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Coffee production and its attachments to an undeveloped state: Chiapas

Chiapas is a region located in Mexico, mountainous mainly, and covered with forests. It is adjacent to Tabasco in the North, to Veracruz and Oaxaca in the West, the Pacific Ocean in the South, and to the East with Guatemala. It is one of the biggest states of the national territory. It has an extension of 74,415 km², and it is formed by 118 municipalities that are grouped in 9 economic regions. It is a state that is enormously rich, not only in natural resources, but in ethnic diversity. There are currently 62 indigenous towns registered that still conserve their ideologies, customs, and traditions, which may be seen from an outsider's perspective as inappropriate and old-fashioned. Yet, it is the main underdeveloped state of the territory. Its inequality, ownership to a federative entity, deficiency in communication, ethnic origin, and hard access are factors that lead to its social exclusion.

In regards to medical services, while Mexico City counts with three doctors and five nurses for 1000 inhabitants, Chiapas counts with less than one doctor and only one nurse for the same amount of people. 76.37% of its population lack opportunities for medical services due to a strong, marked, and dramatic inequality in health services between states of the territory.

Regarding economics, the state suffered a lengthy delay in its development, while the industry saw itself limited to the transformation of products for local consumption. Tourism in Chiapas, on the other hand, has turned thanks to its enormous touristic potential, into something crucial for the development of the state by impacting directly diverse socio-economic areas.

According to the INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, equivalent to U.S Census Bureau), in 2010 Chiapas was the state with the highest rate of illiteracy in people older than 14. It was also the state with the highest index of not-attendance to school in 5 to 14 year olds, and possesses the biggest average of members in a family (4.4). The lowest percentage of people in higher education belongs also to the state.

According to minimum wages, the Mexican territory is divided into three geographic areas:

Table 1. Minimum wages areas in Mexico.

Area "A"	\$59.82 pesos (\$4.79 usd)
Area "B"	\$58.13 pesos (\$4.66 usd)
Area "C"	\$56.70 pesos (\$4.54 usd)

(SAT)

The corresponding area for Chiapas is "C", and, evidently, the wage cannot be enough for an average family living in the previous conditions.

Though, thanks to its temperature, humidity, climate, and height that favor agriculture, the most important activity in the state, it is possible to produce coffee. Chiapas contributes 34.8% of the national production, being the leader in national productivity. But coffee isn't the only important product of the state. Some other outstanding products that are grown in Chiapas are, in cyclic crops: corn, beans, soy, and sorghum. In perennial crops: cacao, mango, banana, and sugarcane.

Mexico occupies one of the top 7 places in coffee production in the global market and the first place in organic coffee, but the amount that stays in the country is depressing. Only 17% of national production goes to domestic market, while the other 83% is exported. The WTO (World Trade Organization) and FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), agree that the most demanding markets for organic products are placed in Europe, the United States, and Japan, industrialized countries, whose population is characterized by their high incomes. The average production of coffee in the last 17 years consists approximately 4.7 million bags that contain 132.275 pounds (\$480 million dollars approximately). Unfortunately, during the last 5 years, production has decreased more than 58%, going from 668 million dollars to 278 million dollars. (Inifap, 2009)

In Chiapas, Veracruz, and Oaxaca, the states with the highest levels of production, of the total coffee produced each year, almost 66.2% come from family crops, than count with less than 10 acres. In fact, and to be more specific, nine out of ten have less than 5 acres. (Swissinfo.ch, 2006)

Coffee

The *Cafeto* is a bush. It belongs to the genus *Coffea* and to the *Rubiaceae* family, which has more than 25 wild species, three of them generate fruits:

The *Arabian cafeto* (*Coffea arabica*) is original from Ethiopia and Arabia. It is the most commercial and possesses the highest quality.

The *Cafeto congo* (*Coffea robusta*), original from central Africa. It has beans of reduced size and a higher content of caffeine.

The *Liberian cafeto* (*Coffea liberia*), is original from West Africa. This species, vigorous as the second, is more resistant to illnesses, but it is of inferior quality because of its scent.

In order to produce coffee, ground must be wet and abundant in organic matter, and must be equipped with great drainage to avoid water accumulation that would decompose the root of the plant. Mexico produces the first two species, *Coffea arabica* in a 93%, and *Coffea robusta* in a 7%. (Nescafé México)The coffee that is produced is considered artistic, and it is mainly produced in some regions of Chiapas.

Of course, and unfortunately, there are adulterations in coffee. When combined, soluble coffee is mixed with rice, barley, chickpea, wheat, sorghum, soy, and beetroot.

For so many years, coffee has found itself surrounded, largely, by myths that over the years have been mostly denied and, on the contrary, science has found a list of health benefits, and reactions to its chemical composition. For example: the occasional consumption of coffee produces a slight increase in blood pressure that completely disappears after it is consumed continuously.

It also prevents postprandial hypertension in the elderly, and has bronchodilator activity in young people with asthma; and, probably the best known benefit of all: Coffee contains antioxidants; same that delay cellular aging and that have turned into something very popular and requested nowadays.

One of the popular reasons and beliefs of people that usually drink the infusion is that they find in the beverage stimulating effects. That is mainly because of the content of caffeine that, even though it isn't a big amount, it is enough and works differently in each organism.

