

Flowers for a Price¹

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Why the Valley of Naben Chauk Is Flooded²

Old Mol Xun was sitting in the sun, picking the hard kernels off a pile of corncobs that lay on a plastic sheet by his front door, and pitching the seed corn into a large basket. He told the following story about the origins of the village.

Long ago, when people had not yet come to live in Naben Chauk, "The Lake of Thunder," tall pine trees covered the valley floor. Deer wandered through this forest, and jaguars and monkeys, too; and when the heavy summer rains came, ducks swam on the small lake that formed in the lowest corner of the valley, by the limestone sinkhole.

Then the holy earth decided it should make this place attractive to human beings, and the sinkhole began to run free. The lake receded. The forest became deeper.

Then came the Zinacantecs, first just three families, then their relatives, and in time their children. They cut clearings in the forests on the valley wall to build their houses and to plant their cornfields. Corn, beans, squashes, and melons grew well in the fertile soil; and people gathered firewood, hunted game, and collected fruits and mushrooms in the woods.

The people of Naben Chauk multiplied, and they began to clear more land for their milpas. Distant relatives came from the lowlands and, bargaining with the new settlers, bought land on the flat valley floor to build more houses. The hillsides were left to the pine trees.

Other people went to work as squatters on the nearby ranch at Yaleb Taiv, "Where frost has fallen." The *ladino* owners were greedy for more cornfields, so they sent these squatters down towards the Naben Chauk valley, to clear the forests. They chopped the giant pine trees, and they slashed the grasses and the undergrowth, and they set fire to the cleared land to fertilize the fields they would plant.

The people of Naben Chauk saw the soil and the ashes and the charred wood wash down the mountain sides towards the sinkhole, when the summer rains began again. But they also saw the white corn, and the beans, and the squash that the Yaleb Taiv squatters harvested on the newly cleared land. There were also fruit trees—peaches, plums, and apricots—that people began to plant, by their houses and on the edges of new fields as they, too, cleared more forest. Soon, the fields yielded good harvests of beans and

corn and squash; and the household gardens began to grow abundant peaches, chayotes, and apples.

But the sinkhole began to fill and clog with the silt, with the debris from the cleared fields, with the waste from house compounds. And once again the lake began to grow, filling the flatlands in the center of the valley each summer, rotting the cornfields that were foolishly planted nearby, driving people from their houses which suddenly sprouted springs in the middle of the hearth, or under the bed platform.

What was once a forest became a village and then a small town. The jaguar and deer and wild ducks were hunted, chased away, forgotten, replaced by domestic turkeys and chickens, sheep, and finally by trucks and VW mini-buses. The peach trees grew old, had grafts, sprouted plum blossoms or fell to the axe to make way for newly discovered species. The cornfields were planted with potatoes, with cabbage, with herbs, and, finally, with flowers.

So that was the result: the holy earth wanted its children to settle the valley of Naben Chauk. They came to live. They cleared the forest. They planted their corn, their chayotes, their peaches. And the lake grew and grew, wider and wider, filling the valley, pushing back the houses, seemingly reclaiming from the flat lands what the people chopped from the hills.

Corn, Mules, and Traders

When one thinks of Zinacantecs—perhaps even when they think of themselves—one thinks of corn. Vogt (1970:48) writes: "The Mayas have been maize cultivators par excellence for some 4500 years, and the Zinacantecs are no exception." Anthropologists have, understandably, seen Zinacantec life as revolving around the cultivation and consumption of corn, taken as an ancient and honorable pursuit for human beings. Maize is ubiquitous. Riding up the Pan-American Highway through Zinacantán, in the fertile days of the Fiesta of San Lorenzo in August, can seem like a trip through one long, continuous cornfield, stretching from the valley below Muk'ta Jok' to the edge of Huitepec, near San Cristóbal. Passing the valley of Naben Chauk, one will often lose track of the houses—patches of red tile, amidst oceans of corn leaves. Even the poorest Zinacantec house has a stash of corn; the richest will be stacked to the rafters with it. Two Zinacantecs, meeting for the first time and striking up an acquaintance, are likely to

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ask, politely, "Where is your cornfield?"

Nonetheless, one must not be misled by this conceptual preoccupation with corn. Zinacantecs, since the arrival of the Spanish, have worked more than their own cornfields.

Old Mol Xun himself farmed corn in the valley of Naben Chauk, where his grandmother remembered the deer roaming before men inhabited the place; and he farmed in hot country up and down the Grijalva River valley. The memories from his youth, however, were filled not with the hoe and the digging stick, but with leather, pack saddles, and mules. Unlike his sons—whose dedication to corn has kept them, for most of their lives, in the constant cycle of cultivation, moving only between their highland home in Naben Chauk and a succession of lands rented from lowland non-Indian ranchers, and investing what surplus they had in distinguished careers in Zinacantán's religious hierarchy—Mol Xun was a traveler. His career, both in the service of the saints and the town, was likewise distinguished. He made his living, however, not by growing but by trading, both selling his own goods and hauling those of others. He carried corn and liquor to Chiapa de Corzo from the highlands. He brought coffee and cane from the far reaches of Tzeltal and Chol country up to San Cristóbal. He bought barrels from the Tojolabales, and ventured into the lowland Tzotzil regions of Soyaló and Bochil, buying their pigs and becoming acquainted, in the process, with their talking saints. He matched wits with the famous witches of Totolapa. He once carried the mail to Comitán, and took forty days to accompany his mule train to Tonalá, on the Chiapas coast, with a cargo of highland bootleg.

Mol Xun was a master of the cornfield, as well, and he spent a part of nearly every day up to his last hoeing "inside his fence,"³ somewhere on his ample lands in Naben Chauk, but his career illustrates a pattern in Zinacantec life that predates the reliance on agriculture that settled onto the community after the provisions of Revolution and Land Reform—Chiapas style—made Zinacantecs into the highland's premier "growers of milpa." In the last century, and up to the Revolution, Zinacantec muleteers were the teamsters of central Chiapas, known throughout the highlands as vendors of salt⁴ and as consummate traders. It is only men younger than Mol Xun's son, Petul—now in his seventies—who grew up "without knowing how to load a horse."

By the nineteen-sixties, many people in Naben Chauk made their livings by other than the cultivation of corn. Young men worked for salaries: building roads, mixing concrete for *ladino* masons, guarding construction sites and buildings against thieves, writing texts for Harvard anthropologists, and so on. Somewhat surprisingly, many such people simply farmed *no corn* at all. They had, in their own words, "forgotten about the hoe." If Zinacantec life depended centrally on the cultivation of corn, the existence of such people seemed to suggest the beginning of the end for Zinacantec culture. In the terms of Mol Xun's story, most of these non-farmers were recreating in modern form the activities of their ancestors: trading (now not

salt but flowers), and hauling (no longer with mule teams but now with trucks and minibuses). They had not, though, ceased to be Zinacantecs; indeed, their approach to these activities has an unmistakable Zinacantec stamp.

Now let me describe some of the activities, practiced by Naben Chauk's "flower re-sellers,"⁵ activities that they qualify under the general rubric of *chonolajel* (from the verb *chonolaj-* "practice selling"), known in Zinacantec Spanish as *negocios*, "business." It will begin, however, with Petul—old Mol Xun's son—a man who retreated from his father's trading profession to dedicate himself to the cultivation of corn, but who still practices small-scale trading.

Mi mu xljaj tana, ta jk'elanbe: "If they don't get sold later, I'll give them away."

The Indians who engage largely in corn farming include hosts of casual sellers, Zinacantecs who sell their seasonal produce and home-grown flowers, or who occasionally supplement their incomes by limited re-selling. In the village of Naben Chauk almost every household has someone setting out once or twice a month to try his (or her) hand at selling some fruit, grain, or leaf in a *ladino* market. Petul's household can illustrate the sorts of activities involved.

The simplest venture involves transporting one bag at a time of the household's corn hoard into market to meet current needs for cash. Clearly, those who can keep their corn through the plentiful time after the harvest until the time of highest prices, during the following growing season, will realize the most profits—but demands for hard cash will not always wait. Petul has sold corn in San Cristóbal—his favorite market is the small plaza in San Ramón where he can usually fetch a better price and get home earlier than by selling in the San Cristóbal central market—in January, when prices are low, to pay for curing ceremonies; or in April, when prices have not risen yet as high as they might, in order to fund his own upcoming farming operation or to pay for fertilizer. The procedure is always the same: haul out a sack of corn from the house the previous afternoon to winnow and clean it; remeasure it into a new burlap sack; then hump the load down to the road before dawn the next morning, to load it onto a truck or combi. Arriving in town, one unloads the corn in the selected market place, and pays the freight. There is then a further choice to make: whether to sell the entire load, wholesale as it were, to one of the corn resellers, many of whom are also Zinacantecs, or whether to spend hours in the process of "small-selling," by weight or dry-measure, to individual buyers. The latter process nets more but can require many hours standing in the market waiting for customers and haggling out the price with each one.

Selling to the corn resellers, who often have their agents waiting by the combi stops, has the advantage of getting the whole business over with quickly, and producing all the proceeds in a single wad of bills. The wad is, however, none too fat, for the market price of corn, in terms of its comparative

buying power, has dropped steadily over the past decade. An eighty-kilogram bag of corn that fetched US\$14 in the San Cristóbal market in 1976 (just before the first modern devaluation of the Mexican peso), and that could still be bought for a bit over US\$15, two years later in 1978, would bring only about US\$13 from the corn resellers at the same market in January 1988. In the same span, for example, the cost of bus or truck fare from Naben Chauk to town, converted to its US dollar equivalent, has nearly doubled,⁶ and other prices have followed a similar inflationary curve.

A decade ago, Petul had surplus beans to sell as well, often hauling them, in a similar routine, to Tuxtla. There he also usually sold them in bulk to market shopkeepers for resale. Their markup, in turn, might be thirty percent (in 1976, from Petul's price of US\$0.36 per kilo to the Tuxtla vendor's selling price of US\$0.48). In 1988, Petul's farming operation had changed, and he had beans only to eat, not to sell. The price of beans had risen somewhat, but was still reputed to be ridiculously low.⁷ In January of that year, Zinacantecs could be seen on the streets of San Cristóbal walking door to door hawking them.

Corn and beans are the staple foods in Petul's house compound, and they are also his staple commodities in commerce. But from time to time his commercial ventures include flowers, fruits, and sometimes other plants from the neighboring forests. Indeed, as real income from corn diminishes it becomes increasingly necessary for Petul to try other means for bringing cash into the household. In the mid and early 1970s, Petul's family sold the products of their gardening rather casually. Neighbors would sometimes come to buy a few bunches of the family's kale, favored by Petul's wife. Occasionally a daughter would gather especially plentiful coriander and sell a few bunches of it during a trip to town, or in the Naben Chauk Saturday market. Once the entire family took greens, squash, spices, and some spare clothing, and made the trip to the hamlet Chikinibal Vo'. This village lies down the mountains from Naben Chauk, in somewhat hotter country where such crops do not grow and where the women, because they spend much of their time hauling water instead of weaving, find it hard either to garden or clothe themselves. Although the women sold their heavy produce and second-hand clothes in the center of the village, Petul carried greens from door to door. Finally, with their profits, the Naben Chauk family not only paid the truck fare, but also bought coffee from their warm-country countrymen.

Other small-scale selling ventures depend on both changing seasons and changing fashions. When the peaches ripen in Naben Chauk—those same peaches that were planted in the early days of the hamlet—their owners have always harvested them and taken them to town, or at least to the highway, to turn them into cash. In the early 1980s, people in Naben Chauk discovered that their tired old peach trees could have plums grafted onto them, producing an earlier and richer crop; a rage of grafting has transformed peach blossoms to plum blossoms.

Petul, who sold his peaches, and sometimes the few apples that the worms didn't get, in August—usually in Tuxtla where the prices are better—now also sells his plums there in June. This is free money: it grows on trees, if you have the time to lug it to market. The only variable is how soon your fruit ripens, or how late it lasts, and thus whether you avoid the seasonal glut and get a better price.⁸

Other fashions have also come and gone through Naben Chauk. In the early 1980s, when Petul had a couple of regular hired workers from Chamula, he turned their expertise at growing potatoes to his advantage by getting them to plant some for him. There followed several tumultuous seasons trying to work out the marketing strategies for potatoes, especially given the seemingly irrational preferences of the market. Petul's daughters quickly discovered that red-skinned potatoes "cook up better"; inexplicably, *ladino* customers in Tuxtla roundly preferred the white-skinned variety.

Other casual selling trips are governed by the calendar of fiestas rather than the seasons. There are times when Petul needs extra money, and thus tries to sell whatever can bring in some cash. This happens routinely before one of Zinacantán's major fiestas—for example, the festival of St. Lawrence in early August, when Petul often tries entrepreneurial flower-selling ventures. He may launch a trip that combines selling the bulk of his peach crop with harvesting and marketing whatever flowers are ripe, supplementing these commodities with bunches of greens or herbs from the garden. For such occasions, Petul is likely to rent a space on the market streets, or even a stall as yet unoccupied by its late rising Tuxtleco owner, to sell his own produce in smaller but more profitable quantities.

