants of state celebrations.

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9 Similar conflicts and reactions may of course also occur between other members of the family – with similar outcomes.
Food for labour and care

When people come to work, paid or unpaid, they do so for the person who provides the work and whom they ‘come to help’ as they say. In return for their assistance a patron’s wife will offer each of them coffee and bread or cookies. People taking part in mutual help are given a more elaborate meal than ordinary wage labourers as *mano vuelta* still has all the connotations of a ritual rather than a businesslike affair. The wives of participants will reciprocate the meal when the others come to work their land. Providing food for mutual help is more than just a compensation for their efforts as the meal has to meet specific conditions and is collectively, if not ceremonially eaten.

Mutual help and wage labour

*Mano vuelta* is most common and significant when the maize is sown and harvested; consequently the meals served at those occasions are the most elaborate. The women of the patron’s household, often with the assistance of the wife of one of the *mano vuelta* workers, cook the food.

At sowing-time the men have to eat their meal at noon on the *milpa*; after they have finished the women who have prepared and brought the food should eat there as well to secure a good harvest. As Totonacs consider beef to be ‘hot food’ that might burn the young sprouts, it should be avoided in such meals. A preferred dish for the occasion is mole with chicken or turkey and of course, tortillas, but when household finances do not allow such an expensive meal, *tixmole* with chicken will also do. Afterwards, the patron’s wife takes part of the meal to the house altar as an offering, and when they have rented the *milpa*, she will also bring a dish to the owner of the land. On the altar the woman will add some bread, coffee, and *refino* to the offering, light a candle and burn some incense.

Harvest time tends to last several days and the *mano vuelta* workers eat at their patron’s house—beef is now permitted. Before they leave for the *milpa*, they come for a coffee and some bread; at noon, when they have already once or twice brought home a *huacal* full of *mazorcas*, they will have their *almuerzo*. This is usually a simple meal of eggs with chillies, herbs or green wild vegetables, and some kind of beans. At the end of the working day, they take their *comida*, which is somewhat more elaborate and may include eggs and beans, *sopa*, organic meat, or *chilposote*, preferably with beef. The last meal on the final day of the harvest always includes chicken, turkey or pork, preferably as *mole* or *tixmole*, because on that day an offering has to be made on the house altar where beef is taboo.

Even when the group of harvesters is small, the number of meals and the amount

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10 An exception to this rule was Odilia, the daughter of don Gustavo and doña Lucinda, who didn’t object taking beef to the *milpa*. “Some people say that it is not allowed to do so, but I don’t care.”
of work preparing and bringing them to the workers can be considerable as the following case illustrates:11

When Pedro asked his neighbour and his sons to come and help him with the maize harvest, Irene had to make food twice a day for an additional two adults and three teenage children: an almuerzo after their first trip and a comida after the third and last trip. The harvest lasted from Monday till Tuesday the next week; as Pedro had to do faena on Friday and had a day off on Sunday, the harvest itself took seven days to complete, and therefore Irene had a tough working schedule preparing the rather elaborate meals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>almuerzo</th>
<th>comida</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tortillas, black beans</td>
<td>Tortillas, paxnica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Tortillas, black beans</td>
<td>Tortillas, sopa (of vermicelli)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Tortillas, frijol bayo, chilli</td>
<td>Tortillas, frijol bayo, egg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Tortillas, scrambled eggs, chilli</td>
<td>Tortillas, sopa, chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>No harvest activities - but still cooking for the family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Tortillas, scrambled eggs, lengua de vaca</td>
<td>Tortillas, chilposontle (beef)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>No harvest activities - but still cooking for the family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Tortillas, scrambled eggs, chilli, bread</td>
<td>Tortillas, sopa, gizzard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Tortillas, egg with beans, bread</td>
<td>Tortillas, chicken, salsa verde</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar arrangements apply to house building as that can also be done either in mano vuelta or through wage labour. The food served is the same as when they work the land: coffee and bread for the wage labourers and the elaborate almuerzo and comida in case of mano vuelta. When the house is roofed, the patron’s wife prepares a special meal such as mole for all who have come to work. On that occasion, Catholics install a small altar for food offerings.

Wage labour is generally used by large landowners or migrants who don’t have time to work their cafetal or milpa themselves or in mano vuelta. These workers are served coffee with bread (or sometime cookies) twice a day in the kitchen, sometimes with a glass of refino as well.

Social support
Although the term mano vuelta covers a specific form of work by mutual support, there are many cases in which people help each other by giving a meal. Women will feed elderly or sick people, women in childbed, households in trouble, or passing visitors. This help will be returned if the present giver or one of her close network members needs it, and can stretch across a wide network of relatives, in-laws, compadres and even friends of relatives, compadres, and friends.

When a close female relative, comadre, neighbour, or friend is ill; women often

11 Of course, when Pedro and his sons return the favour and work the neighbour’s milpa, they will have their meals at the neighbour’s house and Irene will have to cook much less.
send food, if only tortillas with beans or sweet atole. Like women in childbed, sick women and men cannot eat most of the cold food, so one cannot just give a portion of the family’s meal of that day.

Generally parents and parents-in-law who live in the village receive a share every time special food is made (most notably the occasions mentioned in this chapter), or whenever one has come across extra food. This may be in harvest times, after fishing in the river, a successful hunt, collecting herbs and wild vegetables, or when one of the animals has died (and there is no danger in eating the meat). When the mother (-in-law) is too old to cook, or when the father (-in-law) is a widower, children are supposed to give food on a daily basis. Sons (or one should say daughters-in-law) may fail to do so but daughters and granddaughters are more likely to live up to this obligation. Since more residents migrate, feeding the elderly has become much more complicated and the daily responsibility has to be shared between fewer women.

Passing visitors also receive a meal and the next case illustrates how such hospitality can cover a wide-spread social network:

On a Thursday, Irene unexpectedly had a lot of extra eaters. Five adult relatives of her compadres in Zacapoaxtla and several of their children had come from Puebla on their way to delivering furniture in Tuxtla. Irene had to make enchiladas for them filled with a sopa of vermicelli because, as she explained, she had stayed with these people when she went to Puebla to take her mother-in-law to the hospital. Shortly afterwards, several salesmen from Tepango who were relatives of her relatives in Huitzilan stopped by and she served them tortillas with egg in the front room of her house. “It is not easy to be a woman as one has to make tortillas all day”, she complained.

This last case illustrates both direct and indirect forms of balanced reciprocity typical of a rather flexible kinship system (Rothstein 1999) where relations of relatives and ritual kin form part of a common network. The people from Huitzilan (relatives of her relatives) whom Irene fed will probably never be in a position to return the favour, but when Pedro and Irene visit Huitzilan they know they can count on their relatives (who hardly ever come to Nanacatlán). With the relatives of their compadres from Puebla, the exchange is direct because although their relationship was rather remote, they have lodged and fed Irene and her mother-in-law in the past.

Life cycle rituals and food exchange

Whenever a person is going through a ritual transition in life: birth, engagement and marriage, when one becomes a parent or a godfather, when sick or old, and at the point of death; food is a crucial medium to guide the person safely through that liminal phase. As these liminal phases also involve the next-of-kin and the ritual kin of the person concerned, food exchanges invariably include the household and a wider social network.
The general model of life cycle exchanges is that women are the givers while households are the recipients of meals (except when food is given to a woman in childbed). There are two exceptions. Baptisms and weddings are the most ceremonial transitions and the food exchanges on these occasions underline the incorporation of new (ritual) kin into the family. When a child is baptised, it is not only the baby that is welcomed into the circle of kin but also its godparents. When the parents of a prospective groom and bride agree on their marriage, a new daughter-in-law is about to be welcomed. On these occasions, men act as the primary givers of food by handing over the ingredients for mole to the father of the bride and his compadre (at the hand washing ceremony) respectively. The mother of the groom and the comadre receive the ingredients and prepare the meal for their own kin and for the giver and his household. These two crucial moments thus differ considerably from the usual way of performing food exchanges, when a woman gives enough prepared food to her comadre to also feed her household members. The first special meal however, is for the compadre and comadre and as this is the same for all occasions when ritual kinship is created, I present this first.

