

RE-ASSEMBLING THE ECONOMY

WORK, LIFE, AND VALUE IN CATALONIA



Re-Assembling the Economy

Work, Life, and Value in Catalonia

Vinzenz Bäumer Escobar

Colofon

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Re-Assembling the Economy Work, Life, and Value in Catalonia

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Werk, Leven en Waarde in Catalonië
(met samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Introduction

An increasing number of initiatives, organizations, and networks are challenging the hegemony of capitalism in Catalonia. These movements draw on a history of alternative economic practices that go back to the so-called Social Revolution of 1936 when economic and social life came under the control and management of workers and labor unions rather than the capitalist class (Mintz 2006; Souchy et al. 1974). Contrary to Margaret Thatcher's famous claim that "there is no alternative" to free market capitalism, what today's projects are trying to show is that "another world" is not only possible, but is in fact already in existence.¹

This dissertation is about the construction of alternative economic formations in Catalonia that are presented as alternatives to what my interlocutors saw as a conglomerate of hegemonic political and economic institutions often referred to as *el Sistema* ('the System'). To this end, I have conducted a total of 14 months of fieldwork with a so-called eco-network (*ecoxarxa*) in the Northern Catalonian country side and a cooperative-cum-social movement in Barcelona that acted as an umbrella organization for a multitude of eco-networks and other alternative economic projects throughout Catalonia. Both the eco-networks and the Cooperative² used a variety of *ein*s³ (tools or devices), such as a social currency, a food distribution network, and an alternative employment system, in order to create an economic system at "the margins of capitalism" (*al marge del capitalisme*), as my interlocutors would say. The idea was that in these margins people would be able to exercise a degree of ownership over 'the economy', and could pursue ways of life that were less reliant on global financial institutions and the state.

In Catalonia we clearly see that alternative economic practices are and have always been intertwined with political claims. The ability to take ownership of 'the economy' was often referred to in explicitly political terms such as *sobirania econòmica* (economic sovereignty), *autonomia* (autonomy), and *autogestió* (self-management) and can be read as a desire to assert a form of sovereignty beyond the domain of the state. This shows that alternative economic spaces should also be considered alternative

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- 1 The slogan "another world is possible" has been used by numerous social movements across the globe that challenge the hegemony of capitalism (Ponniiah and Fisher 2003). More recently a number of collectives, among them the Xarxa d'Economia Solidaria (XES) in Catalonia, have elaborated on this statement by saying: "*un altre món ja existeix*" (another world already exists) (XES 2019).
 - 2 Throughout this dissertation I will refer to the cooperative where I did my fieldwork simply as "the Cooperative" in order to retain the anonymity of the organization. For the same reasons, I do not specifically identify the location of the eco-network where I conducted fieldwork.
 - 3 While I understood Catalan, I carried out my research in Spanish. If I have left certain words untranslated in direct quotes they will therefore mostly be in Spanish. However, emic terms such as *eina*, *autogestió*, and *feina* circulated more widely among my interlocutors. In the running text these are therefore left in Catalan as much as possible, even though in many spaces people also spoke Spanish in addition to Catalan, meaning that many of these terms also circulated in Spanish.

political spaces in so far that economic diversity “always contains within it the seeds of economic *and* political alterity” (Jonas 2010, 5) [my emphasis]. Claims to economic alterity therefore not only raise discussions about exchange, value and production, but also invite contemplations about sovereignty, citizenship and the state. This emphasis on the political nature of alternative economic networks and their relation to the state is a current that runs through this dissertation.

The construction of an alternative economy was a laborious process that was experienced in terms of a continuous value struggle between *el Sistema* (the ‘System’) and *l’alternatiu* where the challenge was to create and maintain a measure of alterity in the face of what was seen as an ever-encroaching logic of capitalism and the state. This value struggle is reflected in much social scientific literature as well, particularly in human geography, where a leading question has been whether so called “alternative economic spaces” form radical departures from hegemonic politico-economic structures, or whether they are marginal experiments that are, in the end, actually complicit in the reproduction of capitalism (Gritzis and Kavoulakos 2015, 5; Jonas 2010, 11-12; Zademach and Hillebrand 2013, 13). Yet this line of inquiry has been shown to be prone to polarization and has a tendency to get stuck in dichotomous characterizations such as alternative/mainstream or informal/formal (Healy 2009; Jonas 2013). The problem is not only that these frameworks are essentialist or reductionist, but also that these categorizations do not really help us explain the social organization of something that is presented as alternative, nor what the significance is of pursuing these alternative modes of economic activity. In this dissertation I will therefore draw on recent perspectives from economic anthropology in order to address the complex ways in which alternative socio-economic configurations come into being in more processual ways.