Cost of production

According to PROCAMPO, (Programa de Apoyo al Campo) a program created by SAGARPA (Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación) that emerged as a mechanism for transferring resources in order to compensate producers because of the grants received by foreign competitors, by providing support per hectare, the production cost in Mexico is:

- 1 ton of coffee= \$30,000 pesos (\$2405.77 usd)
- 1 Kilo of coffee= \$30.00 pesos (\$2.40 usd)
- Manual labor (5 people at least) salary:
 - \$12.50 pesos the hour (\$1 usd), it is an 8 hour shift =\$100 pesos (\$8.01 usd).
- There are 30 working days in a month =\$3000 pesos (\$240.57 usd)
- Indirect manual labor (2 people) salary:
 - \$10 pesos the hour (it is a 4-hour shift) = \$40 pesos (\$3.20 usd)
In a month: \$1200 pesos (\$93.23 usd)

Coffee development, distribution and problematic

Mexican producers are grouped in more than 16 local and regional organizations that are in charge of the “development”, “protection”, and “regulation” of our producers (there are more than 282 thousand), through distribution, marketing, and regulation of transactions and their remunerations.

Since the 80's, coffee production has increased 24.7% and, after suffering and developing through diverse stages of history, it has turned into a product of massive national and international consumption. Guiding and leading coffee companies like Starbucks, to a scandalous and juicy success, which work and bet in a “luxury” concept that builds in and for the consumer, an atmosphere of comfort, through the space, treatment and variety of options offered, which are nothing but meticulously designed to attract and trap senses and incomes. But, are those incomes in proportion and distributed correct to the people that have made possible its growth?

They are not. Our producers, who are mainly smallholders and native people, are evidently not well remunerated. Since they are not “educated”, they see themselves forced to deal with unfair traits, unfair exhausting and monotonous conditions, and unfair trade. This leaves them, the producers, which include men, women, and even children, in the impossibility of development.

Where is the support of those numerous organizations? Where are they reflected?

Meanwhile, in Chiapas, fair trade with coffee rests static, insensible to our faces. Words that rarely reach their mission, and are described by a group of organizations, FINE (Acronym of Fair trade Labeling Organization, International Fair Trade Association, now World Fair Trade Organization; and the Network of European World shops (NEWS!) and the European Fair Trade Association) as “a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency, and respect that seeks greater equity in international trade, contributing to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to and securing the rights of disadvantaged producers and workers”. (Network)

Proposal

Because local and regional organizations haven't succeeded in their mission, and prices are placed, decided, and stipulated by supermarket monsters, consumed and bought by us, society; we should be placing our vision somewhere else, with the support of internal coordination of small and medium sized groups of coffee people properly organized and sensitized:

- We should be placing our vision in government; just like in Ecuador, with the COFENAC (Consejo Cafetalero Nacional) a private institution with social and public purposes that meets periodically and adopts resolutions of mandatory character for the coffee sector supported by the state (Cofenac); a new model (that even though Ecuador isn't a producer country by excellence and is not located in the first 20 places in production, has an exemplary model in organization matter) which, once adjusted to our needs, will develop favorably according to our production level.
- Acting hand by hand with the system by creating an organization exclusively for coffee that is covered by law. Producers, mediators, executives, sellers, state officials, carriers, entrepreneurs, all listed, regulated, supervised, and guided, and why not, restricted in areas that would develop in abuses or excesses.
- A governmental organization with the mission of promoting the development in coffee sector, where access to education, access to medical services, legal protection, and advice; are stipulated, respected, and developed for one and each of the participants.
These benefits will be reflected in social aspects, by diminishing the state's backwardness; economic aspects, by encouraging the development in diverse regions in need and ecological development, by promoting and providing responsible behavior in soil management, agricultural techniques and technologies for our producers.
- This association must publish a list of prices of immovable character, where every abuse and violation has its corresponding consequences.
- A governmental organization that, through its technical division, does research, training, gives technical advice, and plans every activity related to export promotions, and opportunities.
- A governmental organization that integrates diverse representatives of the coffee chain, including the state, and private participation; preferably advised in agricultural knowledge.
- An organization priority is to generate consciousness in, and for the creation of innovative technologies and methods to increase the performance and quality of the product, as well as to allocate an amount of money to the establishment of schools in the state.
- Finally reaching that famous, and known by so many people, dream once proposed in the United Nations Conference on environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992.

Conclusions

Coffee is by excellence a product enjoyed and consumed worldwide, because of its bitter, pleasant and intense flavor, its attractive and recognizable scent, aside of its multiple benefits. It should be a requisite that a product of that magnitude, quality and acceptance, has an equally favorable origin. Through the proper organization, awareness, creating consciousness, and developing the previous model, the most

affected and undeveloped state of one of the main global producers in the coffee market will be able to progress, and hopefully better opportunities will open up for the people in the state living in exclusion.

Trough fair trade we'll be able to taste even more the exquisite and popular infusion for it will include in every sip the guarantee of welfare for our producers.

And let's not forget that in order to produce a change of great size, we need to assume our own responsibilities, we need to feel the need to seek better living conditions, for us and for society, the development of these needs as the priority.

As my brother would say: It is a moral, social and spiritual duty that us people that "know", have in sharing, seeking, transmitting, motivating, and pursuing the development of our specie; favoring personal and social growth that will lead us to overcome, succeed, and progress as individuals and nations.

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