New compadres and comadres
When a couple has agreed to become the godparent of a child of another couple, they visit the house for the party of their new godchild. They are treated as new kin and treat their godchild as a new relative, even when they are already compadres of that couple as godparents of other children or of the same child for another occasion. Ritually speaking they are ‘newcomers’. As a first ceremonial meal they receive a portion of mole. They are served first and get the chicken or turkey breast, while the others eat the rest of the meat or pork. Their household members may also be invited to the party, but they are treated as any other guest. Although compadrazgo relations are created on numerous occasions, this does not mean everyone is involved in all of them. Many children do not finish secondary school and their parents will not have compadres for graduation ceremonies. But most people have children who will be baptised and will get married, and therefore nearly all women will prepare mole for these two most important life cycle rituals. This meal is the beginning of an exchange flow as comadres who both live in Nanacatlán exchange food whenever there is an occasion to do so. Comadres from outside the village are invited for a meal at special occasions, or whenever they visit Nanacatlán. Comadres might extend these exchanges to include close relatives and ritual kin of their compadres, or even friends, colleagues, and neighbours during a visit to the village.

Well-to-do couples are often invited by many to become their compadre and

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12 It is quite common to ask a teacher as a compadre or comadre for such graduations. People invite a compadre and comadre after finishing secondary school, as well as when their children complete primary education. There is however, pressure from the government to do away with this last habit because it is considered too expensive for most parents and in some years the school committee did not allow it.
CHAPTER 7

will often eat the good food sent to them by their *comadres*: when their husbands start sowing or harvesting the maize on land rented from their *compadres*, when the village *fiesta* is held, at *Todos Santos*, when they have a family feast, or when there is another occasion to prepare a special dish. They will look for influential godparents for their own children outside the village among their regional and urban networks. Unless they are relatives, these external *compadres* will rarely come to Nanacatlán and only visit when their *compadres* have a major celebration or at funerals. The local well-to-do therefore usually receive more food than they give.

*Compadrazgo* used to be cumulative as most parents tended to invite the same couple to be *compadres* at all other occasions in which children go through some kind of initiation ceremony. For this reason, the number of people within the exchange network of a household was limited, the more so if *compadres* and *comadres* were chosen from among siblings, relatives, or employers who were already part of the exchange network. Poor households often still act like this thereby avoiding extensive and expensive food exchanges. Today, there is an opposite trend (see chapter 3) among those who can afford it to deliberately create a more extensive circle of *compadres* and particularly invite relatives who have migrated to Mexico City or other urban areas. These migrant *compadres* come for a couple of days when there is an occasion that they should attend and are cordially welcomed and well fed with *tamales*, *tixmole*, and beans.

Food exchanges are a way to build good relations between *compadres*, but more effectively between two wider networks. Therefore, only at the very start of that ritual tie are *compadres* are served meals for themselves alone. Afterwards, the relationship is extended to include all members of their households. In spite of the instrumental ring of *compadrazgo* ties, the nature of the exchanges between ritual kin follows the characteristics of generalised reciprocity common among close kin.

Marriage proposals and weddings

After the parents of the girl have accepted the boy’s parent’s proposal, the boy is allowed to regularly visit his fiancée and is supposed to give her small presents that are useful for the household or little personal presents. After one or two months, his parents bring food (*llevar tacahuele* or ‘offering’) to his future parents-in-law and set a date for the wedding. His father has to take the initiative and he is responsible for the gifts: they include in addition to a case of beer, a case of soft drinks, *refino*, maize and bread: all the ingredients for *mole*, including a live turkey and a leg of pork, though not the chocolate or the bananas; the firewood is part of the gift. Similar gifts are handed over to the girl’s baptismal godparents and her grandparents. She and her mother will then prepare *mole* for her own household, her grandparents, aunts and uncles, and all her godparents as well as for her future husband and parents-in-law who brought this *tacahuele*.

At the wedding the situation is reversed: it is at the house of the groom’s parents who provide the ingredients while the mother with the help of relatives, *comadres*, friends, and sometimes paid help, prepare the wedding meal. The food is consumed
at the party but first a large pot of *mole* is brought to the house of the bride’s par­
ents. They eat a little and leave the rest for later. Then an offering of *mole*, bread, 
soft drinks, beer, *refino*, and coffee is made to the deceased relatives on the altar at 
the groom’s house, and food is sent to the relatives who cannot attend the party 
because they are ill or too old.

How much food and how many drinks are served depends on the wealth of the 
parents and the size of the party, but they invariably include *mole* with rice and 
sometimes beans, soft drinks, and — when religion permits — beer and *refino*. At 
bigger parties other alcoholic drinks are also served as well as a wedding pie.

Among Baptists alcohol is out of the question and they don’t include godparents 
in the sharing of the food, except for the *compadres* of the wedding itself. They do 
follow the food customs, as Betty the daughter of a large Baptist family, explains:

My parents-in-law carried everything needed for making *mole* to my parents, because it 
is the bride’s mother who has to make *mole*. With some helpers they also brought bread, 
meat, a leg of pork, soft drinks, soap, and firewood. You have to give them to eat that day 
in the girl’s house: *tixmole* made with pork or chicken. You eat the *mole* with your grand­
parents and aunts and bring food to the boy and his parents. During the wedding, the 
mother of the boy and some of her relatives did the cooking. For my wedding [in August 
1996], they made *mole* with chicken because you need that for your *compadres*-of-the-
wedding: you give them chicken-breast. They slaughtered a pig and made *mole* with 
pork for the other guests. (Betty Juárez 1997)

After marriage, the couple live with the husband’s parents during the first year 
when their house is being built. Now it is the new daughter-in-law who has to make 
tortillas for her husband and her in-laws in the household.

Childbed and baptism

After she has given birth, a woman has to stay at home in bed for 14 to 40 days and 
is not allowed to do any cooking. Instead other women (relatives, *comadres*, and 
neighbours) will take turns to feed the husband and children and prepare special 
dishes for the new mother. These dishes have to be made separately from what the 
others eat because for a woman in childbed there are strict dietary rules as to what 
she may and may not have. She can eat maize, chicken, beef, game (such as armadillo, opossum, *tuza*), lamb, goat, black nightshade, all beans except the black ones, *sopa* of rice or pasta, vegetables, fruit and bread, milk, and coffee. Other kinds of 
food are taboo: pork, turkey, black beans, *mañafita*, *quiltonile*, chayote, chillies and 
salsa. This division more or less follows the distinction between hot and cold food: 
during 40 days the young mother should avoid the cold food (other than squash and 
fresh-water fish) but is allowed to eat hot food, but not the chillies.13 Eating the
wrong type of food will upset the baby's stomach.\textsuperscript{14} But observing the rules of what to do and what to avoid in childbirth requires a lot of organizing and involves many people, as when Tomasa gave birth:

In October 1989 Tomasa had her third child, a daughter; Irene brought her sister-in-law food that same day. Tomasa and her baby already had each taken a spoon of oil, and Tomasa a mixture of \textit{refino}, coffee, oil, and honey. She lies on new wooden planks on the floor. This serves as her bed, day and night during the first weeks after she has given birth and after that for another two to three months. She has daily help to wash the child and her own clothes and those of the baby. Because of the rains, October is an awkward time to do the laundry as it hardly dries on the line. Every three days the help heats water for her bath, but Tomasa prefers to bathe herself. The rest of the day she is lying in bed, with the baby completely covered in blankets, apart from when she is breastfeeding her. She has visitors every now and then, and several women come to bring her something to eat. Irene, Tomasa’s mother, her mother-in-law and another sister-in-law bring her food. Her \textit{comadre} Lupe also sends her help to bring food, because she and her husband are godparents of several of the children and Tomasa’s husband works for them. For a couple of weeks her husband and the other two children regularly eat at his or her parents and occasionally with other relatives or friends who may also bring food to the house.