In particular, I will open up the meaning of an “alternative economy” by exploring how alternative economic formations are embedded within a more general process of social reproduction and the pursuit of what the anthropologists Susana Narotzky and Niko Besnier call a “life worth living” (2014, S5). Indeed, in Southern Europe, concerns about the economy and increasing disenchantment with what is experienced as a corrupt political system have thrown the issue of what ‘the economy’ is into high relief, propelling the search for alternative models and ways of living. Examining how alternative economic practices are articulated in relation to livelihood projects is therefore a productive crossroads through which to analyze the shifting relation between society, economy and the state in contemporary Southern Europe.

In this thesis I will therefore not ask whether or not the eco-networks and the Cooperative were ‘really’ alternative or not, but will ask a different set of questions entirely. In what ways are alternative networks constructed and performed? How

is the boundary between what are seen to be different spheres – i.e., *el Sistema* vs *l’alternatiu* – produced? What is the significance of erecting this boundary and what kind of performative effects does this have? How is the production and circulation of value organized in these networks? Through what means is an “alternative” life realized? And what does it mean to lead an “alternative” life?

In the remainder of this introduction I will sketch out the research setting, and show the relevance of Catalonia as a place for studying alternative economies. Then I will situate my research in relation to the relevant literature and explain this dissertation’s contribution to the study of alternative economies. The relevance of this dissertation hinges on two points. First, I will show that despite attempts to deconstruct certain held for granted categories, previous research on so called “alternative economic spaces” (Leyshon et al. 2003) has been prone to become analytically stuck in dichotomous representations of the economy. In this dissertation I will draw on recent anthropological perspectives that move away from analyzing distinct regimes of value in favor of analyzing processes of valuation in relation to life-sustaining practices. In this way, I will show how alternative economic formations are given shape through everyday practices and discourses. However, alongside this work of deconstruction that has become popular in economic anthropology and the social sciences more broadly, my second point is that we also need to examine how the products that result out of the process of (re)assembling the economy – e.g., an “alternative economy” – can themselves become compelling social objects. In this sense I propose a morphology of the economy that traces the creation of specific forms of the economy, and analyzes how these forms themselves can become mobilizing agents that bring about meaningful action in the world. The remaining sections of the introduction will be devoted to an explanation of my methods, followed by a reflection on my position as a researcher, and finally an outline of the dissertation.

Research setting

When I first contacted the eco-network, they put me in touch with the inhabitants of a *masia* (estate) called Mas Jorda⁴ in the Northern Catalan countryside, which, at the time that I moved in, was the temporary home for the network’s storage place (*rebot*). After picking me up and driving through the forest, Vicenç pointed out the impressive *masia* nestled in amongst the trees on a hill across an outstretched patch of farmland. These kinds of rural structures could often be centuries old and are a common feature of the rural Catalan landscape. Nowadays, many *masias* are converted into rural tourism centers. This is also what Vicenç and two other members of the eco-

4 All names of persons and projects are pseudonyms.

network were in the process of doing. In addition, however, they also strived towards living as self-sufficiently and sustainably as possible. This involved, among other things, cultivating vegetables, herding livestock, and generating renewable energy through solar panels. As I later learned, this was also where the weekly encounters of the eco-network were held. The members of the eco-network lived in a dispersed manner throughout the *comarca* (county), but came together during these weekly meetings to socialize, discuss the organization of their network, and exchange goods and services in social currency. The majority of the network's members engaged in a variety of value-producing activities that were mostly but not exclusively related to food production. There were beer brewers and bakers, soap makers and cow herders, but also massage therapists and even an eco-village owner who would organize workshops and host people at the village in exchange for social currency. It was in the Northern Catalan countryside that they tried to, as stated on their website, "create a system of economic relations at the margins of capitalism".⁵

While I conducted fieldwork with this specific eco-network, it is important to note that there were in fact many networks spread throughout Catalonia.⁶ The concept of an eco-network as a vehicle towards exiting or overcoming capitalism was the brainchild of a group of anti-capitalist activists who came together in 2010 to found the first eco-network in a rural area in the north. Eco-networks maintained (trade) relations with other eco-networks in Catalonia, and most of them were affiliated to an organization that throughout this dissertation I will refer to simply as the Cooperative. Like the eco-networks, the Cooperative was the result of the coming together of activists in the early 2010s from various social movements such as De-Growth and the anti-corporate globalization movement.