There are also several crucial points in the year when selling suddenly becomes especially lucrative, or when demands for produce make selling especially attractive. An example is the period of the year around All Saints' and All Souls' Days (1–2 November), when *ladinos* and Indians alike decorate graves and prepare feasts. Petul will again harvest and take to market (these days, usually Tuxtla) all the available flowers, garden produce, and any ripe chayotes. He will even lop off the tips of the cypress trees planted for shade and privacy around his yard, to sell them as adornment for household altars or flower garlands. On such occasions, Petul will leave for Tuxtla at 10 P.M. the night before, sleeping on the truck in the Tuxtla market, so as to stake out a good space in the market during the wee hours of the morning. Even then the glut sometimes reduces hoped-for profits to a minimum.⁹

At the Christmas season Petul's daughters will make a special trip to the wildest Naben Chauk forests to search out plants that he can add to his wares when he goes to sell in Tuxtla. They bring back various bromeliads (*kilkil ech'*, *uma' ech'*, and *uchul ech'*), moss (*tzon te' ta ton*), the fragrant leaves of Hierba Santa (*jabnal*), and even young palm plants (*unen xan*)—all things that can be sold to *ladinos* as decorations for creches. At Christmas, too, Petul sometimes



FIGURE 20.—All Saints' Day at the cemetery, Zinacantán Center, 1977. (Photo by John Swope.)

makes experimental trips with his flowers to other markets around Tuxtla, to try his luck at milking the season for some extra profit. He has explored the bus network that links Tuxtla with a series of small colonies in the area, selling produce in the town plazas of new settlements such as Copoya, on the south, or towns near the Chicoasén dam on the north. It was on such a trip that Petul remarked that any flowers he didn't manage to sell he would simply donate to the local saint, to insure at least some non-material benefit from produce that could not be turned into cash.

This casual "flower selling"—the family's cover term for all this commerce in flowers, fruits, and assorted garden and forest produce—is normally a supplement to Petul's normal profession, which is raising milpa. Nonetheless, from time to time, like his neighbors, Petul has engaged in such business more seriously. When one of his old-maid goddaughters was orphaned a few years ago, she took up active flower selling, despite the scandalous gossip that circulated about her for traveling alone by truck to such uncontrolled places as Tuxtla. Petul, seemingly inspired, also decided to try his hand, in the slow agricultural season between final weeding and harvest. He put together a small amount of capital and invested it in perishables, which he transported to the northern city of Pichucalco, on the Tabasco border—a place he chose, apparently, because it was not already claimed by other Zinacantec vendors. He made weekly trips for almost two months, at which point he was robbed on the bus home, losing his "starter" capital. Harvest was, by then, nearly upon him, so he abandoned the venture, perhaps with some relief.

The Flower Sellers of Naben Chauk

For several decades, Naben Chauk has been a center of floral commerce. Travelers to and from San Cristóbal on the Pan-American Highway routinely stop on the edge of the valley to buy bouquets of flowers, or small buckets of fruit, from children hawking them with shouts and waves to passing cars. Whereas these children once ventured up to the road only sporadically, or when there was an abundant harvest of fruits, trying for a few chance pesos, there are now permanent tin-roofed flower stalls, staffed with adults.

A study of the flower business in the early 1960s¹⁰ reported that most of the heads of household in Naben Chauk were "growing" flowers for sale, a practice begun by a few entrepreneurs in 1949, which grew rapidly throughout the 1950s with the advent of cheaper seeds and bulbs. By 1963, there also existed a group of flower "sellers." Some grew their own produce, but most bought flowers from their hamlet neighbors, or from other Indians in San Cristóbal. They transported these flowers, by bus and truck, for resale in the markets of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, in the lowlands. Most of the flower growers in this period were average corn farmers, like Petul, who filled their free time with the small scale but relatively lucrative flower crop. The flower vendors, on the

other hand, were largely youths who were structurally "emigrants left behind"—that is, Zinacantecs in the position of those landless Indians who leave their village and their society permanently, but who, in this case, still could spend half or more of their time in their villages—between selling trips—and who could thus maintain "many aspects of a normal life in Zinacantán."¹¹ That this situation was fragile, and that the flower vendors could bring major changes to Zinacantán was something students of the time foresaw.¹²

Flower selling represents one obvious way in which the changing economics of plants have altered Zinacantec productive life. The range of flower varieties bought and sold evolves continually, but this is only one of a set of rapid shifts that hold great interest. The flower merchants of Zinacantán experience (and engineer) constant and dramatic changes in markets, costs, sources, methods, and in an emerging understanding of market forces and non-Indian flower-buying patterns, in a variety of places throughout the state and, indeed, the *República Mexicana*.

Each year has brought something new in the business: permanent flower shops in Tuxtla, standing transport orders that have funded the purchase of trucks; weekly trips to the old Jamaica Market and lately the *Central de Abastos*, or Central Market, in Mexico City, as well as to Oaxaca and Puebla, to buy exotic flowers; and even air-freighted shipments of flowers arriving in Tuxtla in response to telephoned orders (sometimes in Tzotzil!). The ripples from these changes rebound off the social edges of village life, as well. The crucified figure of Christ, at Easter, is offered strange flowers with whose names the people of Naben Chauk—except for the flower sellers who bring them from Puebla—are unacquainted. The owner of Tuxtla's *Florería San Lorenzo*—a flower shop named after the patron saint of modern Zinacantán—is rumored to have a three-story concrete house in Tuxtla for his non-Indian wife there, and to be building another identical dwelling in Zinacantán for his "real" wife. One flower seller now sports the same acrylic towel and plastic sandals in his Naben Chauk house that he wears when he sells flowers in the Tonalá market.

Moreover, the flower trade has produced further economic gradations within the hamlet of Naben Chauk. Some merchants—the richest ones, often truck owners themselves—earned their money *entirely* from buying flowers in bulk from distant markets and reselling them to other Indian retailers. Others enhance their reselling profits by cultivating their own flowers and fruit on highland land formerly dedicated to corn, thus turning otherwise idle time at home in the village into cash at the market. At the other end of the spectrum, some Zinacantecs engage in flower trading on a tiny and haphazard scale, only supplementing other sources of income (corn farming or wage labor, for example) by experimenting with small markets, or by contracting out their flower crop to regular merchants. The business has also produced a new class of peripheral Zinacantec wage laborers: truck drivers whose salaries buy both their mechanical and navigating skills;

otherwise underemployed “hired hands,” who sit and do the selling at somebody else’s flower stall; even specialized flower haulers who pick up a few pesos hanging around on street corners near the markets waiting to help deliver a bundle, by tumpline, to its owner’s market stall.

Lavie chiyojtkin xa skotolik: “By now, everybody knows me.”

Selling flowers in the markets of Tonalá and Arriaga, on the Chiapas coast, is both adventure and drudgery for the men from Naben Chauk. The place is hot, and, for most highlanders, incommensurable. There’s not a decent tortilla in sight, and bed is an egg carton laid on the sidewalk. But the coastal towns are also free from the prying ears and eyes of neighbors, the fences and the walls of the hamlet, the jealous intrigues of relatives, and the party politics of the Naben Chauk town hall. Here one’s business is simple: first guarding, and then selling, one’s load of cargo. At night, with money in your pocket, you can buy a meal, or see a movie, and no one is the wiser.

For most vendors, the pattern is the same, week after week.¹³ Take Lol, for instance. Early Thursday morning he arises early, as usual, perhaps in time to make the half-hour walk down the mountain to his woodland properties, where he has a field of daisies planted. He surveys them to see whether he can get a gross or two of the flowers ready for market that weekend. If so, he tells his wife to cut them during the day, along with two or three dozen calla lilies from inside the yard. Then he heads out to the highway in order to catch a minibus into San Cristóbal before seven o’clock. He needs to meet with the flower vendors from Chamula, as well as his countrymen, regular suppliers from Zinacantán Center and Pat Osil, to arrange for his cargo the next day. He finds most of these people in the market in town, though he takes a municipal bus out to San Felipe to track down another of his regular suppliers who still owes him a bundle of one hundred dozen carnations that he had paid for in advance the previous week. He finds the man coming down the path from his house, and he arranges to pick up the flowers the following morning, there on the highway.

Business complete, Lol flags down a Zinacantec truck passing through San Felipe on its scheduled trip from San Cristóbal to Tuxtla. He clammers into the cabin to gossip with the driver during the short ride back to Naben Chauk. He has the rest of the day to cut and bundle his own flowers, using the branches of the wax myrtle (*satin*) which has the singular virtue for this task that “it doesn’t dry out, or wilt right away.” He also prepares his plastic sheeting, his tumplines (which double as ropes), his hot-country clothing (packed carefully into an airline bag), and his “starter”—a wad of bills representing his capital for the next day’s purchases.

Friday is market day, so it requires an early start: Lol is up and on the road, with the other flower vendors, taking a truck to town by three A.M. Their regular ride to the coast is on a truck owned by Lol’s brother; but that vehicle spends the night in Na

Chij with the driver, so the vendors pay for another ride into San Cristóbal. It is still dark, and cold. The men have covered their lightweight clothes for the coast with sweaters, their woven tunics, even stocking caps.

Out behind the San Cristóbal market the flowers have begun to pile up. Lol takes delivery of the ones he had ordered the previous day. A Chamula grower had brought forty-four bunches of lilies, and Lol strikes a quick bargain for another thirty-three bunches, to complement those he had ready at home. He decides to pass up several offers of baby’s breath, being sold by Zinacantecs from Sak Lum, because the flowers look suspicious and damp; he thinks they will begin to rot and stink in the Tonalá heat.

Finding rather few marketable flowers for sale—probably because of the rain, he thinks—and knowing that he has a load of about forty dozen chrysanthemums waiting for him in San Felipe, Lol turns to the vegetables, looking for a bargain. He buys an entire sack full of radishes from another Chamula, guessing by hefting it that it holds about three hundred bunches. The same man offers him “mustard greens,” which upon inspection turn out to be watercress. Lol bargains him down and buys the Chamula’s entire supply, secretly reckoning them to be cheap; he rushes off to find a couple of cardboard cartons to pack them in.

By now the truck has arrived, and other vendors begin to load their things aboard. Lol remembers that he has taken orders for toasted tortillas, from a woman who sells them in her Tonalá shop, so he buys several bagsful near the market. He also stops a non-Indian man with whom he has dealt before to buy two kilos of small plastic bags, of the proper size for holding one kilo of beans. He left beans in Tonalá the previous week, and he wants the bags to be able to finish selling them this weekend. Partly because of this previous investment, and partly because of the poor quality of the flowers and vegetables for sale because of bad weather, Lol decides that he has enough cargo for the week. The other people on the truck buy carnations, daisies, feverfew, stock, both white- and lilac-colored; also freshly dug Chamula potatoes, a few cabbages, and several huge bags of spices: thyme, in tiny little dried bunches, and fresh coriander. One lone vendor from Zinacantán Center sells a bundle of small purple carnations, which a Naben Chauk man snaps up.

It is 10:30 A.M., time to set out. The Tonalá cargo has been loaded first, towards the front of the truck. The Arriaga load, to be removed first, is towards the back. The ladder is hauled inside, and the truck is off, Lol riding up front with his brother—the truck owner—and the driver, the rest of the vendors sitting on their flowers under the tarpaulin in back. It is a large white five-ton truck, with slat sides in the rear, covered against the damp morning air.

Two more stops—one by the road in San Felipe to pick up the pre-ordered flowers: more lilies, a bundle of small carnations, and some *Agapanthus* or “Lily of the Nile” flowers, called simply *yaxal nichim* “blue flowers,” but known to the

ladinos as *agapango* or *cien-en-uno* “one hundred in one,” and the other at home in Naben Chauk. Here everyone picks up the last bundles readied by waiting wives and children. Lol has his own daisies and lilies, and also a few large watermelon squash culled from a brother’s comfield. Somebody has a boxful of aberrant out-of-season *chayotes* and a bundle of cypress tips. Another flower merchant loads a small bunch of straw flowers, known as *siempre viva* “always alive,” which he has grown and intends to try selling.

Lol is handed a small woven bag, full of fresh tortillas and a piece of fried egg to eat on the road, which he stuffs into the airline bag.

Everyone relieves himself in the ditch: it will be four or five hours on the truck, and often roaming police patrol cars make it inconvenient and costly to stop and disgorge passengers on the road. This is a produce truck, officially not permitted to carry passengers—in fact, not permitted to carry more than three in the cabin, so that the four people riding there routinely duck below the dashboard when passing intersections where police are known to sequester themselves.

The ride down the mountain begins, twisting through the lower hamlets of Zinacantán, past the turnoff to Ixtapa, down towards Chiapa, where it begins to get hot. The truck stops for gasoline, and the people in the cabin remove their Zinacantec tunics. Sweltering under the canvas, which has been securely tied down to keep out the prying eyes of police, the vendors stretch out to sleep upon bumpy beds of flowers. One Chamula kid who begged a ride, mistaking this truck for one of the regular Zinacantec trucks that work the San Cristóbal-Tuxtla run, pays his fare and exits on the outskirts of Tuxtla, amid guffaws from the Zinacantecs who imagine him humping his bag of who-knows-what all the way into the market in the midday sun.