A month after the birth when the mother is on her legs again, she has to prepare \textit{mole} from a whole chicken, a piece of chicken-breast or some two pounds of pork and take it to the midwife. Some women also bring her a live turkey and some bread.

When the baby is baptised, which usually takes place somewhere between confinement and its first birthday, the new \textit{compadres}, grandparents, close relatives, other \textit{compadres}, and friends come for a festive meal while some new parents even throw a big party with a large cake and a great deal of drinks.

At the special ceremony of hand washing\textsuperscript{15} (lavar los manos) between the two couples allied through the new-born child, it is by way of exception the father who gives food to the new \textit{compadre}. However, he doesn’t hand him a prepared dish but its still-uncooked ingredients: a live turkey and all the rest that goes into \textit{mole}, as well as two cases of soft drinks, a case of beer and one or two bottles of Presidente brandy.\textsuperscript{16} This takes place up to one or two years after the baptism.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{14} ‘Hot’ and ‘cold’ do not refer to thermal categories, but are a way of labelling food as bringing about heat or cold in the person’s body. It is therefore necessary to regulate the use of food to strict rules, especially in cases where the body is already ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ for other reasons. In daily food, when the body is in balance any food can be eaten. Known throughout Latin America, the hot-cold classification distinguishes food, plants, illnesses, and medicine (Cosminsky 1975; Neuenswander & Souder 1977). In Nanacatlán these labels are mostly used when speaking of food and illness, and the latter is classified as ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ according to the food that is prescribed or taboo.

\textsuperscript{15} This ceremony of hand washing and the handing over of a live turkey and \textit{mole} ingredients, only takes place between couples of a baptismal \textit{compadrazgo}.

\textsuperscript{16} Only at one other occasion, \textit{tacahuele} (when the parents of the boy ask for the hand of the girl), is it the father of the groom who gives food.
\end{footnotesize}
New birthday and quincena parties

Villagers increasingly celebrate birthdays, especially those of their children: usually just with atole or refreshments, sweets or jellies and the larger affairs with pie or even tamales. Mestizos also organise a piñata to which they invite the children of their compadres and workers, and hand out plastic bags with sweets to the children when they leave the party. The adults who celebrate their birthday usually serve beer, brandy, or refino to the men; and soft drinks to the women and children, with pie or a dish such as tamales, tixmole, or gorditos.

The 15th birthday of a girl (quincena) has become the most important birthday party. For that occasion, new compadres have to be sought, often more than one couple; in exceptional cases even up to a dozen. As compadres have to be given elaborate meals of chicken or turkey mole, quincenas have become a major food exchange.

Wakes and funerals

Relatives offer a number of food gifts after a person has died. While the deceased is lying in state during the three days before the funeral, his or her favourite food is on a nearby table or shelf, while there are mazorcas underneath the bier. In the coffin will be twelve tiny tortillas wrapped in a napkin, as well as some water, salt, and ramates de zacate. Catholic families offer food (anything but beef) and coffee, soft drinks or refino on the house altar. Each household will try to send someone to come to pay their respect and will bring one or two of the following items: flowers, mazorcas, maize flour, ground coffee, beans, salt, bread or sugar, and if they are Catholic, they might bring a candle or refino. Protestants will not make offerings on a house altar, but don't object to putting food into the coffin.

During one or two nights, a wake is held, which is an all-male affair. They sit in the room where the coffin is and drink refino, often in large quantities.

On the morning of the day of the funeral, the women of the house use the maize that the visitors have brought to make tamales and put them as an offering on the house altar. Later, they give these tamales to the men who helped carry the coffin and dig the grave, and to the women who helped out in the kitchen. Afterwards, a novena may be held when relatives say prayers for the deceased for nine consecutive days; on the final day, a cross is carried to the cemetery and at home women prepare a large quantity of mole for all who have taken part in the pageant and offer a portion on the house altar to the deceased. They serve the mole with chicken or turkey breast to the compadres of the cross.

For four years, relatives commemorate the deceased on the anniversary of his or her death by putting tamales, coffee, soft drinks, and refino on the house altar.\footnote{The food on the altar for deceased children is the same as that for adults except that it is less spicy and does not include refino.}
Food exchanges in the annual ritual cycle

Each village celebration tends to have its own type of food: on different occasions people eat either fish, *tixmole* with beef, bean *tamales* or *mole* and *tamales* of pork, turkey, or chicken; *tamales* and *mole* are the most common dishes. In the days before the celebration, the whole village is busy preparing these customary dishes and receiving guests. Men are collecting firewood and plants and flowers for decoration, and women fetch extra water and do the shopping. Commerce is thriving as some stock farmers slaughter cattle or pigs or poultry. Some people go fishing in the river, but many buy the fish from door-to-door peddlers. The day before the actual celebration, big meals are prepared for the returning migrants and other guests who have arrived while the women of the house start sending food to fellow villagers. If they or one of their household members have a special role during the celebrations, they will probably feed ritual specialists or performers, or others will feed their husbands or sons.

Ritual specialists and performers

A separate category of people to whom food is given individually are the specialists in charge of or working for the organization of the calendar rituals (in particular the feast of Santiago, San Miguel, and Christmas) in the village and those who perform the dances that accompany these rituals. On those occasions the household of a *mayordomo* provides meals to the fiscals, dancers, musicians, decorators, and others who help out. The households of the village dancers also take turns to feed the dance troupe once or twice.

The house of the *mayordomo* of the village patron for Santiago has by far the greatest bustle. Several days before the feast, the women of his household, often assisted by their sisters (in-law) or other female relatives, have to feed the two decorators who come from Concepción for the four days when they make the colourful *ceras* and beeswax candles. The decorators eat *tortillas* with beans or eggs, and at least once *tortillas* with meat. This is prepared a week before the *fiesta* starts when food is offered on the altar of Santiago. The women also serve coffee with bread to the men who come to decorate the front-door of the *mayordomo’s* house and Santiago’s altar. On the 25th of July when the *fiesta* starts, they prepare a meal (a plate of beef *tixmole*) in the front room of the house for the fiscals and other church assistants and the dancers who come to perform in front of the house. During the processions to the house of the *mayordomo* on 16 July and again when the *nicho* of Santiago is being moved to the church on 25 July, the women serve coffee or *atole* and sometimes sweet bread to all participants and a glass of *refino* to the fiscals and the dancers. At the end of the *fiesta* a new *mayordomo* agrees to take over the office, and he offers the *fiscales* a glass of *refino*. A week later when he officially begins his duties, his wife feeds the fiscals and dancers with *tortillas* and beans or *gorditos* or *tamales pinto* and hands out *atole* drinks to the participants in the procession.
The women of the household of the *mayordomo* of San Miguel have a similar task. On 29 September they feed fiscals and dancers and distribute *atole* or coffee and sweet bread to all participants. The new *mayordomo* also offers a glass of *refino* to the fiscals as a sign that he accepts his appointment. When the *nicho* of San Miguel is carried to his house on the 9th of October, the women of his household feed the fiscals and dancers and serve all participants coffee or *atole* and bread.

The women of the households assigned to act as the Christmas *posadas* between 16 and 24 December also serve coffee or *atole* to the people that take part in the procession when it stops at their homes. On Christmas Eve, the women of the *mayordomo’s* house prepare pork *tixmole* for the fiscals and their assistants and give them coffee and bread when they come decorate the house and the altar. On the 6th of January the Infant Jesus is carried back from the church to the *mayordomo’s* house, and the fiscals receive again a dish of *tixmole* of pork.