The Cooperative had its base of operations in a squatted former therapeutic center called Can Xim in downtown Barcelona. From this location, a group of approximately 40 dedicated, remunerated activists worked towards realizing alternative economic systems that would enable people to live beyond the reach of the state and capital. The members of the Cooperative were organized into several committees that were tasked with carrying out specific tasks and managing specific projects. The activities and projects undertaken by the members of the Cooperative were many and also changed as the organization developed. I will explore their specific contents in more detail in the next chapter. Here I will only briefly mention some of the most notable projects that were up and running during the time that I spent at the Cooperative from

5 Whenever I quote directly from the website of the Cooperative and eco-network, I will not give links to the URLs in order to protect the identity of my interlocutors.

6 There were also a number of eco-networks in Valencia that copied the model of the Catalanian eco-networks. These, however, were not as active and I have not visited any of the Valencian eco-networks.

October 2016 until August of 2017: a telecommunications service that allowed people to have cheaper mobile phone services, a food distribution network that helped the eco-networks trade goods with each other, an interest-free bank, a social currency used by the eco-networks, and an alternative employment system that enabled people to be self-employed without having to register with the state as such.

As we can see, the eco-networks also made use of some of the services offered by the Cooperative. Moreover, the Cooperative also maintained political relations with many eco-networks and alternative economic projects throughout Catalonia. There was a complex system of governance based on consensus decision-making in an (open) assembly, which operated at various scales. Eco-networks and other smaller projects were seen as belonging to the *Local*. These local nodes then were organized into a regional network called a *Bioregió*. The three *Bioregions*, South, North, and East, were represented at the general assembly of the Cooperative in Barcelona which was referred to as *Global*. Both the Cooperative as well as the eco-network were based on principles of horizontality, direct participation and consensus-based decision-making in assemblies, instead of a supposedly more hierarchical style of governance that was seen as typical of *el Sistema*.

The people involved in the Cooperative and eco-networks were a diverse group of actors who are not easily put into fixed sociological categories. There were both young and old people, both highly educated and less educated persons, and both working-class and middle-class people. Some had been involved in social movements and countercultural organizations for their entire lives, while others only recently became politically active. Some came from privileged backgrounds, others were brought up in highly precarious positions, while others were what Narotzky and Besnier might call the “not so wealthy but not poor” (2014, S6). What they all had in common, however, was a deep sense of mistrust in political and economic institutions – i.e., ‘the System’ – to provide the conditions seen as necessary for a “life worth living” (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, S5), and a strong dedication to creating these conditions through alternative means. I will return to a more detailed examination of the Cooperative, eco-networks, and the people involved in these projects in the next chapter. At this point it is necessary to briefly situate the context within which the Cooperative and eco-networks should be seen and to explain the relevance of Catalonia as a site for studying alternative economic formations.

Research context

While alternatives to capitalism have arguably been a permanent feature of the economic landscape since the origins of industrial capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2006 [1996], 21), they have been gaining momentum and have enjoyed increased visibility

in more recent times marked by environmental, political, and economic crises. The so-called Solidarity Economy⁷ (SE) in particular has become increasingly visible and prominent on a global scale. SE is an umbrella term used internationally to describe various projects, organizations, enterprises, but also all kinds of more ‘informal’ or unregulated self-help groups, social currencies, and local food provisioning networks that, in carrying out a certain economic activity, prioritize social objectives as opposed to solely profit-oriented ends (Utting 2010, 1-2). The term SE has a long history but became more visible and institutionalized at a series of gatherings at the World Social Forum in the early years of the twenty-first century. Since then it has become increasingly recognizable on a global level through the tireless work of activists and organizations such as the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS) (Kawano et al. 2010, 1-2). While the SE is thus a global phenomenon, there appear to be certain hotspots where there is a congruence of grassroots organizing and increasing institutional support. Catalonia, and Barcelona in particular, is one of these regions where the current socio-political climate is favorable to the fomentation of the SE at both an institutional and more grassroots level. It is therefore a prime research setting to inquire into the vicissitudes of constructing alternative economic formations.