Once, when the patrol cars were fewer, the flower trucks would make a routine refreshment stop on the way through Tuxtla: a cold Coca Cola or a plastic bowl full of what among Tuxtlecos passes as *ul*, a corn drink, typically flavored here with slightly burned chocolate. But now the truck owner wants to hurry on—there is too much chance of meeting a police car. In fact, just on the outskirts of town, one appears, lights flashing. The policemen signal to the driver to pull over, then speed on to stop another truck farther down the road. One policeman walks back towards the Zinacantecs.

Lol curses and extracts a wad of bills from his pocket, peeling off a thousand-peso bill¹⁴ and handing it to the driver.

The cop sticks his head in the window. “¿Cómo estamos?” he asks indifferently, “How are we?”

The driver hands over the bill, silently.

“*Orale pues,*” says the cop, and saunters back to the patrol car to join his partner.

Passing through Ocozocoautla, the truck makes a detour through town. Though normally another Zinacantec truck brings flowers and produce to this market, one of the Naben Chauk people who sells there had sent for a supplementary

load. The large vehicle lumbers through the narrow streets by the Ocozocoautla market, scraping mirrors against awnings, and passing close enough to some street vendors that Lol buys a mandarin on the fly. Two Zinacantecs appear, wearing only their plain white woven shirts, and celeste-colored trousers. They receive a bundle of flowers and what looks like a forty-liter plastic bag full of Chamula cane liquor—wrapped in newspaper and unsuccessfully hidden in one of the ubiquitous egg cartons. Then they disappear again into the market.

The journey continues, out again on the open road. Lol suggests a soft-drink stop in Cintalapa, but the driver, not used to this route because he is only filling in for his brother, decides to press on. No more police cars appear, and after several more hours down the twisty coastal range, the truck arrives in Arriaga, the first flower stop.

Four people on board plan to spend the weekend there selling: two Naben Chauk men with long-term histories selling in Arriaga, another boy who is the employee of this truck’s owner—also a long-time Arriaga flower vendor who now stays with his truck rather than sitting for three days in the market, preferring instead to pay someone else to sell for him—and, surprisingly, a woman who says she is from Chenalhó but whom all recognize to be a Chamula in disguise, who has managed to secure a regular ride with the Naben Chauk truck. The truck makes its way to the market, now quiet and largely deserted in the late afternoon, and the Arriaga cargo is unloaded.

Lol steps off the truck and is immediately accosted by an old *ladino* man who asks him to promise to bring five liters of cane liquor down with him the following week. “My uncle is having a birthday,” he explains. As Lol waits, another man comes up to the truck from the market. Before it can even be unloaded to the ground, he puts both hands on a large watermelon squash and starts to bargain for it. He wants it for *taverna*—a sweetened beer fermented inside the squash and known to pack a knock-out punch. Perhaps it will be someone else’s birthday.

Several of the Naben Chauk men go into the Arriaga market and pick up more bundles of flowers there. These are the exotic varieties, delivered, the previous night, from Mexico City by yet another Naben Chauk truck.

Now the last half-hour ride down the road, past the fruit fly inspection station, and up behind the Tonalá market. It is just beginning to get dark, and everyone wants to unload the flowers, which are by now feeling as tired as their owners.

First Lol and the others unload the cargo that goes inside the market. All the flower sellers help each other in the process, with one man staying on the truck to hand bundles down, and the rest hauling one bundle after another up the back ramp and into the market. Despite the lateness of the hour, there is lots of activity in this part of the market, because another huge truck, filled with vegetables and fruits, has arrived from Puebla and is beginning to unload. As the Zinacantecs carry their flowers—wrapped in leaves, old pieces of plastic sheeting, and tied up with tumplines—the local merchants unload wooden crates of

mandarins, and fiber bags of cabbages and potatoes, all delivered to their stalls by youths with wheeled carts. These same youths make joking remarks to the Zinacantecs, jostling them and grabbing at their loads as they pass. All seem to be old friends.

Soon the Naben Chauk truck has unloaded half its cargo, and it moves around by the covered outside stalls where the younger Zinacantec vendors will sell. As the last flowers are unloaded, the driver stretches out on the sidewalk to rest up for the ride back to the highlands. Xun, the truck owner, takes up a broom and sweeps out the flatbed, then wanders around the truck, tying up the tarpaulin and brushing bits of debris from the paintwork. He has yet to collect the fares for both vendors and flowers. He is planning to return to Arriaga to see what produce he can carry back to Tuxtla—perhaps watermelons. Because of the poor weather, there was a smaller cargo than usual this week, and Xun is vaguely worried about his profits on this trip. He will charge the flower sellers just less than the price of a kilo of meat for their own fare down to Tonalá, and the same amount for each of their bundles; but with the small load this week, the total will not amount to much. A recent dispute between the flower sellers has produced a competitor: another Naben Chauk truck now makes a flower run to Tonalá, and Xun is beginning to wonder whether his weekly trip, with a reduced load, is still worthwhile.

Once he has moved all his cargo inside the market, Lol stops to have a look at the things for sale from the Puebla truck. He has dealt with the owner—a fat Mexican woman with a clipboard in her hand—before, and he knows how much she is willing to bargain on her prices: not much. He decides to buy two dozen gigantic cabbages from her, as well as a bag of potatoes. The tangerines, though attractive, he figures to be too expensive, even though he is beginning to think that he has brought too little produce with him and will not have enough to keep selling for the whole weekend. He takes his new purchases back and sets to work preparing his wares.

A few of the Zinacantecs, who have been selling in Tonalá for several years, have regular spots within the market—not normal stalls, but conventional spaces in the aisles where they display their produce on Saturdays and Sundays. Lol, in fact, has a whole closetful of equipment, stored in various locked rooms around the market. For the moment, what he needs are his buckets and tubs, which he extracts from the market storeroom where he left them the previous week. The flowers first: they must be unwrapped and set in water to recover. “They must come to life, their souls must return,” after being tied up so long. The other Zinacantecs who have positions inside the market do the same. The carnations and daisies, cut with long stems, are put directly into tubs that have been filled with water, taken from one of the fish stalls inside the market. The feverfew must be trimmed with a knife first, as must the lilies, for their stems have gotten crunched during transport. Lol also tears away the blackened petals of the lilies. The chrysanthemums must be untied and spread, so that they will

regain their rounded shape. Lol divides the whole cargo of flowers in half, and he sets part aside, also in large water tubs, to hold until Sunday. Tomorrow he will have to drain and replenish the water, for it will turn black by morning. He may also have to add a headache tablet—*Mejoral* or aspirin—to the water if the flowers look droopy.

Lol turns his attention, finally, to the vegetables. The watercress also has a very tired look about it, so Lol shakes out each bunch and lays them out on the floor on a cardboard box so they will not be so tightly bunched. He is afraid they will turn yellow before he can sell them. The radishes, packed tightly in a bag, seem to be just fine where they are.

He decides to leave the Puebla cabbages and potatoes alone, too, and he strolls out to see how the others are doing. One of the Naben Chauk men has brought Chamula potatoes, freshly dug and red-skinned, and Lol examines them closely. No good, he reckons, too young and too damp. And the Chamulas sent them covered with dirt. They need to be washed, and then they are likely to start rotting straight away—not like the fancy imported potatoes that he has bought from the Puebla truck. They are ready to sell, straight from the sack. Another has had a disaster: the bagful of fresh coriander that he bought in San Cristóbal turns out to have been packed wet, and it is already beginning to rot. Against the protests of his fellows he hoists the entire bag onto his shoulder and carries it to the refuse heap, where he dumps it out. He will have to recoup these costs with something else.

There is some discussion about the carnations. Most of the flower sellers have brought carnations from the highlands—small, fragrant, red ones, tied up in bunches of about fifteen each. But included with the fancy Mexico City flowers are also red carnations, these much fuller blossoms, tied up by the “dozen” (which, on inspection, turn out to have only eleven flowers each). One vendor, Maryan, has the idea that to distinguish these “finer” flowers further he should attach a sprig of cypress bough to each bundle, so he sets to work making this little adornment.

Lol, however, has finished preparing his cargo, as it is now nearly 10 P.M. He has thought of trying to wash, but he decides that he won’t be able to convince the market caretaker to open the toilet room where the water is. Instead, he decides he is ready to eat and go to sleep. Tonalá is a hot place, and at night, when it is merely warm, the people swarm on the streets. They stay up to hours unheard of in the chilly Chiapas highlands—and likewise they arrive at the market long before dawn, unlike the people of San Cristóbal, who wait until it is light to venture, well bundled up, to the market. Leaving a couple of flower sellers who are still working on their loads, to guard the goods, Lol and a couple of companions set out for supper.

There are currently two eating places favored by the Zinacantecs at night: one regular restaurant where one can get a plate of chicken and a soft drink for about the cost of the truck fare down, the other a twenty-four hour taco joint, with a

television, and a sour-faced waitress, where one orders by the piece. Lol elects the latter because of the late hour. Around the corner from the tacos there is a boxing match in progress, in what looks like a makeshift ring in someone's patio. As they gulp down eight tacos apiece, the Zinacantecs can hear the shouted bets, even over the din of the Mexican variety show on the television, and the steady chopping of the taco-maker's cleaver as he works over a pig's head by the entrance. By now, everyone has been awake for almost twenty hours, and it is time to get back to the market and go to sleep.

There are several choices here, too. The market is locked up at night, except for one rear entrance; but sleeping inside is stuffy and unpleasant. Sleeping outside on the empty market counters is better, and there one can keep an eye on the otherwise unprotected flowers and vegetables; but near the building, under the trees, there are always swarms of mosquitos. It seems best, tonight, to stretch out on the sidewalk, across the street from the market, where one can both sleep better and still watch the goods. There is only one worry: a crazy man, half naked and muttering to himself, who has suddenly appeared near the market. The Zinacantecs lay out their beds—again, folded egg cartons—on the street, side by side, remove their sandals, loosen their belts, and stretch out to sleep. Lol carefully hides the huge stones that one of the Zinacantecs uses to weigh down his plastic sheeting, so that neither madman nor thieves can use them to crush his head during the night. Thankfully, the madman finds a step near the market and himself nods off.

In the morning, he has gone. It is four o'clock and the Saturday market begins to come to life. Trucks filled with local produce draw up to disgorge their contents, currently mostly oranges and melons. The *ladino* shopkeepers arrive to uncover their stands and lay out their wares: plastic shoes, bags, belts, razors, flashlights, acrylic garments. They dislodge one of the Zinacantecs who, worried about the madman rifling his vegetables or upsetting his tubs of flowers, had moved up to sleep on one of their tables during the night. The other Zinacantecs unwrap the blankets that had protected them from marauding mosquitos and wander back to their own cargo, setting out mats and plastic bags and preparing for the day's sales.

Lol's setting up is more complicated. First he must retrieve some additional equipment, which he has stored in the locked back room of one of the butchers, near where he sells his flowers. He has a stool and several wooden crates, which he fashions into a makeshift table, covered with a piece of plastic. He also has a wooden cashbox, with a supply of change. His complicated system of accounting means keeping the proceeds from different sales separate, and the different compartments of the box serve this end. He also has a five-kilo scale, which he extracts from the box to inspect. It has taken to working badly, sticking instead of balancing smoothly, and he fiddles with its adjustments and thinks of trying some oil.

Finally he has a half-empty sack of black beans, and a metal

measuring can. He purchased the beans the previous week from another Zinacantec, and he intends to sell what remains over the next two days.

He begins to arrange his wares by pouring a heap of beans out onto his table and measuring a few kilograms into plastic bags. Then he stores the flowers and packed vegetables for Sunday's sales in the butcher's back room, and arranges the rest of the produce on and around his stand: the expensive flowers in their tub, on the wall behind him, the rest arranged in bunches next to the beans, and the vegetables stacked to one side. The radishes are arranged in a circle with the red tubers on the outside and the leaves meeting inside. Lol strips the yellow leaves from the watercress, and does a last minute touch up to any blackened lily petals or withered daisies. Although all the cabbages came at the same price from the Puebla truck, he selects 10 of them and sorts them into two categories—large and small. He will sell the two groups at different prices.

Almost immediately he has his first sales, but not from ordinary customers—some of the regular vegetable vendors have been attracted by his handsome radishes, and ask him to sell them some on the cheap so that they can, in turn, sell them at their own stalls. What's more, they want them on credit. Lol obliges, carefully noting down in a small, tattered notebook their names and the numbers of bunches they carry away.