As the dancers of the *Santiagueros*, the *Migueles*, and the *Voladores* frequently give performances during village rituals, their mothers or wives often have to feed the dance troupe. When other troupes from outside the village come to take part in the *fiesta*, these women will also take care of their meals. The dancers will again be offered a meal of beans or eggs with *tortillas* when they come to dance in front of the house of those who have invited them so that their homes will be blessed.

Unlike the food offered to relatives and *compadres*, the meals given to the specialists and performers are part of a direct exchange because they receive them in return for carrying out their ritual tasks. The food is a gift to individuals and does not include their households.

**Fish during Semana Santa**

The Holy Week stands out because of the absence of meat in the dishes as the Catholic rules proscribe it for specific days during the period of Lent. On all Fridays until Easter meat is taboo – not too heavy a burden for villagers who rarely eat meat anyway. The Protestants follow the same dietary pattern because they consider it to be part of local custom. On Thursday and Friday during the Holy Week, women make the customary *tortas* of shrimp, *gasparo* or eggs; or cook freshwater fish from the river. On Saturday evening (*Sabado de Gloria*), Jesus’ resurrection from the grave is celebrated at home with *tamales*, mole, *tixmole*, *misiote* – or in lean years *enchiladas*. On a small scale, women bring food to their parents, parents-in-law, and sometimes a close *comadre*, enough to feed the house-

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18 Although there is considerable local variation, the general Roman Catholic rules are as follows. Fasting and a taboo on meat used to exist during the whole fasting period, forty days before Easter. Presently the general rule is that abstinence of meat is to be observed by all Catholics 14 years and older on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent. Fasting (which means not more than one full and two smaller meals) and meat abstinence is to be observed on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and preferably also Holy Saturday. On Ash Wednesday the period of penance starts when people go to church and receive a marking on their forehead with ashes from the burned palm leaves of Palm Sunday. In addition to fasting the penitents should give alms and say prayers (preferably by going to Mass daily).
hold or even its visitors. There are no strict rules as to what kind of food should be made for the Saturday evening meal or to whom food should be given. Beef is conspicuously absent from the dishes and women use chicken, turkey, or pork though they do not offer food on the house altar.

Feeding migrants and non-villagers at the village fiesta

The fiesta de Santiago on the 25th and 26th of July is the most conspicuous event of the year when many migrants return to the village and many visitors arrive to take part in the bustle. The village feast used to be the occasion to feed non-villagers, but nowadays invariably includes the many Nanacatecos who live elsewhere. It is not only the village feast that brings people, but also the weddings, baptisms, and first communion celebrations that villagers prefer to organize during these days. Households, many of whom have put up their returning relatives and fed visitors from outside the village, are busy preparing food for them and all the people from neighbouring villages with whom they have an exchange relationship. This means that those with large networks and many migrant relatives are extremely busy. Remarkably enough, no food is placed on the house altar, because the customary food for the fiesta is taboo in offerings.

Tamales that last for several days, have already been made on the 23rd and 24th of July for when the guests arrive, and are given to parents, parents-in-law, and close comadres. On the 25th most women make tixmole, preferably with beef, but others cook mole with chicken or pork. These days there are no fixed meal times, and visitors are served when they arrive, and often leave again shortly afterwards.

In 1994 Irene’s brother from Huauchinango came to stay with his wife and children for a couple of days. They became the new godparents for the First Communion of one of their nieces on 25 July. They also agreed to take Pedro’s and Irene’s eldest son Silvino into board next September when he will go to technical school in Huauchinango. This year Irene has more visitors than usual from Concepción, Hueytalaín, and San Martín, because in the preceding months Pedro has been installing electricity. Those who were kind enough to feed him have been invited for a meal during the feast. A few days before, on the 23rd, Irene prepared some 80 tamales some of which she brings to her father, her parents-in-law, and to Lupe who is her closest friend and comadre. When her relatives arrive, she serves them tamales, and on the 25th she makes them and the others guests tixmole with tortillas.

That same year, a few houses further down the road, Lupe and her maid Caro made a bucket full of tamales – part of which she sent to Irene in return for the ones she received from her – and beef tixmole because as usual she will have some relatives of her husband Elios coming to stay. His sister Sylvia already came over from Mexico City a week before the feast to drop off her son who will stay in Nanacatlan during his holiday. His other sister Venus and her husband have also come from Zaxapoaxtla to join the fiesta. Elios’s other siblings usually come and visit him at Christmas. As he is from a family
with many relatives living throughout the Sierra, there are always some (second) cousins who drop by during the fiesta and join the meal. Other guests who come during these days are several of his fellow members of the committee that prepares the presidential elections and they are served pork chops and tortillas. Normally, Lupe’s mother and occasionally her brother and his family would come as well, but not this year as Elios and Lupe will visit them in San Luis Potosi in August.

Magdalena has to feed quite a number of people, even though she has no overnight guests, and she prepares tixmole and a huge pile of tortillas. Her sons are members of the Santiagueros and she feeds the dancers at least once. Many compadres and patients of Lorenzo drop in and on the first and most crowded day of the feast she feeds about fifteen people from Tuxtla, Zitlala, Hueytalpan, San Martín, and Concepción. A nephew from Puebla – where Magdalena’s brothers live – also pays a visit.

As Jehovah Witnesses, Florencia and Leobardo have a more modest approach. Florencia cooks tixmole and invites me to come and eat. She also feeds her brother-in-law Alibert and his daughter, who stay with them during the feast, as well as her widowed father and father-in-law. They do not stop their children going around the village and enjoying themselves. Later on Leobardo and Alibert visit one of the shops, to get tanked-up with other villagers.

As nearly all other households are in similar situations as those of Irene, Lupe, and Magdalena – though in Florencia’s case, not always with the same quantity of people – the village population has nearly doubled for a couple of days. In most houses there will be some people passing by to eat or drink and go back again to watch the dances and basketball games or just stroll through the village.

Todos Santos: honouring the ancianos
As we have seen, commemorating the dead and preparing special dishes at Todos Santos takes place on three consecutive days from 31 October till 2 November, and again on 8 November. The first day, the day in which the dead children are honoured, women make tamales with beans. On 1 November (the day of the deceased next-of-kin of the family); they prepare tamales and tortillas with turkey, chicken or pork; and on 2 November (the days of all adults who have died at home) the dishes consist of mole with turkey, chicken or pork, and tortillas. The same dish is also made on the final day of Todos Santos, the 8th of November, when all adults who have died outside their homes and those who have died because of an accident are commemorated. On all these occasions, beef is taboo just as all meat and hot chillies are taboo on the day of the deceased children.

The members of the family eat these meals together with relatives who have come over for the occasion and sometimes with their compadres whom they have

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19 Some households commemorate these ancianos on the day of San Andrés (30 November).
invited. The mother or father of the household places part of the food on the house altar for the dead; he or she calls the deceased relatives by their names and asks them to come and share the meal. On the third day, they extend their invitation to all dead souls.

After these three days which are mainly an intra-household affair, the 3rd and 8th of November are days of food exchange between households: women take the mole from the altar and bring it to their comadres, relatives, neighbours, and friends who live in the village; again, sufficient to feed the household. These exchanges are remarkably direct, immediate, and balanced: what is given is at the very same moment returned with an equivalent food gift, to be carried home in the same pot or bowl she used herself to bring the food.

When a comadre comes to bring the food, she is always invited to come in before she returns. Women in well-to-do families, who often have a large number of comadres, have to cook a lot of mole and will be busy receiving numerous visitors who come to bring theirs. They end up with many portions of mole that their household and its visitors have to consume because they may not use what they have received for redistribution.