At an institutional level, since the ascent of Barcelona en Comú, the Catalan branch of the national left-wing party Unidas Podemos, there has been considerable support for stimulating the SE in Barcelona and neighboring regions. In 2016, for instance, the municipality made 24 million euros available for a Plan d’Impuls in order to stimulate the SE over the 2016-2019 period (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2014). Moreover, several non-governmental entities in Catalonia are making use of this moment to promote the SE in close collaboration with local municipalities. The SE is estimated to account for roughly seven percent of the Barcelonan GDP and projects affiliated to the wider SE range from energy cooperatives to consumer groups, and from publishing houses to telecommunication services (for an overview see Fernandez and Miró 2016). Barcelona will also host the 2020 World Social Forum of Transformative Economies where various movements related to the SE will gather in order to “deliver public visibility and recognition to transformative economy projects, as well as provide an alternative narrative to challenge hegemonic capitalist discourse” (WSFTE 2020).

7 Certain collectives prefer the usage of Solidarity Economy over Social *and* Solidarity Economy in order to more clearly differentiate the social from the solidarity economy. The social economy is generally seen as part of the so-called third sector of the economy. In order to be considered part of the social economy, then, it is sufficient to adapt a certain organizational structure (i.e., cooperatives, associations, foundations, etc.). However, this does not necessarily mean that certain values – such as, indeed, solidarity – are actually practiced and upheld. Solidarity Economy advocates, moreover, strive for a “more transformative approach to economic activism” rather than being merely complementary to the existing order (Miller 2010, 26-27). Throughout this dissertation I will indeed use Solidarity Economy as this was the preferred usage among the majority of my interlocutors.

Alongside the more recent institutional manifestation of the SE, we have also seen the proliferation of countless grassroots, unregulated alternative networks and projects spread throughout Catalonia that have, moreover, become increasingly integrated at a regional level. The Cooperative and eco-networks that I analyze in this dissertation fall into this category. These projects are akin to what the geographers Duncan Fuller and Andrew Jones call “alternative-oppositional institutions” (2003, 57). These are “institutions” in which participants are highly aware of the fact that they are intentionally building alternatives which “embody alternative values, organizational principles, and socio-economic practices” (Jonas 2010, 8). The forms of the economy my interlocutors were creating, however, did not necessarily ossify into “institutions”. In fact, my interlocutors preferred the usage of “alternative economy” “alternative economic system”, or “network” (*xarxa*). Indeed, among social movements in Barcelona, the ideal of the self-organizing network has not only become an organizational principle, but also a powerful “cultural ideal” that serves as a model for how society should work (Juris 2008, 11, 68-69). I will therefore use the more encompassing term ‘alternative economic formation’ to capture the broad range of forms of the economy my interlocutors were creating.

The current visibility of the SE has not occurred spontaneously and should be seen in relation to broader socio-political developments in Spain’s recent history. The 2008 financial crisis has had far-reaching consequences for many people from different classes across Spain (Molina and Godino 2013; Narotzky 2012). Moreover, regardless of the official end of the recession in Spain, overall levels of distrust and disenchantment remain high and the legitimacy of the Spanish government seems to stand on shaky grounds (Edelman 2020). This is particularly noticeable in Catalonia, where the struggle for independence has made Spain’s political crisis even more evident (Faber and Seguí 2019; Rübner Hansen 2017). This long-term sense of disenchantment with the national government and the global financial system has made people receptive to the idea of constructing alternatives to mainstream political and economic institutions. It is within this context that alternatives have become more visible to both the scholarly and public eye (Conil et al. 2012; Hughes 2015; Zademach and Hillebrand 2013).

The renewed popularity of alternative economic practices in Southern Europe is closely related to the question of what a “life worth living” should look like in contemporary Southern-Europe (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, 55). This has become an increasingly urgent matter that invites us to reconsider many commonly held assumptions about what ‘the economy’ is. One pathway towards rethinking the economy seems to be the possibility of an “alternative” life and economy. Yet how do we make sense of this? What are some of the analytical tools that we can draw on in order to come to an understanding of alternative economies and how these relate to the

question of livelihoods in Southern-Europe? In the following section I will discuss some of the more recent social scientific literature that has started to ask these questions, and explain my position vis-à-vis this literature and outline the specific contribution of this dissertation.