Soon the first marketers begin to appear, and quickly Lol is busy selling flowers, beans, cabbages. He has a stash of old newspapers—bought there in the market—and string which he uses to tie up the bundles of flowers. The plastic bags he bought in San Cristóbal are for the beans, which he first measures either by the kilo or in a liter measuring cup before deftly tying them up in the bags. The exact measurements here are critical, because Lol's profit margin on beans is tiny and depends on a level measuring can or a perfectly balanced scale. One man, a regular customer with a ten thousand peso debt from the previous week, stops by to pay what he owes. At the same time, however, he orders another ten kilos of beans—also on credit—and says he will send his helper along for them later in the morning. Many of his customers call Lol by name, and banter with him as they complain about his prices. "Here," says Lol, "everyone knows me. They all look for Lorenzo."

The coffee woman, from a restaurant on the second floor of the market, comes by to take breakfast orders. Lol decides on two pieces of sweet bread and a glass of *ul*, a thick hot gruel, but *ladino* style, made from rice or cornstarch, rather than corn dough. He has by now discovered that his lilies appear to be inferior to those of his neighbor; and that the cabbages simply will not fetch a price that will render him a profit. Only the watercress, which though still looking wilted, is not to be found elsewhere in the market, seems to sell well, and Lol stands firm on his price. He steps across the aisle to consult with the neighbor, another Naben Chauk man called *Chaparrito*, "Shorty."

"I didn't think you could sell those Puebla cabbages," says Shorty. "The only way you can make a profit on cabbages is to

buy them from Chamulas. The best thing to do is cut them up and sell halves." Shorty also has a suggestion about the beans, which appear to have been dusted with a pesticidal powder. "Rub them off between your hands," he urges, "and then they will look blacker." The two men agree not to go below a minimum price for the lilies, and Lol asks Shorty to keep an eye on his stall while he goes outside briefly.

The other Zinacantecs are doing a brisk business in the open air. Crowds pass on the street. Young boys, hauling loads for stall owners, call at Lol and threaten him with mock punches as he sits down to relax with a Naben Chauk friend, selling beets (brought from San Cristóbal) and mandarins (bought in Tonalá the night before). They watch with curiosity and make appropriate comments as a peanut vendor, apparently himself a Tzotzil-speaking Chamula, walks past. The sun is up and it is beginning to get hot.

Back inside the market, the meat vendors are also beginning to work up some energy. Their selling style is aggressive and strident, perhaps because the meat itself has a limited life on the counter, and the best cuts go fast. Lol is sandwiched between a beef lady, whose husband appears only to cut the major joints, leaving the piece-by-piece selling to her, and a chicken lady, who sets up a table next to Lol's tubs of carnations. Both talk directly to almost everyone who passes by, sometimes trying to clutch at them to catch their attention. Lol sits silently, only occasionally brandishing an old broom handle when a dog comes too near where he sits. His regular customers come to him, and he usually waits until a prospective customer has finished pawing through the radishes or shaking the bunches of daisies, before he offers her a price or ventures a suggestion. He bargains only minimally, having decided on his prices the night before in consultation with the other Naben Chauk people.

Little by little his piles begin to diminish. Lol carefully puts the beans proceeds in a plastic bag, and the money from the sale of the daisies—products of his own gardening—under a piece of cardboard in his cashbox, so as to keep these accounts separate. There is a constant commerce in small bills, as the vendors begin to call on each others' cash supplies to make change, as the day wears on. The restaurant lady comes by to collect her glass and the price of the corn drink, and to see what Lol will have for lunch, there at the stall. The chicken lady sells her last battery hen, and leaves temporarily to bring more from the main stall of which she is only a satellite. The beef lady begins to spread sea salt on the remaining pieces of meat hanging from the rack in front of her. She also calls out to Lol to save her several bunches of watercress and radish, and she sends her daughter across the aisle to pick out four bunches of flowers, which Lol gives her for nothing.

Outside the Zinacantecs are now in direct sunlight, and they pull back their wares into the shade of the trees or erect emergency tents made out of plastic sheeting and woven fertilizer bags. The crowds have thinned, fleeing the midday heat. The flowers, and their owners, are beginning to wilt, but they eat their lunches there at the stalls, hoping to catch some

late shoppers. Lol emerges again, this time to gossip with the other Zinacantecs about political machinations within the market. Some of the Tonalá stall owners have, it appears, lodged a complaint about the growing number of Zinacantecs who are selling vegetables that they buy in Tonalá instead of highland produce. The market administrator is being asked to prohibit them from the market, but Lol scoffs at the business. "They want to be the only ones who eat," he says, "but this is a public market." No one has said anything to him, in any case, and it is only the newer vendors, selling outside the market without established positions, who have been criticized.

Throughout the afternoon sales are slow. Lol, in fact, packs up everything but a few tired-looking flowers and—ever hopeful—the cabbages, and settles back to read the latest issue of *Kalimán*, a superhero comic, which he borrows from Shorty. The butchers close up shop, admonishing Lol to be sure to lock the storeroom after he puts his things away. The chicken lady goes into a frenzy of hawking to rid herself of the last wings and feet and herself departs. The fish vendors, with whom Lol has had several long conversations about market politics, stack the remaining fresh fish on an ice-filled wheelbarrow, and head for home. It appears to be time to prepare for the evening.

Tonalá's three movie theaters, closed for many years, have once again become an attraction in the town. Shorty proposes that they go to the only decent picture in town, a kung fu movie showing near the central plaza, and he asks the watchman to give him access to the washroom to take a bath. Lol stores his flowers and follows suit. Lol quickly reviews his take for the day and discovers that he has managed to earn back his costs and has a small profit, after one day of selling. Both men take the money for their evening meal and the movie ticket from their cashboxes, and set out, returning to find the other Zinacantecs already asleep on the sidewalk.

The next day, Sunday, proceeds much like Saturday, except that Lol and his companions begin to feel anxious to head for the highlands by early afternoon. Lol manages to sell nearly everything except the poorest of his daisies, a bunch of extremely haggard-looking calla lilies, and the wretched cabbages, which he has been trying to sell at a loss. Finally he trades the lot, with much obscenity and mutual criticism, with one of the Zapotec ladies from Juchitán, who also sells flowers and fruits. She gives him two watermelons, which he stuffs inside his airplane bag, and she reminds him that he still has not brought her the bootleg cane liquor he has promised for months. He threatens to come back and marry her, husband or no husband (and, in his case, wife or no wife).

Then he stores his tubs and boxes away, hides his wad of bills on his person, and leaves the market, giving farewell greetings to the several Naben Chauk men who are still trying to sell their last bunches of flowers or a final watermelon squash. A couple of *ladino* women call after him, "Adios, Lorenzo!" He heads for the first-class bus station. He hopes to

be in time for the 4 o'clock direct bus to Tuxtla, where he can get a second-class bus home to Naben Chauk, and go to sleep in his own bed before midnight.

The History of the Flower Business

Lol and his companions have organized their lives for nearly twenty years around weekly trips to lowland markets, selling flowers and fruit, and occasionally supplementing their income with other related ventures. Lol undoubtedly gave the watermelons he smuggled back from Tonalá to his children to eat—they had to be smuggled because fruit is not permitted past the fruit fly checkpoint on the outskirts of Tonalá, and Lol ran the risk of confiscation as he carried them home on the Cristóbal Colón bus. At certain seasons of the year, however, it is worthwhile bringing larger quantities of hot country fruits back from the coast, to sell at fiestas in the highlands. Sometimes watermelons, lemons, or mangos are cheap and plentiful in Arriaga, and the flower vendors arrange with their truck driver to carry quantities home for resale. And Lol is just one among many; flower resellers ply their trade in Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Chiapa de Corzo, in Cintalapa and Ocozocoautla, in Arriaga, or even as far as Huixtla and Pijijiapan, on the

Chiapas coast.¹⁵

However, the Zinacantec flower trade has not always been so elaborate. According to Bunin (1966), the flower business began in Naben Chauk sometime prior to 1950, doubtless aided in its early growth by the construction of the Pan-American Highway, which linked Naben Chauk and its neighboring hamlets directly by road to markets in San Cristóbal, Tuxtla, and beyond.¹⁶ This is when an increasing number of Naben Chauk people began to grow flowers for sale, furthering the process that, in Mol Xun's recollections, began with the felling of the forests and produced Naben Chauk's lake. Indeed, many farmers planted their flower fields on the flat, damp valley floor, and even on the very edge of the lake (or, at least, where they calculated the lake would reach during the wet season), to simplify irrigation. Commercial flower growing, then, appears to have nearly a forty-year history—long enough that for most people in Naben Chauk, flowers, like peaches, have *always* been there.

The personal reminiscences of both Petul, now in his seventies, and Lol, thirty years younger, show us how the business has evolved from a casual supplement to household ready cash to a personally transforming profession. Moreover, the progression from Mol Xun, the muleteer, to his son Petul,



FIGURE 21.—Arranging flower stall at the market, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, 1983. (Photo by John B. Haviland.)

the corn farmer par excellence, to his nephew Lol, the *comerciante* or “businessman” with a shadowy other life in Tonalá, demonstrates the genealogy of economic and social change in Zinacantán.

Finding Jalisco

Lol had mentioned that Petul, his uncle, was one of the oldtimers who used to go to Tonalá, and who were selling there when he took up the business as a youth. Petul, in turn, attributes his start in Tonalá¹⁷ to one Antun T’ot’ob, who was the first to discover the road down to the coast, sometime around 1949 or 1950.

Before that, during peach season, Petul and his father, Mol Xun—along with others from Naben Chauk—used to sell their peaches, their hawthorns, their chayotes, and watermelon squash to a *casero*, a man from Chiapa de Corzo, named Juan Xantis (Sánchez). They would set out with their mules from Naben Chauk before dawn, arriving in Chiapa about noon, with their peaches all packed into big bags. Often Juan Xantis would ride up the road to intercept them above Chiapa, not far below Ixtapa, probably to avoid competition from other peach buyers. Petul says they used to do this for many years. They would often sell all their cargo on the road and then turn around and come straight home. This Xantis had over a dozen horses, and he would take the produce back to Chiapa himself. When asked what he did with the stuff, he would say that he sold it in a place too far away for the Zinacantecs to get to. “Jalisco,” he called it.¹⁸

At some point, Antun T’ot’ob, unsatisfied and curious, decided to find out where this place was. He made an expedition with one of the *ladino* men from Naben Chauk, who had moved there from Salinas after the new Pan-American Highway had replaced the old road from the lowlands. The highway already passed through Naben Chauk at that point, although it was not yet paved. The two men went to Chiapa de Corzo, then took a truck to Tuxtla, walked to the far edge of town, and from there made their way by truck or bus to Arriaga—which is where they discovered the *casero* had been selling the peaches all along.

When Antun came back to Naben Chauk, he told the others that they were being robbed by the Chiapanec. They decided to mount an expedition as a group to the newfound market. Petul himself decided to take four sacks of peaches.

They stacked their loads up by the first curve, where the highway passes through Naben Chauk, and they waited all night for a truck that would take them. Finally a huge truck responded to their calls of “Arriaga!”¹⁹ The truck driver agreed to take them but told them the charge for their bundles would be very high: three pesos per sack of peaches. He refused to bargain the price down to 2.50 pesos. Each person paid a fare of fifteen pesos.²⁰ They left about dawn and got to Arriaga in late afternoon, piling their stuff up by the side of the road.

Antun asked whether they might want to go on to Tonalá, a

place he had never been but only heard about. He suggested they could simply ask where the market was and try their luck at selling. So they flagged down a bus and went down the road to Tonalá. The fare was 2.50 pesos per person and another 3 pesos per sack.

When they arrived, all the townspeople gathered around to see what they had brought, and they sold almost the entire load the first afternoon. They slept overnight. The next day, the remaining peaches were quickly sold, with people asking when they would be back next with more of the same. Petul remembers that this first trip was near the end of peach season already, so they didn’t have many more trips left that year. He also remembers that on that first trip he came home with the almost incredible sum of 2500 pesos, which would have been a small fortune in those days.

They saw the *casero* Juan Xantis in Arriaga on that trip, and Petul remembers speaking with him. “Have you arrived, Petul?” asked the Chiapanec. “Where is my load of peaches?” “Well, that’s all finished now,” Petul replied, “since I have seen the road for myself.” After that Petul never remembers seeing that *casero* again.

For the next seven or eight years, Petul made regular trips to Tonalá, and elsewhere on the coast. He always preferred Tonalá, because that’s where he seemed best able to sell his peaches. Other men of his generation from Naben Chauk also traveled regularly to the coast: Antun, who had first made the trip, as well as Petul’s brothers-in-law and friends. They made the trip to Pijijapan about twice, doing very well, and on to Pueblo Nuevo, where they didn’t sell much because of competing fruit coming down from the highlands of Motozintla. Once they also set out for Tapachula, but never got that far, having been warned that there were already plenty of peaches there.

Petul remembers that they always used to go down to Tonalá in their traditional short pants and their beribboned hand-woven palm hats, called *semet* “griddle” for their flat, wide-brimmed shape. As a result they underwent lots of ribbing: “your penis will be visible,” people joked, “and your legs will get sunburned.” People urged them to wear long pants. Petul’s father, Mol Xun, when he came to hear of this new fashion, mercilessly mocked the people involved for “making themselves into non-Indians.” He also criticized Petul for wasting his money on storebought trousers.