The Christmas processions
The nine households that act as stations or posadas during the nine evenings before Christmas have to feed the fiscales during the day the procession will come to their house. They put up the decorations and hand out atole to the participants in the procession that accompanies the nicho with the Infant Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. When the crowd arrives at their door, many children and male teenagers join to get their share of the atole and the sweet bread and donuts that some households are now giving out. In 1997, the children had an additional treat when the fiscales organised a piñata after the main procession.

For all other households, Christmas is an increasingly family affair which is held at home, if at all. On the 24th of December they have relatives, compadres, and friends over for a common supper of tamales while some also serve mole or tixmole on the 25th. When visitors stay longer, they might also be served tamales de frijol or tamales pintos on the 26th.

A week later on New Year’s Eve, people prepare tamales and drink atole, rum or beer; in the Catholic church chocolate atole is served at midnight. If they have visitors staying over for the New Year’s celebrations, women may also cook a festive dinner, part of which will be sent to parents, parents-in-laws, or other close relations.

20 Although there doesn’t seem to be a general rule on what amount of food has to be put on the altar, some people say that preferably there should be an odd number of dishes.
21 Food is not sent to all comadres and relatives, but it will at least be brought to the baptism and wedding comadres and to parents and parents-in-law and those siblings, relatives, and comadres with whom the woman has a close bond.
22 As the godparents of their own children tend to live elsewhere in the Sierra or in the cities, they don’t exchange food except when these compadres are visiting Nanacatlán during Todos Santos.
State celebrations and meetings

What goes for community and religious celebrations also goes for occasions in which the state, or its local incorporation—the village authorities, is involved. No gathering happens without some kind of customary food. Whenever official visitors come for a meeting, the authorities have to provide food and drinks. In practice, this means that the wives of the men who are members of the civil committees and the female committee members are asked to make tortillas and mole with chicken; or when the mayor considers it to be a special occasion, even with turkey. While the work is ‘donated’ by the women who prepare the food, the village pays for the costs of the ingredients; these meals tend to use a large part of the village budget.

Once every three years food is served to all villagers when a new mayor takes office and the outgoing mayor has to organise a festive meal for all the villagers. It is said to symbolise the community as a collectivity under the aegis of the mayor and his wife. It is not a gift from the retiring mayor as the costs are borne by the village, and his wife has to organise and prepare the meal.

In 1996 after the years of political tension, the wife of the outgoing mayor was unwilling to do her share, and the new mayor had a bull slaughtered and his wife and sister organise a huge meal of beef mole\(^{24}\) with piles of tortillas for everyone. This proved to be a clever move, because all villagers came to join the meal, even his fiercest opponents from the oppositional PRD. They denied that they came to celebrate their competitor’s victory but stated that they just wanted to have their share in what was being paid from the village budget.

Schools are the other community-related reason for cooking or donating food. Teachers ask mothers to donate some food for the Christmas party on the last school day before the holiday. On 6 January the municipality offers food and sweets to all schoolchildren, prepared by the women and the wives of the men of each school committee. Though it is Twelfthnight, the meal is more a treat for the children than a religious celebration. In 1998, each child received 3 portions of the typical Mexican tacos: six factory-made tortillas (bought in Zapotitlán) with meat, onion, coriander and salsa, and also a glass of soft drink.

When reciprocity ends

So far, I have discussed occasions at which food exchange initiates (as in the case of new compadres) or reinforces (as in ritual meals being given to others) social ties between villagers and between villagers and outsiders such as migrants and relatives and friends living elsewhere. There are also cases in which the circulation

\(^{23}\) When village funds are low, the mayor may use the loudspeaker to ask women in the village to bring a few tortillas.

\(^{24}\) This is quite exceptional because as explained, mole is hardly ever made with beef.
of food deliberately comes to a halt – implying that at least one of the parties involved wants to cut a previously existing tie. These cases fall into the category of ‘negative reciprocity’ as when a gift is not made, the material flow is not balanced by a return gift, or when the balance is upset by someone refusing to receive a gift. These cases involve a breach of the three crucial obligations (to give, receive, and return a gift) that Mauss (1970) distinguishes as the stages of reciprocity. Though Nanacatecos regard theft as a serious offence, they take it more personally when the flow of food exchanges is disrupted on purpose. Not giving or refusing food when it is considered a customary obligation is a grave neglect or insult. This may happen as a result of personal quarrels or local feuds causing a breakdown of social relations. Because it is women who entertain social ties through food exchanges, in the last resort their actions in such a situation decide whether relations are indeed severed or not. During the political turmoil between 1992 and 1996, tensions between parties and factions caused serious trouble between relatives, neighbours, and friends. Some women added fuel to the fire by halting food exchanges with political opponents, while others tried to make peace or at least not aggravate the situation by adding insult to injury.

Sebastian, Pedro’s brother-in-law, had always worked for Elios and rented a milpa from him. It was thus a matter of course to ask Elios to become his compadre when his children were born. Sebastian remained a loyal client of Elios until 1992 when political conflicts between the local factions of PRI and PRD erupted. Unlike his close relatives, he became a PRD activist and joined the most outspoken criticisers of Elios, who was mayor at the time. Elios reacted by not employing him anymore and Sebastian had to turn to another patron, found in the person of don Felipe.

Tomasa, Sebastian’s wife and Pedro’s sister, was carried away by all this and for a while stopped sending food to her comadre Lupe (Elios’s wife). However, she kept exchanging food with her brother Pedro and her sister-in-law Irene, even though Pedro was very active in the PRI and a staunch supporter of Elios who was also his compadre. The two men were hardly on speaking terms when the conflict was at its height, but though both Tomasa and Irene stood by their husbands, they continued sending food to each other “to not make things worse”.

Things went sour between Sebastian and his father, who had always remained a loyal PRI supporter. He fell out with his son after he had become a political opponent, to the point where relations seemed totally disrupted. One day when Tomasa had sent her daughter with food to Sebastian’s father, his wife (stepmother of Sebastian) locked the door of the house and pretended not to be at home. Tomasa felt greatly insulted and it took months before the break could be healed. In the end, it did – as did their relationship with Elios and Lupe.

25 Sahlins uses the term to denote attempts when people try to get something for nothing with impunity: the unsociable extreme or the most impersonal sort of exchange involving theft, chicanery, gambling, barter, or haggling (1974:195).
It need not be political frictions that upset food exchanges. Feuds which follow from family quarrels such as inheritance disputes can also cause severe tensions and may lead to a split. Women may either try to settle or worsen such conflicts; they tend to make their own decisions in that regard. If she wants to aggravate the situation, though her husband wants to keep the peace, she may continue sending food to the other party but restrict both its quality and quantity to an absolute minimum. The message will be clear enough. As a last resort, she may decide not to send food anymore to show her discontent and not receive food sent to her, the latter being an even greater insult. In that respect, there is a clear parallel between what may happen within the household and what may happen between households: refusing food is a sign to break off social relations.

Characteristics of the food exchanges

I now turn to the social and symbolic dimensions of the exchanges. In Nanacatlán exchanging food is the medium through which social networks are created, maintained, and reinforced (as well as broken up when the exchange is deliberately brought to a halt). At the same time, the type of food exchanged is bounded by cultural rules and taboos. In the next sections, I want to point out how food exchanges constitute a coherent system that is crucial in the construction of community. To do so, I first analyse who is involved in exchanging food at the occasions presented above, then how this is done, and finally what the types of food exchanged say about the symbolic domain of food and local belonging.