Locating Economic Alterity

The history of thinking about alternative economic formations arguably goes back to the early years of the development of industrial capitalism. Attempts by the political left to understand the capitalist mode of production often went hand in hand with the theorization of alternative economic models out of a desire for overcoming capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2006 [1996], 1). In reaction to classical political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, socialist and Marxist thinkers argued that the supposedly natural laws of the market that were said to bring prosperity to all were in actuality contingent upon the exploitation and marginalization of certain social classes (i.e., the working class) and in fact resulted in increasing wealth disparity. Instead, a socialist or communist model was posited in which the chains of the proletarians could be cast off and their creative capacities would be unleashed (Marx 1976 [1867]).⁸ These foundational perspectives later became influential in various iterations of Marxism, socialism, and other critical inquiries into economic practices that often straddled the boundary between theory and social practice (Gramsci 1971; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1947]; Lukács 1972 [1923]; Luxemburg 2003 [1913]; Trotsky 2010 [1931]). Here, I will not give an overview of the entire breadth of this history, but will limit myself to a number of more recent discussions in the social sciences that have begun to “[rethink] the economy” (Mitchell 2008; Narotzky and Besnier 2014, 54).

The question of economic alterity has not only been a constitutive element in Marxist and socialist literature, but also in the history of economic anthropology. Indeed, some of the earliest texts in economic anthropology dealt with uncovering so called “primitive” systems of exchange thought to be radically different from Western “market societies”, and analyzing how, within these systems, value was created and linked to the specific ways in which the circulation of goods, people, and spirits were organized (Bohannan 1955; Malinowski 1984 [1922]; Mauss 2002 [1925]). In trying to understand how non-Western economies differed from supposedly more advanced, capitalist economies in the West, economic anthropologists subsequently developed a specific

8 It is true that Marx and Engels distinguished their socialism from the “Utopian Socialism” of earlier thinkers (Engels 1999 [1880]; Marx 1976 [1867]). But this should be seen as an attempt to make socialism as such more credible. This does not take away the fact that their “scientific socialism” shared with so-called “utopian” socialists an alternative vision of the way that socio-economic relations could be organized.

analytical vocabulary that was premised on the assumption that there were various, bounded regimes of value constituted by their own particular logics. Moreover, these different spheres of the economy were, ultimately, thought to be incompatible with one another. This assumption underpinned a series of dichotomies such as informal/formal, gift-economy/commodity-economy, pre-capitalist mode of production/capitalist mode of production, community/market, and embedded/disembedded which were often mapped onto the more general distinction between the non-West and the West (Hart 1973; Gregory 1982; Gudeman 2001; Meillasoux 1974, Polanyi 2001 [1944]).⁹

The great merit of these works is that they question the universality of certain forms of economic conduct and show that there are economic formations and forms of generating value that diverge from the way Western “market economies” are structured. However, in documenting supposedly incompatible spheres of the economy and locating them in specific geographical spaces, early economic anthropologists contributed to the modern understanding of the economy as, in the words of Timothy Mitchell, “the structure or totality of relations of production, circulation, and consumption within a given geographical space” (2006, 183). In other words, the economy is here understood as a distinct, reified social sphere that encompasses all the activities, social relations, and ways of being in a specific geographical location that are viewed as economic. This is not only still a commonly held notion of the economy in popular discourse, but one that continues to haunt much social scientific research. This is evident when looking closely at the literature on what in human geography have been called “alternative economic spaces”.

Alternative Economic Spaces and the Problem of Alterity

In human geography there is a substantial body of work that deals with alternative economic formations (Jonas et al. 2010; Lee 2006; Leyshon 2005; Parker et al. 2014; Schulz and Kruger 2018; Williams et al. 2012; Wright 2010). Here the focus is on mapping various alternative spaces, discussing their political-economic potential, and examining their ‘alterity’ (i.e., to what extent certain phenomena can be considered ‘alternative’)

9 These dichotomies and the reification of difference between the West and the non-West were perhaps a lingering result of the conclusion of the debate between substantivists and formalists in the 1960’s (Burling 1962; Cancian 1966; Cook 1966; Dalton 1976; Polanyi 1944, 1957; LeClaire and Schneider 1968). Where formalists argued that the entirety of economic life, regardless of its geography, could be studied using formal economic models (e.g., rational choice theory, marginal utility, etc.), substantivists argued that non-Western economies functioned according to radically different logics. Ultimately, the substantivists thereby ceded the study of Western, supposedly advanced capitalist economies to the formalists, effectively erecting an epistemic boundary between “market societies” in the West and “non-market societies” everywhere else.