During this period of selling peaches, old Mol Xun never went to the Chiapas coast, although Petul remembered his father’s telling him of going there long ago to deliver cane liquor, by horse, taking forty days for the round trip. The tradition of Zinacantec commerce, first by mule and foot, later by bus, and most recently by trucks owned by Zinacantecs, themselves, thus has a long tradition.

Why did Petul stop going to Tonalá to sell? Too many young men, he says, who had gotten their starts following the trail blazed by men of Petul’s generation, started to take over the business—people like Lol. These young men wouldn’t give the

older men space any more, because they began to set up a more or less permanent trade there (unlike Petul and his companions, who used to go only once or twice a year during the peach season). The advent of flowers totally transformed the business.

Jun vwelta chiyelk'an xa ox li aktavuse: "Once, I remember, the passing bus tried to steal me."

How, then, does Lol remember his own path to becoming a flower seller? His story²¹ gives a clear picture of the evolution of the life of the new Zinacantec flower sellers.

Lol began selling flowers, on the highway at the edge of the Naben Chauk valley, when he was a boy, barely into his teens. When he began to sell flowers, however, he was already experienced in the world of *ladino* work. Never attracted to corn farming in the lowlands, where his father routinely took him, as soon as he was old enough to travel on his own, he began to earn money for the family by working on paying jobs, such as road building and construction.

Lol began to learn Spanish, not in school—which he attended for a total of one half day—but rather doing road work in the lowlands, smuggled onto the job by his older brother who, like Lol, preferred earning some money to sitting in a classroom. Lol was, he remembers, still too young to drink the tequila that the Mexican road workers offered, although little by little, though, he learned to read from them.

It was when he worked on construction sites in Tuxtla that Lol also began to enter the fringes of market life. Sometimes early in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon, after finishing his daily quota of trenches dug or bricks laid, he would go to the Tuxtla market and sit around on the street corners where people unloaded their cargo. There he could often pick up a few centavos hauling fruits and flowers from the trucks to the market stalls, or even carrying some lady's shopping bags.

Back in Naben Chauk, Lol began commerce in flowers himself, buying them from neighbors and hawking them to passing vehicles on the Pan-American Highway. The only flowers to be had at that time were red geraniums, ubiquitous in Zinacantec ritual and grown for profit mainly by two Naben Chauk brothers, who made their living this way. Lol would buy a small quantity, whenever he had time free from the cornfield or the construction site, and set himself up in a small makeshift flower stall on the edge of the Pan-American Highway. Sometimes alone, and sometimes with a few friends, he would hold the flowers aloft to passing cars and buses, selling to whoever "had the urge to buy them."

Little by little, Lol began perfecting his trading techniques. He first added red gladioli, bought from a new flower grower whose fields were on the valley floor. He would find some thick sticks, and tie the geraniums to them so that they would stand up in an eye-catching display. Then he would array the gladioli against a horizontal pole and wait for passing Mexicans to buy them. The profits were meager, but they were sufficient for him to continue with the business for several years,

whenever his obligations to his father's cornfields left him free time.

Once, he remembers, a passing bus tried to "steal" him. Stopping apparently to buy his flowers, several Mexicans, who Lol was convinced were going to abduct him, got off the bus. He ran away in terror, leaving his flowers lying where they were, and finding them gone when he finally returned to have a look. Soon thereafter, disillusioned with the roadside business, Lol began to look for other ways to make a living.

Although people from Naben Chauk were, by this time, growing large quantities of commercially saleable flowers, few were actively involved in selling the flowers in *ladino* markets. They might sell a few flowers to hamlet-mates who needed them for curing ceremonies or for offerings at the church, but only a few specialists were, in those days, carrying flowers for resale to the markets of Tuxtla and San Cristóbal. One of these was Maryan P., whom Lol approached in conversation, begging to be taken along on a selling trip to Tuxtla. Maryan agreed and set Lol to work going house to house in Naben Chauk buying daisies for resale in the Tuxtla market. People had, according to Lol, perhaps seen a daisy here or there being sold in a marketplace. They had begun to start cultivating them, though most of the growers "didn't know how to sell them." Maryan P., now with Lol as his apprentice, began taking quantities of daisies to Tuxtla to sell.

Lol began making the trip himself, throughout the week, selling his daisies on the Tuxtla streets near the old central market. The flowers came exclusively from Naben Chauk, and Lol remembers clearly the price spiral of the early years. A load of one hundred bunches of daisies went from three *tostones* (half-peso coins) to two pesos, to three pesos. Lol's profit on such a bundle would, in turn, be two or three pesos. With particular clarity he recalls one spectacular success on a New Year's day when he chanced to be the only flower seller in the market. On that day he sold the flowers retail at three bunches for "two bits" (twenty-five centavos), or eight pesos per hundred bunches. This profit was cause for celebration when he brought it home to his family.

All during Lol's youth he remembers Naben Chauk's peaches. The older men, of his father's generation, used to sell the fruits during the height of the season. His uncles, including Petul, were part of the group of men who went regularly to Tonalá. Lol's father had many peach trees, and he would ordinarily sell his entire crop to a neighbor, Mikel Buluch, who would pay him five centavos for two peaches, the variety called *karera*, which used to be planted throughout the Naben Chauk valley before fancier new peach varieties, along with plums, pears, and apples, were introduced.

By this time, old Maryan P., Lol's first mentor, had also begun to carry flowers to Tonalá. Again Lol asked to accompany him, and again the old man agreed to take Lol on as apprentice. The first trip took place in the early 1960s. The two men traveled by second-class bus to Tuxtla, changing there for another bus to Arriaga. Before entering the town they got off at

the Tonalá crossroads to flag down a passing vehicle on the short, gravel-paved stretch to Tonalá. On this trip the two men took only two bundles of flowers, one of white daisies and the other of small white carnations.

Arriving at the Tonalá market, Lol and his guide faced another problem: where to set themselves up to sell. The problem was that another pair of Zinacantecs, also from Naben Chauk, was already in Tonalá. They, too, were regular flower vendors who left the highlands in order to arrive with their flowers late on Fridays. Lol's guide, Maryan P., had calculated the schedule so as to get to Tonalá about the time their rivals would be finishing their loads of flowers. The plan was sound, but at first, early on Saturday morning, there was simply no place for them to set up, because the other Zinacantecs had claimed all the available flower-selling space. By around ten o'clock, one of the Naben Chauk men finished selling all he had. As he prepared to go back to the highlands, he spoke to Lol and Maryan, offering them his place at the market. They set up their wares and themselves began selling, staying until late the next day, Sunday, long after the other Zinacantecs had gone home.

This was Lol's first visit to the coast, and apart from flower selling, which was diverting albeit slow, he found the experience frightening and unpleasant. Worst of all was the heat: a hot sun that meant one felt like drinking one soft drink after another, day and night. In those days the market sat behind the municipal *palacio*, to one side of a large movie theater at one edge of the town square. The Zinacantecs slept out in the open, or under the roof in front of the town hall where, Lol remembers, the soldiers "watched after them" at night, also making it unnecessary to sleep right in the market with the flowers.

When the flowers were finished, Lol and his partner returned to the highlands by flagging down a truck at the gasoline station on the outskirts of Tonalá and seeing how far they could get before taking a bus. This happened about 1961, four years before Lol married, although the exact dates are lost in Lol's memory, as are the costs, long ago, of flowers or transport.

Lol accompanied Maryan P. on several more trips, until he saw for himself that it was "worthwhile," and gained the confidence to try for himself. The old man continued to sell, and Lol would accompany him to Tonalá, but carrying his own cargo. He experimented with selling in other places. In Cintalapa, between Tuxtla and the coast, Lol found the people unpleasant. In Arriaga, the first stop on the coast, where Lol also tried selling, people wouldn't pay good prices for his produce. In those days he could buy fruit in Naben Chauk at the rate of fifty large peaches for between two and three *tostones* (fifty-centavo coins)—an average, say, of three centavos each; in Arriaga he could resell the peaches for at most three for 20 centavos, or worse, at five centavos apiece. In Tonalá, by contrast, people gladly paid ten centavos each. Lol also tried selling farther away, in Tapachula, before he established himself in Tonalá.

Thereafter, he began to make regular trips to the coast every Friday, returning to the highlands on Mondays after selling all he could. Sometimes when he had left-over cargo in Tonalá, he would go early on Sunday mornings to Pjijiapan, farther down the coast, to try to hawk the left-over produce near the train station, or walking from door to door. Once he had a regular routine, he thereafter rarely missed the weekend trips. During peach season, he sometimes made two trips in a week, returning to Naben Chauk late on Sunday in order to buy more fruit in San Cristóbal before going back down to the coast on Monday.

By this time, by his own reckoning, Lol was beginning to get smarter. There was a large group of elder Zinacantecs, including several of Lol's uncles, who banded together to carry the peach crop to market in Tonalá and Arriaga. They were, as Lol puts it, the one who gave the orders for Arriaga and Tonalá. They had made a regular arrangement with the owner of a pickup truck from Chiapa de Corzo to take them down to the coastal markets every week, or every three days, depending on the season. Lol asked them if they would take him with them on these trips. "No room," was the reply. These men wanted no one else to invade the market.

Lol did follow a couple of these senior men on their buying trips to San Cristóbal. They would buy peaches from non-Indian women from town, who would sell their crop in the small plaza at the foot of the church of Guadalupe in town. Sometimes they would contract with a Zinacantec to climb the peach trees and harvest the fruit himself. Zinacantec resellers competed with each other to corner the peach crop, intercepting potential vendors as they walked into San Cristóbal on their way to market.

Unsuccessful in finding a ride to the coast with the older men from his hamlet, Lol decided simply to set out on his own. He would transport his cargo of peaches and flowers home from San Cristóbal by truck. Then, despite the relatively high cost, he would stop the second-class bus as it passed through Naben Chauk, and make the trip to Tonalá in that way. He discovered that he could get to Tonalá before the others. They would arrive and greet him angrily when they found that he was already in the market selling.

This was clearly a time of much competition and animosity between the Zinacantecs who engaged in reselling. Lol quickly found a companion, another man who could not capture a ride from the Naben Chauk elders. This man was called Juan Goat, an evil-tempered man with a scraggly beard, which stuck out in clumps like a goat's. He had come from another hamlet to take a Naben Chauk bride. His father-in-law was one of the Naben Chauk elders who sold peaches in Tonalá, but he had a falling out with the other men and no longer was included in the pick-up group. He and Lol began to transport their loads to Tuxtla by truck, then making their way to the far side of the city in order to try to flag down a ride to the coast on the large corn-transport trucks. Juan Goat was experienced at this business, knowing which trucks tended to charge exorbitant fares—and cursing them as they passed. Lol followed the older

man's lead, learning the details of the complicated network of transport between highland and coast.

Lol's memories of his growing involvement with the flower trade focus, in fact, on transport. After he and Juan Goat got tired of flagging down trucks on the road out of Tuxtla, they started investigating bus schedules in more detail. There was the green bus, known as "Corzo," that left Tuxtla for the Coast at 9 A.M.; there were slower second-class buses to Arriaga; and from Arriaga there were several different trucks that would carry the Zinacantecs to Tonalá, in particular a very large com-hauling truck belonging to a Chiapanec called Belisario, with whom Lol often rode.

It was through Belisario that Lol met old José, another *ladino* from Chiapa de Corzo, who had a small flatbed truck with wooden slat sides. José would drive from San Cristóbal, where his wife had a house, down to Tonalá to buy fresh shrimp and fish, which he then transported back to the highlands for sale. Sometimes he would take a small quantity of fruit or flowers with him—Lol remembers that even though he owned a truck he was still wretched enough to try peddling the flowers on the Tonalá streets—but his principal interest was the fish. Lol made José's acquaintance and begged a ride for Juan Goat and himself; the fare was three pesos for each bundle of flowers and five pesos for each person. This arrangement lasted for a long time, giving way finally when one of José's brothers-in-law, a certain Humberto who had a larger truck, began to take the Zinacantecs on a regular basis. At first, Humberto arranged to take Lol and his Zinacantec friends in another small pickup, taking them to Arriaga and Tonalá and dropping them off once or twice a week, depending on the season.

About this time, Lol reports, his fortunes began to change. Before he had been the apprentice, watching the older people sell and learning from them how to travel, how to sell, how to negotiate the Tonalá marketplace. Now, however, people began to come to *him*. "Do you have a truck?" they would say. "I do," he would tell them. "Let's have a drink," they would say, "we want to go too. Take us with you." From learner Lol was transformed into boss. He began to have, as he put it, his own men—his own followers. As some of the old timers began to give up the business, some of the other elders themselves started coming to Lol, begging to be included in his trips.

Lol also began to establish contacts in Tonalá. An elderly woman, near whose stall he often set up his flower stand at the market, became his friend and adviser. She gave him hints about how to display his wares, and how to set prices. She gave him space for some of his marketing paraphernalia—clothes, a money box, measures and weights—and she often let him sleep over at her house. After she retired from the market stall, she remained a resource for him, letting him bathe at her house, and from time to time advising him about some of his more dubious enterprises (such as selling bootleg cane liquor, smuggled from the highlands to coastal cantinas).