The gendered nature of exchange

As we saw in chapter 3, male and female domains are strictly defined and normatively sanctioned, which is reflected in a clear division of labour between them, "according to custom", as people like to say. The rules about men cultivating crops and women transforming them into food (see chapter 5, also Pollock 1998) are related to ideas of the earth being female allowing only men to make it produce crops. The only time women may enter the milpa is when they bring meals to their husbands – and occasionally to his co-workers. On the other hand, women's own reproductive capacities are associated with the male moon. As the husband brings in the food and the wife bears children, both are complementary in the sense that they are involved in a balanced exchange of maize and children (Govers 1992). The division of village life into male and female domains can also be seen as the way in which women and men are related to culture and nature. The male domain is closer to 'untamed' or 'wild' nature (in agriculture, hunting, taking care of animals outside the village) and to culture (in the religious and civil cargos). Women primarily deal with domestic tasks (garden, animals around the house) and transformations: turning cultivated products into cooked ones, babies into social beings, and outsiders into close relations. Seen from this perspective the woman can be seen as responsi-
This separation of domains clearly visible in the division of labour within the household is extended to the relations between households and the exchange patterns within the community. Exchanges between men as members of the community include communal labour, the organization of rituals, faena, and politics through the system of cargos civiles and cargos religiosos. When men act on behalf of their household, the exchanges they are involved in concern the extension of kin ties (e.g., betrothal – tacahuele – and marriage), of ritual kin ties (compadrazgo) and of relations with the supernatural world (prayers, offerings, and decorations). Here again, female roles are complementary in that the male exchanges are invariably accompanied by exchanges of food prepared and distributed by women. The reproduction of social relations therefore requires the involvement of both men and women, in that men initiate and formalize these relations while women mediate by embedding them in shared food that acts as the material basis of these relations and keeps the potential dangers of new relations at bay.

The food that women exchange is, like present-day social networks, not confined to the village itself but regularly crosses its boundaries: they invite (migrant) relatives, compadres, and friends from outside Nanacatlán into their homes on ritual occasions but also when they happen to visit the village. Even though the actual exchanges usually take place within the domestic sphere of the house, women play a conspicuously public role in maintaining and strengthening social ties.

When we relate these general issues to the food exchanges discussed above, the complementary nature of gender relations becomes apparent. A cross-tabulation of exchange occasions and the gender of givers and receivers of food (see table 7.1) shows that it is mainly women who initiate the food exchanges as on only two occasions do men act as initiators. A man gives a live turkey and the ingredients for mole to the godfather of his child and to the future father-in-law of his son; his gift is prepared by the godmother and the future mother-in-law and bride. His household receives a portion of this food as a return gift. On all other occasions women

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26 This is interesting in the light of recurrent discussions about women and nature or nurture, also within feminist anthropology, which gave rise the nature-culture debate (see Moore 1988:13-21). The old discussion between Ortner (1974) and McCormack (1980) and Overing (1986:136) became relevant again when women were seen in the 1990s as the ‘natural’ keepers of the endangered environment in ecofeminism, and in the debate on women, environment and development (WED; see Häusler 1993; Luhrmann 1993; Meynen 1993; Van den Hombergh 1993) which has influenced programmes and policies concerning the environment.

27 The discussion of female roles used to focus on whether they were of a domestic or public nature and whether a hierarchical relation exists between the two (with the public as more powerful and male). For the different opinions involved in the ‘domestic-public debate’ see e.g., Friedl (1967), Rogers (1975), Rosaldo (1980). For an overview see Moore (1988, especially 21-41).
Table 7.1. Food exchanges and gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of exchange</th>
<th>Creation of ties</th>
<th>Expression of ties</th>
<th>Food as support</th>
<th>Accessory to other exchanges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generalised</td>
<td>Tacahuele: Father groom to father bride</td>
<td>Tacahuele: mother bride to next of kin and new in-laws bride</td>
<td>Daily meals: wife and mother to husband, children and household members</td>
<td>Renting milpa: wife renter to wife owner land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father child to new compadre</td>
<td>Any ritual: daughter (-in-law) to parents (-in-law)</td>
<td>Old age: daughter (-in-law) to parents (-in-law), and women to favourite next-of-kin</td>
<td>Mutual help: wife patron to workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women in household to the dead</td>
<td>Comadre to new compadres</td>
<td>Any ritual: female to female next-of-kin, comadre to close comadre</td>
<td>Wage labour: wife patron to workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women in household to Patrons and saints</td>
<td>Woman in household to guests at life cycle rituals</td>
<td>Woman in hh to female next-of-kin, comadre to close comadre</td>
<td>After birth: young mother to midwife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Todossantos: female to female next-of-kin, comadre to comadre</td>
<td>Woman in hh to guests at annual rituals</td>
<td>Any ritual: female to female next-of-kin, comadre to close comadre</td>
<td>Rituals: wife mayordomo to cargo holders and ritual specialists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Todos santos: female to female next-of-kin, comadre to close comadre</td>
<td>Woman in hh to guests at religious rituals</td>
<td>Woman in hh to guests at life cycle rituals</td>
<td>Dances: mother/wife of dancer to troupe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Gender in exchanges: between males: underlined; between females: **bold italics**; from female to male: *italics*; from female to female: **bold**; from female to female and male: normal; from male to female: non-existent.
exchange food with other women and men, and women’s gifts may freely pass
gender lines as they give to women, men, or both. Men only give to men.

When we look at it from another angle we can say that men give food when a
new relation of kinship is involved: at baptism, the moment the child receives a
personal name and the father’s family name, and at the tacahuele when a father
gives to the father of his future daughter-in-law. The male food gift thus symbolizes
the incorporation of new kin into their circle. Food exchanges by women are less
innovative as far as kinship is concerned, but more diverse as they cover the
whole network of a household.

Exchanges exclusively between women are the general practice during Todos
Santos. At that time of the year, women prepare several dishes which they put on
the altar for the ancestors and the other members of the family who have died.
Although at first sight, Todos Santos is a ritual performed within the household
(and on the graves of the village cemetery), the food is shared among the house­
hold’s network. The day after it has been put on the altar, the women bring this food
which has passed through a stage of ‘semi-sacralization’, to their comadres. It is
always the mother of the godchild who goes to the house of her comadre to bring
her food and receive the same kind of food in return; it is a direct and balanced
form of reciprocity. The Todos Santos exchange clearly involves households and
kin groups that are engaged in numerous other exchanges as well. The closest
bonds exist where women exchange sacral food for sacral food as it expresses ritual
kin ties that extend to the ancestors. Therefore it produces an incorporation of outs­
siders as kin within the household, this time performed by women.

Types of reciprocity in food exchanges

If we now turn away from the people involved in exchanges towards the nature of
the reciprocity in the exchange, we can draw a number of concentric circles (see
figure 7.3) in which the inner-most circle encloses people closely related and
among whom we find basically forms of generalized exchange, while the outer
circles cover more and more distant relations where balanced exchanges predomi­
nate. The inner circle begins at home with the household members, including the
deceased relatives and the sacred beings venerated at the house altar: God, the
Patrons, and Saints. From there it moves to the circle of the next-of-kin (siblings
and married children with their parents-in-law) and the closest ritual kin (compa­
dres and comadres with the members of their households). The only exception to
generalized exchange within the inner circle is the food given and returned at Todos
Santos: this is a direct exchange of equivalent gifts. But the very fact that this

28 A child also receives as second name the family name of the mother, but the father’s family name
is the one commonly used and is passed on to the next generation, so that patronymy is the actual
practice.