(Rosol 2020).¹⁰ A number of observers have noticed that this debate has a tendency to polarize, and have identified a divide between what have been called “believers” and “skeptics” (Fickey and Hanrahan 2014, Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2015, Healy 2009). The “believers” generally follow the feminist geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham, known under the author name J.K. Gibson-Graham.¹¹ They argue that societies are never entirely capitalist and propose to reveal the inherent diversity of economic life through the notion of a diverse economy (Gibson-Graham 2006a [1996], 2006b, 2013). On the other hand, skeptical researchers, often coming from a more classic political-economy position, believe that many so-called alternatives only end up reproducing familiar power structures and should be seen as just another stage in the steady march of Capital (Narotzky 2012b; Samers 2005).

This debate revolves around the problematic definition of ‘alternative’. Often this leads to the argument that something alternative by definition requires a referent to which it is, indeed, alternative. Studies on alternative economic spaces therefore tend to understand the alternativeness or “alterity” of a particular phenomenon in terms of what it is not; a consumer group is not a supermarket (Johnston et al. 2009), a time bank is not a corporate bank (Schor et al. 2014), and a social currency is not fiat money (North 2007, 2010). Alterity is thus always characterized in terms of lack in relation to a particular mainstream referent. Many studies on “alternative economic spaces” therefore tend to turn into definitional battles over how we need to understand alterity and are built around dichotomous categorizations such as alternative/mainstream, informal/formal, and local/global.

The underlying problem seems to be, as the geographer Andrew Jonas notes, that alterity is here thought of in terms of “fixed taxonomic categories” (2013, 29). That is, there seems to be an assumption that there is a clearly demarcated mainstream or dominant economy to which there are alternatives that simply need to be discovered or, alternatively, shown to somehow still belong to the dominant economy. Jonas instead proposes that we view alternatives as “evolving processes” and to examine how alternative economic spaces are always caught up in a “strategic interplay between mainstream and oppositional forces” and are subject to changes over time (2013, 41). However, Jonas and others who follow this more relational approach to alterity within

10 Some anthropologists have also asked this question about alternative economic projects (Alquezar et al. 2012). Others, particularly in the anthropology of food and alternative food networks (Goodman et al. 2012), have moved away from discussions of alterity and view alternative economic formations in relation to processes such as civic participation, the morality of provisioning practices, and the shifting relation between state and society (Grasseni 2013; Ichinkhorloo 2018; Luetchford and Pratt 2011; Maurer 2005, 2008; Orlando 2011; Jung et al. 2014, Siniscalchi and Counihan 2014).

11 Julie Graham passed away in 2010, yet Katherine Gibson continues to publish under the moniker J.K. Gibson-Graham. In this dissertation I will do the same and consistently refer to them as Gibson-Graham.

social geography still propose that “from these dynamic processes” we can continue to distill “concrete abstractions” that are less reductionist and more sensitive to “territory and context” (2013, 42).

Yet the problem is not only that certain categories or dichotomous distinctions are essentialist, reductionist, or not grounded in a specific social context, but also that these categorizations do not bring us towards a better understanding of economic formations that are presented as alternative, nor what the significance is of pursuing these alternative modes of economic activity. So rather than assuming that there are alternative or dominant economies to be found as real structures in the world, I will argue that it is more productive to examine how these categories are built up through everyday practices and discourses. In this dissertation I will therefore draw on recent insights from economic anthropology that shift our focus more towards processes of valuation and their entanglements with various life-sustaining practices. In this way, it will be possible to come to a more processual understanding of alternative economies.

From “the Economy” to Economization

Recent perspectives in economic anthropology have problematized the above-mentioned dichotomous and essentialist representations of economic life and have focused on processes of valuation rather than the classification of different supposedly incompatible regimes of value (Appadurai 1986; Elyachar 2005; Miller 2008; Munn 1992; Robben 1989; Roitman 2005; Strathern 1988; Thomas 1991). These works do not assume that the structure of economic relations *eo ipso* define the value of certain goods, but instead put forward the view that goods can also undergo changes in their status. Jane Guyer, quoting the historian Philip Mirowski, puts it this way: “value is contingent, hermeneutic, negotiable and non-natural” (Mirowski in Guyer 2004, 13). What this means is that goods, persons, and everything in between do not derive their value from some kind of unchanging value domain – be it a “gift-economy” or a “commodity economy” – but that the value of something comes about in a relational process, is therefore subject to changes in value status, and can be measured according to different “scales of value” (2004, 20). Anna Tsing, for instance, has shown how Matsutake mushrooms, as they travel across global commodity chains, are in fact continuously converted from gifts into commodities and back again, rather than circulating in neatly circumscribed gift and/or commodity economies (Tsing 2013, 22-24).