During this period, Lol also decided to marry, putting

together the necessary capital during a year-long courtship. He would take his prospective wife's family's chayotes with him to the coast, and deliver the profits to his in-laws-to-be.

Humberto did so well with his transport business, that he ultimately bought a brand new seven-ton Dodge truck. Now he could really hold cargo! Humberto also acquired a woman partner who sold radishes, lettuces, and tomatoes in Tonalá. The truck would leave from San Cristóbal each Friday, and then return from the coast on Sunday or Monday, leaving Lol and his partners off at home in Naben Chauk. The cost was higher—five pesos per load of cargo and ten pesos per person—but still less than the bus fare, and clearly both more secure and more convenient than standing by the roadside. The added cargo capacity, and also the need to fill the truck to make the journey profitable, meant that more of Lol's "friends" began to join the regular weekend trip to the coast—with flowers, with fruit, sometimes with the vegetables that could be found in the San Cristóbal market.

Lol reckons the crucial dates from this period with a genealogical calendar, anchored to a transport milestone: the shift from a dependence on non-Indian transport to the use of a Zinacantec-owned truck. The social details are complex, although the economics are simple: Lol and his friends calculated that it would be both cheaper and more reliable to organize their flower business around a fellow Zinacantec's truck, once Zinacantecs began to own their own vehicles. The chronology, as Lol reconstructs it, was as follows. Lol married in 1965, and his first two children, sons, were born in 1966 and 1969. During that time he was "working with Humberto," that is, transporting his cargo of flowers to Tonalá on the Chiapanec's truck. By this time, the flower business was changing. The elders from Naben Chauk, including Lol's uncles, had gotten too old and had started to withdraw not just from regular trading but even from seasonal peach selling, leaving the rigors of distant travel to the younger men who dedicated themselves to the trade, and who, like Lol, had acquired both linguistic and practical expertise in negotiating a non-Indian world.

The case of Xun Martines was typical: like many elder men of his generation, he would invest large amounts of cash in buying and transporting peaches to Tonalá during the fruit season, which normally came just as the cornfield weeding season finished. The quick profit on peaches could thus offset the costs of intensive cornfield labor. A single disaster, however, could wipe out one's investment and sour one's enthusiasm, and this is what happened to Martines. One entire load of peaches, perhaps packed wet, perhaps mishandled on the road, arrived damaged in Tonalá. There ensued a massive argument with the other peach vendors, both Zinacantecs and natives of Tonalá. Unable to sell the fruit to the Tonalá resellers, the hapless Xun had to throw the entire load onto the market rubbish heap. "Forget it," he said—according to Lol—and "went back to the milpa."

At the same time, younger men from Naben Chauk—men

with neither their own land nor much experience at farming corn—began to approach Lol, now known as an expert at “business,” for help in launching their own flower selling careers. Most of these youths were unmarried or newly married; many were Lol’s cousins or childhood playmates. None of them knew “where to sell or how to sell,” but all were anxious to learn. Coming to Lol with a bottle, they would beg for the chance to join Lol’s group. “Let’s drink,” they would say, “take us down with you to sell. Show me the road.” Lol claims credit for giving most of the Naben Chauk flower vendors their start in Arriaga and Tonalá.

It was as the group of “his people” grew that Lol became friendly with one of the first Zinacantec truck owners, a man from Na Chij. The fares on other trucks and buses had begun to rise; from five pesos per person, the cost had risen to seven, and then to ten pesos. Lol took his own bottle to his wealthy countryman, proposing a deal in which the truck owner would make a regular weekly trips to Tonalá, just as the Chiapanec had been doing. Within a year, by 1971 or so, Lol had sealed this arrangement by making the truck owner his *compadre*, convincing the man to serve as baptismal godfather to his third child, a daughter, and later to the sibling who followed thereafter.

The flower sellers were agreed that it was better to travel with a countryman, especially when he had his truck sitting there ready and waiting. More than municipal loyalty was at work however: with the Na Chij man the vendors could travel on credit, leaving payment for a trip until after the selling was complete and profits were in hand. Lol recalls, in fact, that before he made the truck owner his *compadre* they occasionally had drunken arguments:

“Sometimes we would ask to ride on credit down to the coast. We wouldn’t pay him when he left us off, but only after we had finished selling. Then sometimes he would get drunk, the poor old fellow, and he would say to me, ‘You bastard, are you ever going to pay your debt?’

“‘I’ll pay it, of course,’ I would say, ‘but I don’t have it now.’ We used to fight with each other, when he would get drunk.

“But when he was sober, he’d always just say, ‘Let’s go.’ He knew we’d all pay sooner or later. Anyway, my *compadre* made a success of it, in the end. He really made most of his money by hauling flowers to Tonalá and Arriaga.”

In fact, from a tentative beginning with a rickety second-hand truck, which ultimately broke down entirely on the road to Arriaga, this Na Chij truck owner progressed to a new three-ton truck, and later to a huge seven-ton truck, which carried enough cargo that Naben Chauk flower sellers who traded in Ocozacoautla and Cintalapa also joined the weekly trip from the highlands. A few people from other hamlets, particularly Apas, joined the trip from time to time. Again, Lol was the boss; people who wanted to join the journey negotiated with

him.

Lol’s regular trading in Tonalá thus now spans more than twenty years. From an irregular beginning, selling seasonal fruit from a curb-side stand, Lol has gradually incorporated himself fully into the Tonalá market. Each Naben Chauk man now has a well-defined spot at the market where he, or his designated replacement, sells every week. There was a time, however, when a scrambling competition for space threatened the unity of Lol’s “group.”

“You see, I didn’t always go every week. I occupied myself with other things sometimes, you see. But then when I would go back the next week, well I didn’t know where to set up my stand. That Chep Tojtik had seen my spot before, and he never failed to go down, every single week. So I would arrive on Friday, and I wouldn’t have any place to set myself down. Well that’s because Chep had told his brother Maryan: ‘Here. Take this spot; it’s unoccupied.’ But that’s where I would have gone to set up my stall. So we were about to start fighting about it, trying to steal each other’s spot. We were going to become enemies over it.

“But then I decided—just forget it. Never mind. And I found another spot.”

Finding a good spot at the market had been a matter of getting to Tonalá early and staking one’s claim. Moreover, the competition involved more than Zinacantecs. Lol remembers that the *ladinos* from the nearby ranches would often storm into the market early on Saturday mornings and chase the Indians away, in order to set out their own produce. However, once the Zinacantecs established a regular system of transport, the rest of the organization—places to sell, prices on common produce, cooperation over watching cargo, eating, and entertainment—became similarly regimented. Each Zinacantec now pays a standing market rent on his place, which is accordingly reserved for him by the market administrator. Most of the regular vendors, like Lol, have an arrangement with one of the stall owners for storing buckets, scales, boxes, plastic sheets. Most, too, have their regular customers, week after week.

Lol’s memories of his flower-selling career end, however, with a lament. He thinks with envy of old José from Chiapa de Corzo, the man who used to give him a ride to the coast.

“And that old José that I told you about, the guy with the little truck. Today he has a house of two stories. There’s a big house there, with a sort of arch, on the corner near the gasoline station, on the road out towards San Cristóbal.... That’s where José’s house is. It’s a very nice house, two stories. He even has a car. That’s all from his selling, that’s how he made it. And he used to do that, too: when he couldn’t sell all his fruits and flowers at the market, he would go out hawking them from door to door.”

Worse, Lol looks around at the other Naben Chauk men whose flower-selling careers he helped to start, and he compares their circumstances to his own. His brother, his

cousin, his nephew, and several of his earlier apprentices, have all gone from flower vendors to truck owners. Indeed, Lol currently transports his own flowers on his brother's truck, bought, Lol calculates, on the brother's profits from selling flowers in Arriaga (a task the brother now contracts out to a younger man, while he himself stays with the truck). Worse still, another flower-vendor's truck has recently²² started a competing weekly trip to Tonalá and Arriaga, prompting a bitter division within the group of Naben Chauk men who sell flowers there.

Despite his brick house with a concrete roof in Naben Chauk, and despite his political career as a hamlet official, Lol compares himself unfavorably with his fellows in the flower business.

"They have made a success out of it. But not me—I drink too much liquor! I never managed to save any money. Can't afford a truck."

Jamaica

Lol's reminiscences bring us close to the present day, but omit what is in some ways the most noteworthy aspect of the recent flower business in Naben Chauk: its expansion into distant markets, and the concomitant expansion in knowledge and experience, social and otherwise, among the flower sellers. In the late 1970s, a group of Zinacantecs began to look beyond the San Cristóbal markets, and their own or their neighbors' gardens, for the flowers they would sell in lowland markets.

Around 1980, one enterprising Naben Chauk flower vendor, Maryan K., now himself a truck owner, introduced an innovation into the business. He had been involved in selling flowers for some years, and being an inquiring fellow (Lol says he has "a clever and lively head"), he had made the acquaintance of some of the other flower traders who arrived in Tuxtla. This group included some who knew of the flower markets in Mexico City. Once he got wind of the possibility of buying flowers more cheaply in distant markets, he decided to investigate, traveling by bus and asking around in Puebla and Mexico City.

Maryan made one trip entirely on his own to Mexico City, and then he invited his friend Lol, and together they made two more trips by bus, arriving at the huge Jamaica flower market in the center of Mexico City. They hired commercial transport trucks to haul their flowers back to Arriaga (whence Maryan went to Tuxtla to sell them, and Lol to Tonalá). Then they decided to find a truck of their own, and Lol contracted with his compadre, the truck owner from Na Chij, who at that point had never been to Mexico City. It was Maryan K. himself who guided that first truck into the city.

By the mid 1980s, men from Naben Chauk had a flourishing trade in exotic flowers, which were acquired on weekly trips to Mexico City, in several Zinacantec trucks. These trips continue to the present day, and as I noted at the beginning of this



FIGURE 22.—Zinacantecs loading flowers at the Jamaica Market, Mexico City, 1985. (Photo by John B. Haviland.)

chapter, they are now supplemented by telephoned orders and airfreight delivery from the *Distrito Federal* to the Tuxtla airport!

The trips to Mexico City have furthered the practical and social education that spending long periods selling and living in *ladino* towns had already begun for these Zinacantecs. The following brief sketch of a typical trip²³ may suggest how the commerce in flowers is changing, and has the potential further to change, the foundations of Zinacantec life.

The trip began in Naben Chauk about 3 A.M. on a Tuesday. The ride to Mexico City was simply a longer version of the weekly ride down to the Chiapas coast. The food was worse, the fatigue more intense, and the police bribes more costly. These costs were, in turn, calculated into the overall price—in 1981, about 5000 pesos,²⁴ split among the ten flower buyers—set for the trip by the truck owner. The Zinacantecs, alternately standing and dozing in the back of the empty truck, made their way across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, through

rural Veracruz, and into the center of the country, arriving about nightfall at the toll highway leading up into the mountains near Orizaba.

As the truck wound up the highway, the fog rolled in, night fell, and it began to rain. Tarpaulin beds became tarpaulin roofs, as the truck began the nightmarish ride up the two-lane toll highway into Orizaba. The road was bumper-to-bumper with traffic, mostly gigantic trucks competing with each other to leap into the left-hand lane and pass the cowed passenger cars that had the misfortune to be on the road. "Damned little cars," muttered the Na Chij driver as he slammed the gears and passed about half a dozen of them on a blind curve. He had now been driving almost non-stop for nineteen hours—having left his bed before 2 A.M.—and he had another four or five to go before reaching the Jamaica Market.

About midnight, somewhere on the toll road beyond Puebla, the truck again pulled to the side of the road. Another Zinacantec truck was there, waiting. Another was expected. Because there were only a few people who knew how to navigate the complex route from the toll-road exit in Ixtapalapa into the bowels of the Federal District where the flowers were to be had, the owners were waiting to distribute the competent pilots among the three Zinacantec trucks. Finally, the three trucks set off in tandem, into the city.

The roads were deserted at this hour—almost 1 A.M. on Wednesday morning—and Lol's truck wove its way to the market, where there was still parking space in the Zinacantecs' favorite street. It was now very cold, and it would be several hours before the market would begin to stir. The driver claimed the cabin as his bedroom, and immediately plunged into a desperate sleep. The rest of the Zinacantecs accommodated themselves among the bedrolls in the rear—each man carefully putting his airline bag, which contained his bankroll for purchasing flowers, under his head.

At three o'clock, a light-skinned, blue-eyed *ladino* from Michoacán popped his head over the side of the truck and shouted: "The flowers have arrived!" The Jamaica Market had been transformed. All the neighboring streets—still lit with streetlamps—now teemed with people. Trucks jammed with flowers were parked in every available space. Bundles, on backs and on wheeled carts, were hurried to and fro.