29 Outside kinship, women do initiate new social ties with friends or colleagues who become part of
her exchange network.
involves sacral food that has come through the ancestors means that the receiver has to make a similar gesture in returning the gift with food that has been blessed by her ancestors. In the next circle we find remote kin and distant compadres, neighbours, friends, village and school authorities, and other villagers; whereas the outer circle is for relatives and compadres of the people in the previous two circles, as well as of regional acquaintances and authorities (such as from neighbouring villages and the municipality) and colleagues or urban relations. Notwithstanding their semi-permanent absence from the village, most migrant relatives have remained within the inner circle of people with whom one has a form of general-
ized reciprocity, partly as a consequence of their frequent returns to Nanacatlán and partly because many of them have become the new compadres of the relatives as they provide a convenient foothold in the city for villagers and their children.\footnote{As explained in chapter 3, the inclusion of migrants and people from outside the village (like teachers) has caused a shift of local social networks from primarily being close-knit (‘encapsulated’) to become ‘integrated’, consisting of people who are members of different clusters but who know each other and meet (Hannerz 1980: 250). In terms of Woolcock (2001), present-day compadrazgo has moved from local patrons as favourite godfathers for villagers (‘bridging social capital’) towards urban relatives who can provide ‘bonding social capital’ as well as ‘linking social capital’. Social ties may have become weaker than in the past, but as Granovetter (1973, 1983) explained, weak ties can be an effective way of securing access to resources in modern society.}

The different types of food exchange in Nanacatlán also fulfil a number of different functions: to establish new ties, an expression of existing ties, accessory to other exchanges, and as support and care for those who need it.

New ties are created through marriage (tacahuele) and ritual kinship (compadrazgo). They create strong ties between the persons and the households involved, based on generalized exchange, and provide indirect and sometimes useful, access to people in the networks of the two parties.

Food is the most appropriate medium to maintain and regularly reaffirm existing ties as it keeps the stream of all kinds of exchanges going. The gifts to parents and parents-in-law and compadres as well as the offerings to the dead and to Patrons, Saints, and God, are based on generalized reciprocity. In other cases such as during life cycle ceremonies and calendar and community rituals, relations are reaffirmed through balanced exchanges: migrants and other guests, who have come over and are fed, are supposed to return the favour when Nanacatecos visit them at their place.

Food is also exchanged between people who feel more distantly related; not as part of a continuous cycle of reciprocity, but as part of other exchanges. Such accessory food gifts can be of a more personal character. This is for instance, the case when food is given to the wife of the owner of a milpa that the household has rented, when the wife of an employer provides a meal to the wage labourers, when a young mother gives a present to the midwife who helped her deliver the baby, as well as gifts by a mayordomo to the ritual specialists, by parents and wives to dancers, or by political leaders to the electorate. Accessory gifts between more closely related people occur during mano vuelta when men or women come to help each other. No return gift is expected in these cases.

Finally, food may be disinterestedly given as a form of support or care when someone is in childbirth or ill and incapable of preparing a meal, and during funerals when people come out to help the bereaved family. A return gift is not expected and may in fact never be given by the receiver; as such, support gifts are also of a generalized nature.

\textit{Hot-cold: what to give and what not}

As we have seen above, there are specific rules about what should be exchanged at
what occasions, and what types of food are taboo. If we look closer at these prescriptions and proscriptions and analyse the occasions at which they are in force, a structure of food classification emerges that underlies these rules and norms. To simplify matters I look at meat, the most important ingredient of the exchange dishes.

Let us turn to the most salient examples and paradoxes. On many occasions, particularly at the end of Semana Santa at Easter Eve, tamales and mole are the favoured dishes that women exchange; they should be made with turkey, chicken, or pork – except for the commemoration of deceased children on the first day of Todos Santos when it should be tamales with beans. When in childbed, a woman is not allowed to eat turkey, pork, and black beans, but may eat chicken and beef. Beef is prohibited when the maize is sown on the milpa and when food is offered at the house altar. It is however, eaten on a large scale during the village patron feast when it is served to visitors from outside Nanacatlán; on the other hand, on the same occasion, exchanges between comadres and the food prepared for the guests that stay overnight contain no beef, but tamales. Beef is allowed when one is in childbed and during the village fiesta but at all other rituals it is proscribed. Black beans are to be avoided in childbed, but should be part of the tamales on the day of the dead children.

To explain these paradoxes we need to understand the system by which food is classified. In Nanacatlán, as in most of Latin America, a major way of classifying food is through the categories of hot and cold (see table 7.2).

Turkey, chicken, and pork are generally considered cold food, and as these types are often prescribed in ritual exchanges, at those occasions apparently hot food should be avoided and cold food is the norm. Cold food should be eaten when the body is hot, and that would lead one to conclude that during rituals bodies are hot indeed. This corresponds to the rule that a woman in childbed, whose body is cold, should eat hot food such as beef or a lean chicken.31

More difficult to understand is why beef as a hot food type is served to visitors at the village fiesta but is allowed neither in the offerings on the house altar nor in the meals to be eaten at the milpa. How to understand this taboo on beef during religious rituals? For this we turn to Mary Douglas’s famous work *Purity and Danger* (1966) in which she shows how taboos are related to ideas about purity and pollution. In her view something is seen as polluted when we do not know how to handle it; when it does not fit into our system of ideas on society and cosmology. People tend to have fairly consistent taxonomies and anything that does not fit into such a taxonomy is labelled as “impure” and dangerous and can therefore best be avoided. So how is it that beef does not fit into the existing categories of Nanacateco classification? The history of Mexican food might serve as a source of

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31 This seems to be at odds with the classification of chicken as cold food. This goes indeed for big and fat chickens but a young, lean chicken is classified as hot.
Table 7.2: Hot-cold classification of food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Hot' food</th>
<th>'Cold' food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maize (T. kuxi)</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tortillas</td>
<td>Young turkey (totole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>Porc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>Fat chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game: armadillo, opossum, paca</td>
<td>Armadillo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat, Lamb</td>
<td>Fish: Acamaya (transparent river shrimp), cosol, maxaxaca, sardines (river fish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egg</td>
<td>Fowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>Green tomatoes (tomates de cascara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried flea-chilli (chiltepin)</td>
<td>Green and red chilli (chile verde, rojo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried and smoked Jalapeños (chilpotles)</td>
<td>Mafafa, mafafa morada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh and dried chile de arbol</td>
<td>Quelites, Quiltonil, quintonii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black nightshade</td>
<td>Black nightshade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans (frijol, T. stapu):</td>
<td>Frijol negro, (T. laktustapu), black beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frijol bayo/blanco (T. xuyumit)</td>
<td>Squash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frijol colorado (T. makia)</td>
<td>Chayote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frijol cuerno (T. lukustapu), cowpea</td>
<td>Cabbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frijol gordo (T. klankastapu), runner bean</td>
<td>Mole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frijol grande (T. xoyema)</td>
<td>Tixmole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purslane, little hogweed</td>
<td>Chilmole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atole (sweet and sour)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sopa (prepared with oil, not lard)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All fruit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explanation: beef does not belong to the original Mesoamerican diet, but is part of the imported food as cattle were introduced from abroad only after the Spanish Conquest. Chicken and pigs, however, were also unknown in pre-Columbian Mexico and are not part of a general system of taboos. My hypothesis is that chicken fitted more readily into the existing classifications, as these could be subsumed under the familiar category of poultry because of their similarity to turkey. This

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32 Hot food can usually always be eaten, while cold food is taboo when sick and/or using medicine. Items with * are taboo for women in childbed; when underlined they appear in both categories (when informants differ), but less mentioned here.

33 Elephants ear. Wild: capote. (T. paxnica, pisis); Cultivated (also in wild): purple stem taro, T. lok).

34 Overlapping categories of wild and cultivated plants. Especially the wild prince’s feather (red amaranth), available the whole year.

35 Frijol bayo, pinto, and negro are recognised varieties of the frijol gordo.
could explain why the bigger, fatter chickens are ‘cold’ like turkey, and the smaller, leaner ones are ‘hot’, like wild birds.

Cattle and pigs pose a problem within Nanacateco classification but why is beef ‘hot’ and pork ‘cold’? Pigs, turkey, and chicken are all kept around the house and taken care of by women. They also eat maize, the sacred staple food. Cattle are kept outside the village, are tended by men, and do not eat maize in contrast to the other domesticated animals just mentioned. So the foreign origin of cattle is reinforced by their particular spatial and metabolic characteristics. They are definitely not wild, but they are also not part of the female domain like other domesticated animals. They can be said for Nanacatlán to be ‘betwixt and between’, an awkward, not easily classifiable type of animal. In the case of women in childbed, to eat beef therefore symbolises her seclusion (even from her own domain). The village feast is not so much an exchange between villagers, but between Nanacatecos and people from outside the village and beef is thus served to people who do not live in the village. To use beef as a token of seclusion or of relating to outsiders would be contradictory in food exchanges meant to express closeness and maintain and create intimate bonds and so becomes taboo. It comes as no surprise that the activities at which eating beef is under the strictest taboo are when an offering is made on the house altar and while sowing maize. There is a tension though, in the correlation of beef and outsiders, because in the past the village feast was the preeminent occasion to invite less well-known outsiders, especially from neighbouring villages. Nowadays this is extended to well-known outsiders who double as co-villagers: migrant Nanacatecos. They are not complete outsiders, but also not living in the village, and one could say they are as ‘betwixt and between’ as the beef they are served. But while they have this awkward position as villagers, they remain next-of-kin and compadres in personal relations and are therefore also part of the more intimate food exchanges.

The exchange taboos and reversions suggest that not only individuals but relations can be ‘hot’ or ‘cold’. Relations with supernatural beings, patrons, and the dead, as well as with close relatives, comadres, and compadres and friends are considered as ‘hot’ and this means cold food is necessary. Other relations are ‘cold’ and need ‘hot’ food, including a mother of a newborn baby until they are (again) incorporated into the community. The village feast relates villagers to neighbouring villagers, and they are received at home and given food. There food falls under the same category as for sick people whose souls have left the body. Food exchanges are thus mostly but not always a meeting of souls. It seems that relations within the household are generally neither ‘hot’ nor ‘cold’, because daily food is free from the hot-cold taboos and prescriptions.

Obviously, there is a strong correlation between the types of social relations and the symbolic meaning of food to create and maintain such relations. As such, food used in exchanges has become a marker of how the giver perceives her relationship with the receiver. At the same time, the symbolic analysis of Nanacateco food classification sheds light on a common framework of perceiving the social, natural,
and supernatural and even though villagers are often not consciously aware of the symbolism involved in exchanges, they share a practical knowledge of how to act in different social and ritual settings.

Conclusions

In the previous chapter I discussed the increase in rituals in number, frequency, scale and participants, and argued that this is closely linked to the overall transformation of village life: the accelerated opening-up to the outside world, a differentiation of income sources, considerable long- and short-term migration, and a changing system of social stratification – in short, processes that made life in the end of the twentieth century dramatically different from thirty or forty years before. Instead of the expected breakdown of the community as community relations were under strain, we saw that villagers and migrants apparently found it in their interest to maintain expressions of communality as far as possible. Many migrants keep a foothold in the village not only socially but economically – a step that they could make as the introduction of coffee enabled them to more or less successfully combine urban labour with seasonal work in agriculture. The growing interest in the community is reflected in an expanded ritual life: old-time rituals on the decline in the 1960s and 1970s have been recreated, new rituals or ritual performances have been added to the repertoire, and exchanges have become more elaborate.

Rituals underline sociability and communality and also present social relations and social networks in action. As sociability is based on reciprocity and exchanges, the most visible expression is through the medium commonly used to symbolize and constitute social proximity, viz. through the sharing of food. This is the case within the household in Nanacatlán, where women are responsible for the production of the daily meals, particularly the crucial tortillas. Ideally, her role as food producer is complementary to that of her husband who is in charge of growing the maize and other food crops. Their responsibilities are ideologically and spatially strictly separated: the men in the milpa and the woman in the house – in that respect gender roles are unyielding and transgressions are extremely frowned upon even in exceptional circumstances. Even so, or rather for that very reason, the bond between husband and wife is seen as an exchange relationship in which both are simultaneously giver and receiver.

This intra-household model of exchange can be extrapolated to inter-household networks of exchange. At the start of a household, a couple brings their own networks of kin and friends but in the course of time enter into a widening range of new relations: compadres, new affines, neighbours, friends, and colleagues. To be viable, this circle of belonging and mutual trust needs to be maintained by a continuous flow of exchanges. What better way of expressing reciprocity and mutuality than through the giving and sharing of food, the symbol par excellence of potential harm warded off in a setting of trust. Here again, while men tend to represent the household outwardly, women take care of preparing and distributing
food and in doing so recreate and reaffirm social bonds. Given the increased frequency of rituals, and therefore food exchanges, women's role in maintaining the network of the household has gained in importance.

Reciprocity in food exchanges is most generalized among next-of-kin and the cherished comadres among whom exchange does not require an immediate and equivalent return gift. They also receive the food that has become sacred after it has been offered to the family's ancestors on the house altar – implying that by sharing in this food, the receiving party becomes part of the household, and vice versa, because it is immediately balanced by a similar return gift. In all other cases, exchanges are balanced and more profane. What is essential is that they strengthen alliances between households and do not serve as a redistribution of wealth, though they can be strategic (see also Monaghan 1990, 1996).

Food exchange is more than just the material expression of common bonds; in the ways it is classified as appropriate (or not) for the occasion, it embodies a worldview shared among Nanacatecos. Under normal conditions, there should be a balance between hot and cold in the body – if that is not the case, the spirit soul (listakna) may leave the body and cause sickness. Inside the household, the woman has to see to it that this balance is maintained or restored. A similar precarious role is played by the women in food exchanges in that they have to carefully follow the local rules that say what kind of food should be given or avoided at specific ritual occasions. 'Hot' food such as beef is given to more distant relations and to express seclusion (for a woman in childbed), while 'cold' food is part of the more intimate and sacred exchanges where 'hot' food is taboo. In that way, the common ideational system is reproduced in the food given to others.  

At a more mundane level, village food has acquired symbolic value: homemade meals have become a symbol of the good village life they have left behind since migrants have moved to urban environments where they have to buy their food, including tortillas, and where they have become part of the large-scale industrialised food chain. Nanacatecos have increasingly become aware of the value and tastiness of their meals. Local food (as opposed to the ingredients people buy in urban shops) has become a source of pride and an emblem of belonging to the village.

Since urban migration has soared and social relations have crossed village and regional boundaries, social networks have changed. Unlike the small but tight net-

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36 Obviously, in Protestant circles the symbolic dimension of ritual food tends to deviate from the customary Nanacateco worldview that sees ritual meals as being sacralized. As they don't have a house altar to offer food to God (as the Patron of the maize) or to dead souls, the meals they prepare and exchange may be the same as among Catholic villagers, though they lack spiritual and symbolic power. Nevertheless, from the fact that with only a few exceptions they follow the common rules and taboos, one may conclude that Protestants are aware of and endorse the importance of food exchanges in safeguarding communality. Likewise, they share many other elements of the local worldview (the ways in which Patrons have to be treated, sickness is explained and cured, stories about the village past are recounted, and brujos and Hojs-Kaxi constitute a dangerous threat) and therefore are still part of the community.
works of relatives and *compadres* based on generalized reciprocity, present-day networks often include a much wider circle of people. Ties between them are weaker, but as they cover a wider range, they have become much more useful as migrant relatives – who are increasingly invited to become *compadres* – provide access to new resources. As relations with them tend to be more instrumental, exchanges are based upon balanced reciprocity. It is precisely the increase of those ties that has linked migrants more closely to the village – which in turn, has been a major cause in the ritual upswing in Nanacatlán. One may conclude that balanced exchanges have become crucial in the creation and continuation of the community as the focus of a spatial, ritual, and social network of Nanacatecos.