Instantly the Zinacantecs were on their feet, digging in bags for their tumplines and their wads of money. It was time to survey the goods and check out the prices. Lol and his brother clambered down off the truck, and began to confer on what sorts of flowers they were after. Then they set out in different directions to survey the week's offerings, planning to meet again at the truck to compare prices. The unit of flowers was the *gruesa*—a dozen dozen—and soon Lol and his companions were hauling carnations, chrysanthemums, and several varieties that, according to Lol, had "no name" back to their growing stacks of cargo. Other Zinacantecs contracted men with pushcarts to bring the goods to the truck.

By the time it was light, Lol had spent almost 8000 pesos²⁵

on his flowers. As each new load of flowers appeared, Lol pulled a wad of banknotes from his pocket, and, in consultation with his companions—sometimes disguising the normal Spanish number words with archaic vigesimal locutions in Tzotzil—he compared prices and quantities. He still wanted to buy a few more things, but he now was planning a trip into the center of Mexico City where he knew a man who would sell him bullets for his .22 rifle back in Naben Chauk.

Later, the Zinacantecs stacked the truck high with the flowers they had bought, preparing for the return trip to Chiapas. The driver, who had slept without moving since arriving, roused himself about 10 A.M. and went off in search of some food. Within the hour they would set out again on the highway, and he would put in another twenty-four hour shift without sleep. All together, the Naben Chauk buyers had spent more than 30,000 pesos—the equivalent of two-and-a-half months' wages for a skilled Zinacantec mason, back in Naben Chauk. The truck was filled to overflowing, and the Zinacantecs prepared themselves for the tight squeeze as they rode another twenty hours back to Arriaga, atop this floral bed.

Their schedule was carefully timed. They had left Naben Chauk so as to be at the Jamaica market early on Wednesday for the arrival of fresh flowers. They would leave before noon, hitting the hottest part of the return journey only after sunset, passing through the scorching lowlands of Veracruz and Oaxaca at night. They would deliver the flowers to Arriaga, and then to Tuxtla and Chiapa de Corzo during Thursday. Vendors could thus begin to sell the produce on the following weekend, picking up the flowers and transporting them to their final markets on Friday for sale on Saturday and Sunday. During a seven day week, as Lol put it: "I only get one day free, on Monday."

Mother's Day

At some seasons of the year, Lol does not even get to rest on Mondays. An especially active season for the flower trade comes at All Saints' and All Souls' Days (1–2 November), when most Mexicans make elaborate offerings, including food and flowers, to their deceased relatives. At this season, many Zinacantecs take what flowers and produce they can harvest from their gardens and fields, and head for *ladino* markets to try to turn the traditional All Souls' ritual into cash.

However, the real professionals among Naben Chauk's flower sellers say that they sell the most flowers on another day, the 10th of May. In Mexico this is the *Día de las Madres*, "Mother's Day," a highly commercial national celebration of Mexican-style motherhood. This is a time when the professional flower sellers make a special effort to procure a plentiful supply of top-quality flowers.

When there is an extraordinary market for flowers, the regular sources of supply—including the vast Jamaica market or, in recent years,²⁶ the central produce market in the capital—are insufficient to meet these Naben Chauk vendors'

needs. In the same spirit of entrepreneurial adventurism present throughout the evolving flower trade in Zinacantán, Naben Chauk traders have in recent years made special forays to other markets, in search of cheaper and better flower varieties.

To give a final example, an abortive but instructive expedition in search of more flowers took place a few days before Mother's Day in 1984. Almost as an experiment, Lol and his companions set out to Oaxaca in search of flowers, a bit unsure of the exact whereabouts of the village, but trusting to their business expertise to guide them. They ultimately found their way to the community of San Antonino, known by Lol as San Antonín—a place that he had visited the previous year at All Saints' Day.

Huge fields of flowers, being tended and watered, were visible along the road. However, as the Naben Chauk merchants ate in the little plaza, an Apas truck drove up. The other Zinacantecs had already been in the town a few hours, and they furnished the black news that there were no flowers to be had. They were leaving, they announced, although the sceptical Naben Chauk merchants did not trust their words.

Members of the Naben Chauk group began to fan out, asking random people passing in their horse-drawn carts: "*¿Vende flor?*" "Do you sell flowers?" Some even knocked on people's doors. Someone produced a couple of telephone numbers, apparently belonging to former flower vendors from a previous trip, while others walked around the parched back streets of the town, trying to find addresses that people on the plaza suggested.

It was evident that there *weren't* any flowers after all. Most of the apparently abundant crop had been pre-ordered and paid for by other people—not Zinacantecs. The few flowers that were stacked in people's patios were rather poor. Lol went out to the fields, on the north edge of town—flat and fertile looking land. Instead of the endless beautiful flowers he expected, however, he found only a few planted fields, of rather tired aspect. Some kind of worm had ruined the crop.

Lol immediately began to hatch new plans. He thought of trying to get a telephone message to his sons in Naben Chauk to tell them not to give away his own crop of feverfew. (He had been planning to share it with other merchants, confident that he would be able to replace it with better flowers from afar). There was now no time to strike out to Acasingo (in Puebla) or to Mexico City to get an adequate load. Lol had been planning to make a killing during this selling spree, and he had almost twenty-five thousand pesos²⁷ to spend on cargo. But at this rate, he wouldn't be able to *find* that many flowers, let alone buy them.

When I left the Naben Chauk party, Lol was in a quandry, about to mount a house-by-house search for flowers, with approaching rain clouds promising to ruin the plan of going to the fields themselves, in the cool of the night, to cut flowers from those vendors who still had crops to sell. In the end, Lol and his companions tried to rescue the trip by buying flowers in

the central Oaxaca market the following day, returning to Chiapas with a fairly massive loss.

Ikuch xa yu'un, li prove: "He made a success of it, the poor fellow."

This trip to Oaxaca makes plain a central feature of the Naben Chauk flower business: its riskiness. Flowers are inherently an uncertain commodity, both because of their obvious perishability, and because—unlike much edible produce—both the supply and demand are evanescent and unpredictable. The business therefore depends on a precise sense of timing, and on a good dose of luck. Lol and his companions had counted more on luck than on good business sense when they set out in search of Oaxaca flowers, to find the crop already sold or promised to others. Similarly, more than one Naben Chauk merchant has squandered a small fortune in start-up capital investing in a load of flowers from Mexico City that either dried out on return or rotted unsold in a lowland market town.

At All Saints' day in 1983, one Naben Chauk flower seller lost forty-five thousand pesos²⁸ in a single weekend when the truck returning from Mexico City broke down at Tapanatepec, still on the hot coastal plains of Oaxaca, ruining almost the entire load of flowers. On this occasion, the Zinacantec had sent his partner to buy for the two of them in Mexico City, while he himself set out in the other direction, towards Comitán near the Guatemalan border, also in an optimistic search for cheap flowers. Both ended up with nothing but an empty purse.

During that same season, Lol made major trips both to Mexico City and to Puebla, buying huge loads of flowers that he ended up selling at a loss—falling several thousand pesos short of covering his initial investment, his travel costs, and his running expenses. Another Naben Chauk flower vendor reportedly spent over one hundred thousand pesos²⁹ in the Jamaica Market during the same weekend, and no one doubted that he would suffer a severe loss.

On the other hand, the economics of flower selling are clearly such that its most successful practitioners gradually transform themselves into truck owners, some of Zinacantán's richest citizens. This is Lol's own observation: that people who have "survived" the rigors of selling end up rich men, who thereafter make their livings "sitting down," i.e., riding shotgun on their own trucks.

The small-scale or casual flower vendor relies on transforming each load for sale into a profit sufficient to cover running costs and to contribute something to his household economy. For a man who farms corn, both cultivating and selling flowers can supplement income that is otherwise limited to post-harvest boom and pre-harvest bust. But when the "starter," the pool of capital required to maintain the trade, disappears in a disaster—the broken down truck or the robbery in Pichucalco—people like Petul simply give the business up. Lol, a full-time flower vendor, insulates himself against such temporary setbacks by investing his profits, not only in houses with

concrete roofs, but also in loans to his fellow Zinacantecs. Money loaned when Lol is flush becomes reserve savings when, tapped out, he calls the loans in again. Lol's contacts with flower growers, with people in the Tonalá market, with truckers, all represent part of the cultural capital that allows him to survive the vicissitudes of the market. He also diversifies his trade, hauling liquor and corn, and living always on the lookout for something he can sell at a profit if he just carries it to the right market.

At the big-time end of the scale, there are no fewer than six truck owners in Naben Chauk who have been active for years as flower sellers. Lol's brother, the man who now hires a youth to sell flowers for him in his old spot in Arriaga, is one. Another, the man with whom Lol avoided a fight over who had rights to a good spot in the Tonalá market, has *two* trucks. Two or three additional trucks belonging to Naben Chauk flower sellers make, or have regularly made, the weekly run to the *Central de Abasto* in Mexico City—a trip that by January 1989 cost the merchants over two million pesos³⁰ for truck fare alone. A couple of the owners of these trucks are major suppliers of flowers in Chiapa de Corzo and Tuxtla. The economics of Zinacantec truck ownership require detailed study. But it seems clear that participating in this large scale floral enterprise, as well as hauling Zinacantec corn, beans, and bodies, has contributed to the efflorescence of Naben Chauk trucking, a latter-day, gasoline-powered analog of the mule teams that, according to Mol Xun, once grazed in the Naben Chauk valley.³¹

It remains to try to quantify what Lol means when he says that someone "has made a go of it,"³² or that selling flowers "is worthwhile."³³ The changing value of the peso, and rampant inflation, have made calculating costs and prices a complex matter. In what follows I will try to render values in the relatively more stable US dollar equivalent. I will also venture some comparisons with such relevant costs as the price of meat.

Petul reported that first trip to Tonalá to sell peaches, which cost him \$1.40 in truck fare, and \$0.50 per bag of peaches, yielded the astronomical profit of \$200; having no other fixed guide to purchasing power or wages in that period, we observe that, if we believe Petul, the total earnings from a trip were roughly 140 times the cost of one-way transport. Put another way, Petul's remembered profit was \$100 per bag of peaches, 200 times the cost of transport (which, in this case, was the only cost, as they were his own peaches). Even by the early 1960s, when an agricultural worker's daily wage was only about \$0.50, this would have been an astounding haul, even for only one such weekend in a year.

Bunnin (1966) writes that, in 1963, a dedicated flower vendor from Naben Chauk reported his own average earnings as about \$8 per month, whereas Bunnin estimated that he could be earning up to about \$5 for a four-day trip to Tuxtla. Again, this is to be compared with a daily wage for Indian laborers of about \$0.50.

In February 1976, the Zinacantec trucks still charged about \$1.60 to take a flower seller to Tonalá, and each bundle of

flowers (or bag of peaches, etc.) cost \$3.20. The difference between the selling price and the cost of 100 bunches of carnations (which were bought in San Cristóbal for \$12 per hundred) was only about \$4. (In that same period, Zinacantecs were paying their milpa workers about \$1 per day, though laborers in Tuxtla and Chiapa could earn about three times that.) In this year, Lol would carry flowers, peaches, cabbages, and earn a profit of about \$20 per weekend, after all his costs were paid. Lol's earnings were thus well above those of corn workers, but not appreciably better than those of laborers in higher-paying jobs.

By 1985, the figures were inflated and the profits were much better. On a flower-selling trip in April of that year, I calculated Lol's total outlay to be about \$130, including \$8 for truck fare.³⁴ On the flowers he sold during this trip, his profit (by my calculation) was about \$150, and he also earned about \$120 selling his own plums and hog plums, bought in Chiapa. Thus his total profit for the week was \$270, about twice the value of his original investment.

To put this sort of wage in perspective, workers on government development projects (road building or reforestation, for example)—the best jobs Zinacantecs could find in those days—in 1983 earned a weekly salary equivalent to the cost of about 30 kilos of meat. An experienced Zinacantec mason, in 1981, could earn a daily salary equivalent to about four-and-a-half kilos of meat. Lol's weekly earnings, from this flower trip at least, equaled about 80 kilos of meat, or over ten kilos per day.

I should add that on this same trip, in 1985, Lol made a further profit of about \$53 on a load of 200 liters of cane liquor, which he transported to Tonalá on the flower truck—that's another sixteen kilos of meat.

In January 1988, times were hard again, for flower sellers as well as for nearly everyone else in Chiapas. Now a bridge worker's weekly salary would buy only twenty kilos of meat, a skilled mason's only about ten kilos, and a truck driver's only six kilos. Selling flowers (seventy-five dozen lilies, as well as thirty-three dozen carnations) and vegetables (mostly radishes and cabbages), Lol's profits for the weekend were about \$90, or about forty-five kilos of meat. He was still earning more than laborers (or truck drivers), but in terms of buying power, flowers were paying half as much as they had three years before.

As a final note, it is worthy comparing how floral prices have fluctuated over the period of the Naben Chauk flower industry. Bunnin's 1963 study showed the following prices (per 100 bunches, converted to equivalent US dollars) for a variety of retail flowers in the Tuxtla market:

1963 (Bunnin, 1966)	
Lily	\$12.00
Gladiolus	\$ 8.00
Carnation	\$ 1.20
Daisy	\$ 0.80

It is not clear what size bunches these were; similarly, the fancy

grade flowers from distant markets had not yet reached the Zinacantec vendors.

In 1976, when the peso still had the same parity against the dollar, carnations cost ten times as much, and made a handsome profit when sold in Tonalá.

1976 (February)	Buy	Sell
Carnations	\$12.01	\$16.02

In 1983, after several devaluations, the selling prices in Tonalá had hardly changed at all when converted into dollars, although the Tuxtla retail prices were low. Daisies continued to be cheap.

1983 (August)	Sell Tonalá	Sell Tuxtla
Carnations	\$16.25	\$3.25-\$6.50
Daisies	\$0.65	

In 1985, flowers had the following prices in different retail markets.

1985 (April)	San Cristóbal	Tonalá
Carnations	\$4.00	\$10.00
Daisies		\$13.00
Gladiolus		\$ 4.50 (per dozen)
Chrysanthemums		\$82.00
Feverfew	\$3.27	\$ 9.22
Cypress boughs	\$2.05	\$ 6.83
Calla lilies	\$6.15	\$16.39

Finally, in 1988 I recorded the following prices for the flowers that were carried to Tonalá in January.

1988 (January)	San Cristóbal	Tonalá	(Mexico price)
Lilies	\$13.15	\$36.00	
Chrysanthemums	\$ 8.77	\$16.00	(10 dozen)
Carnations	\$11.00	\$22.00	
		\$66.00	\$29.00
Lilies of the Nile	\$65.80	\$87.70	
Feverfew	\$ 8.80	\$22.00	

Since the early 1980s, when business was booming, there has clearly been massive inflation in flower prices, coupled with a fairly severe reduction in real profits for the Zinacantec flower sellers. At least some of the people who were "surviving well" during the rapid expansion of the flower business during that earlier period have now gone on to become truck owners, apparently by taking advantage of windfall profits. But the days of those profits have gone. Zinacantecs who stayed in the business or who were lured into it by seemingly easy money have been disappointed. Present day flower merchants—or at least the small-scale retailers—cannot reproduce the high levels of income of that earlier period. Perhaps this is why Lol, working harder than ever down in Tonalá, laments the fact that he "drank away" his profits from past years, and that nowadays "he feels himself poor."

Yik'al chkom li bak'ine: "Perhaps sooner or later I'll leave her."

Bunnin's 1963 study of the Zinacantec flower business

divided it into two social universes: the flower growers, who were on his analysis merely extending practices of normal Zinacantec life to the cultivation of a new cash crop; and the flower sellers, who were the residue within the community of extreme external pressures towards change—in his words, "emigrants left behind." Unlike those who respond to economic and social pressures inside Zinacantán by leaving the community entirely, this group of largely young men do spend more than half of their time outside the municipality, buying and selling flowers; but they keep their homes and families in Naben Chauk. According to Bunnin (1966:232):

Since they maintain their place inside the community while at the same time developing new links with the outside world, they are marked—unlike the flower growers—as carriers of penetrating change in the pattern of life in Zinacantán.

I said at the outset that the flower sellers of Naben Chauk have not ceased to be Zinacantecs. This is certainly true, as far as it goes; but there is little doubt that the flower sellers have already done much to transform the notion of what being a Zinacantec means. The transformation continues. Let me end this extended essay with a personal vignette, from a trip to Tonalá with my Naben Chauk friends and compadres in January 1988.

Manvel, who has been selling in Tonalá nearly as long as Lol, is a handsome man with a large family back in Naben Chauk. His eldest son, Xun, a frail lad who was often sick as a child, frequently accompanied him on his weekly trips to the coast.

Some years ago his mother-in-law came to gossip at my house, and she had nothing but harsh words for Manvel. "You see he's building a new house," she said. "When that is finished he will leave his wife [the speaker's daughter] and move alone into the new house."

The following year, Naben Chauk bubbled with rumors that Manvel's wife wanted to leave him. Even as we trudged up the mountainside on a major, expensive curing ceremony for her, Manvel confided to me that she always seemed angry with him: this hot condition was part of what the ceremony was designed to cure.

The next year, when I arrived in Naben Chauk after a nine-month absence, the women of the house compound where I live couldn't wait to blurt out the latest scandal. Over fresh tortillas, I was regaled with tales of Manvel's misdeeds: people said he had another wife, down in Tonalá. He had, reportedly, spent thousands of pesos on a truckload of beer for the wedding celebration; and he even had a child with the new woman. Everybody said it was true, but Manvel continued to deny it.

I was curious, but not convinced. Neither Manvel nor the other flower sellers had said a thing. When I went down to Tonalá, Manvel seemed normal; he followed his usual routine, and we even traveled home to Naben Chauk together on the same first-class bus.

Nonetheless, in January 1988, having joined my friends as a “fellow Zinacantec merchant,” and after we had all prepared our flowers and vegetables for sale the following day, and were laying out our egg-carton beds on the sidewalk, Manvel said to me, “Well, sleep well. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“And where are you off to,” I asked, unthinkingly.

“I have to go over there,” he said, gesturing vaguely with his head, and quickly trotting off into the night.

The following day, as I chatted with a fat *ladino* woman who sold chicken in the market, conversation dwelt on current hard times. “No money,” she said, “and the government doesn’t care about us. We can’t even support our families anymore.” She looked around. “And for Manuelito it’s worse,” she continued, “since he has two families to support now. And that new wife of his is always asking him for money.”

So there it was. Brazenly, I asked Manvel to present me to his new wife, and, after a moment’s hesitation, he took me home with him for lunch. A handsome woman, whom I had seen for some years selling *atole* in the market, cooked us fish, garnished with cabbage and radishes from Manvel’s own market stall. She sat silently and watched us as we ate and talked in Tzotzil, which she clearly did not understand.

How was it, then? I asked Manvel. What did his wife back in Naben Chauk have to say?

“Oh, I still deny it to her,” he told me, “even though my mother-in-law is always accusing me. But this arrangement isn’t working out too well, anyway. This woman always complains that I don’t give her enough. Her brothers may beat me, but, perhaps, sooner or later, I’ll have to leave her.”

Back in the market, preparing to go back to the simpler world of Naben Chauk, I sat for a while, in the slack selling hours of an early Sunday afternoon. Xun, Manvel’s son, had been waiting in Tonalá when we arrived the previous Friday afternoon, and I asked him when he had come down from the mountains.

“Oh, I have been here a month,” he said. “I don’t like to go home much: it’s too cold.” He rearranged a pile of mandarins on his stand, and I noticed that he was selling exclusively fruits and vegetables that could be acquired right there in Tonalá. “Sometimes my father brings me some things to sell, but mostly I buy my load right here. Right now the only things I have from home are some beans, which I sell little by little.”

What did his mother have to say about his father’s new wife? “Well, we don’t talk about it. But I give her money myself when I go home.”

A group of uniformed Tonalá school children walked by, looking without much interest at Xun’s avocados and bananas. He glanced at me with haggard eyes—he still didn’t look well, I thought. “You know,” he said, “I would like to go to school here, too. But I have to keep working.”

“Do you know any people here in Tonalá?”

“Well, there’s this girl. Her father runs that refreshment stand just by the steps inside the market. He has given me permission

to talk to her. But she isn’t here today, otherwise I would take you by so you could see her.”

It was getting close to 4:00, when the bus would depart for the highlands, so I said good-bye to Xun, bidding him, in Tzotzil, to be strong as he stayed behind, selling his vegetables, and the last of his father’s flowers.

Notes

¹My thanks are due especially to my *compadres* Lol Vaskes, Natil Xun Vaskes, and Mol Petul Vaskes of Naben Chauk, for their friendship and companionship, at home and on the road; to Leslie K. Devereaux for mutual fieldwork; to the Australian National University, the Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Reed College, and the National Geographic Society for financial and logistic support; to Robert M. Laughlin and Frank Cancian for comments on various drafts; and to Lourdes de León for everything else.

²See the tale of this name, in the words of my late *compadre* Mol Xun Vaskes in Laughlin (1977:126–129), and the introductory chapter “Where have all the flowers gone?” My version of this (hi)story is also due to Mol Xun, especially to conversations with him around our house compound during an idyllic stay in Naben Chauk between January and June 1976.

³*ta yut (s)mok*

⁴Even as late as 1967, on my first trip to the township of Chenalhóo, in the company of a Zinacantec cargoholder in search of cheap meat, we were greeted by locals, who recognized our Zinacantec costumes, with the question, “Do you have salt to sell?”

⁵*j-‘ekel-nichim*

⁶In 1976, a truck ride to Tuxtla from Naben Chauk, for example, cost 6 pesos (= US\$0.48). In 1988, the same truck ride costs 2000 pesos (= US\$0.88), and the bus costs 2700 pesos (= US\$1.18).

⁷In Tonalá, Zinacantecs were selling black beans at 1200 pesos (= US\$0.53) per kilo, and a bagful in San Cristóbal was reputed to cost about 100,000 pesos (= US\$43.86), which would average out to about US\$0.50/kilo.

⁸In the first years of the plum rage, a box of early plums could fetch the equivalent of US\$6. In 1987, in the early part of the season (the first week of June), a box was worth about US\$3.80, but a few weeks later the price was about half that.

⁹At All Saints’ Day, 1983, Naben Chauk people bought carnations in San Cristóbal for resale in Tuxtla, but because of the number of flowers that appeared, and the especially hot weather, flowers that had been bought for 25 pesos a bunch (= US\$16.25 per hundred) were unloaded in Tuxtla for only 10 pesos (= US\$6.50 per hundred). Cypress boughs dropped from 10 pesos to 2 pesos a bunch during the week before the All Saints’ Day, and Petul’s take on the 60 bunches he carried to Tuxtla was the equivalent of US\$1.30.

¹⁰Bunnin(1966).

¹¹Bunnin(1966:231).

¹²Bunnin (1966:232).

¹³I sketch a composite view, based on trips to Tonalá in February 1976, August 1983, April and July 1984, April 1985, and January 1988.

¹⁴The ethnographic present here is January 1988. Exchange rate, US\$1 = Mex\$2300.

¹⁵By 1988 there were separate trucks making regular flower deliveries to four different zones: in addition to the two weekly trucks (which sometimes went twice in a week) to Tonalá and Arriaga, there was another for Cintalapa-Ocotzocuaula, another for Pijijiapan and Huixtla, and then the regular run of hourly trucks on the route between San Cristóbal and Chiapa de Corzo and Tuxtla. I have not included regular trucks bound for Mexico City and Puebla to buy better flower varieties, which I describe in a later section.

¹⁶Bunnin's researches, in 1963, were confined to Zinacantec flower selling in these two nearby cities, and do not mention flower selling in more distant markets on the Chiapas coast, for example.

¹⁷The following section is drawn from my field notes of 12 April 1984.

¹⁸Jalisco was the name of the community where the train station was located. By the 1930s the community had been absorbed into an expanding Arriaga.

¹⁹Petul recalls that Antun T'ot'ob had stopped calling it "Jalisco" now that he knew the name of the real destination.

²⁰This would have made Petul's cost 27 pesos, at a time when the daily wage a corn farmer paid a worker would have been less than four pesos.

²¹The following notes are drawn from Tzotzil conversations with Lol recorded in April 1984. The description offered here is considerably less fluid than Lol's own narrative and dialogic presentation, whose flavor is retained in only a few passages in what follows.

²²In early 1988.

²³Based on my notes from May 1981.

²⁴A little over US\$200 at 1981 rates.

²⁵More than US\$300 at the exchange rates of the time, though this money included investments from several of the other Tonalá flower sellers who had given Lol their money and sent him to buy for them all.

²⁶The regular vendors at the Jamaica market were evicted by force and the market was razed in a series of moves by the municipal government in 1986 and 1987 to centralize food and produce distribution in the Distrito Federal. Flower selling has been relocated in the *Central de Abasto*.

²⁷At the time, almost US\$150, and all of this money Lol's.

²⁸About US\$288.

²⁹More than US\$600.

³⁰Almost US\$900, split among ten flower buyers. In addition, each man had between 800,000 and 1.5 million pesos (US\$350–\$650) to invest in flowers in Mexico City.

³¹It has also produced a most interesting new category of Zinacantec: the truck driver. Sitting on the curb in Tonalá, in January 1988, as the last of the flowers were being unloaded from a Naben Chauk truck, I had a long conversation with our driver, a youth in his early twenties from Na Chij, who told me that he had never hoed corn in his life. His father, one of Zinacantán's first truck owners, had put all his sons to work as drivers, and this youth, from the time he learned to handle a stick shift and an overdrive button, had made his living with vehicles. At the time he was earning 120,000 pesos, or about US\$50, a month at this full-time job. He did not help with the unloading.

³²*ikuch xa yu'un*

³³*xlok' kventa*

³⁴Lol worked out his costs a different way: he figured he had brought about \$60 worth of flowers (feverfew and daisies) and fruit (plums) from home in Naben Chauk, but he didn't count this as cost—this is simply what it would have cost him to buy similar produce. Similar, he did not count into his own outlay the \$20–\$30 worth of flowers that he "borrowed" from his hamlet mates, to replace at a later date with equivalent flowers of his own.