A similar move towards deconstructing ‘the economy’ has been made in economic sociology. Building on anthropological perspectives on valuation processes, the sociologists Koray Çalişkan and Michel Callon argue that what we consider to be ‘economic’ is always a variable outcome of a continuous process of circumscribing various structures and their consequent assembly that makes it possible for certain

phenomena to appear to have an economic character (Çalışkan and Callon 2009, 386-391). Seen in this way, the various guises of the economy – formal or informal, gift or commodity, capitalist or non-capitalist – do not exist as such, but are abstractions that come to take on the appearance of discrete and discernable social forms through a complex yet mundane process of assembly, configuration, and articulation that Çalışkan and Callon refer to as “economization” (Callon 1998a; Çalışkan and Callon 2009, 2010). What this perspective achieves is to unsettle our understanding of ‘the economy’ in the sense that what is considered ‘economic’ is not set in stone, but, rather, becomes an emergent category.

These perspectives move us from thinking about the economy as a distinct sphere towards a more processual approach wherein the economy is something that is continually made and re-made through everyday practices. Or, as Narotzky and Besnier write, this kind of approach assumes that “the economy does not preexist economic action but rather that it is constituted by it” (2014, S12). Following these insights, a number of works in economic sociology and the anthropology of finance have examined how the economy is constituted through everyday practices in the world (Appel 2017; Callon 1998a; Holmes 2009; Mackenzie and Muniesa 2007; Muniesa 2014).

However, research that looks at how “the economy” is made or “performed” often focuses on how “experts” – economists, bankers, stock traders, financial consultants, politicians – produce certain bodies of knowledge that are, in turn, constitutive of certain economic formations. In this conceptualization, the abovementioned work of Callon has been widely influential. Following a similar line of inquiry yet somewhat separate from the work of Callon, Mitchell has also called for analyses into how “the economy” is a product of boundary making by economists and other elite actors in the context of state-building projects (Mitchell 1998; 2006; 2008). The economy, however, as Narotzky reminds us, is not only built by elite actors at national and transnational levels, but also at a more “grassroots” level by people who do not have access to the kinds of privileged networks and knowledge domains that “experts” do (Narotzky 2012a). In this dissertation, I therefore align myself with Narotzky and build on her inquiries into how “ordinary people” construct “folk” models of the economy and attempt to make these manifest in practice (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, S5). But what are some of the analytical tools that we can draw on to study this process?

Making a Living

Narotzky’s research investigates how “ordinary people”, in times of crisis, “operate with coping strategies that enable them to locate increasingly elusive resources” in order to enhance their “well-being” and pursue what she, together with Besnier, calls “a life worth living” (2014, S6). For Narotzky and Besnier, the crucial point is that the pursuit of

a life worth living involves “dynamics that are not commonly thought of as ‘economic’ or that are often defined by mainstream economics as malfunctioning, deficient, or as signs of ‘developmental backwardness’” (2014, S6). In making a living, people rely on more than just wage labor and turn to unregulated networks of reciprocity, the development of new skills and forms of work, and the production and distribution of material but also immaterial resources (e.g., trust or solidarity).

More than works in economic sociology, Narotzky points out how “the economy” is created through the life-sustaining practices of “ordinary people” and their entanglements with a plurality of value frameworks. In so doing, she joins a number of anthropologists who, in the wake of the de-construction of “the economy”, have started to foreground how people make a living for themselves through processes of valuation and various life-sustaining practices that may certainly involve more conventional income-generating activities (such as waged labor), but often go beyond what are normally considered to be economic activities (Kasmir and Carbonella 2014; Millar 2018; Narotzky and Goddard 2017; Tsing 2015).¹² This shift towards examining how people make a living seems to be particularly salient in recent ethnographies of Southern Europe in the context of crisis and austerity (Knight 2016; Knight and Stewart 2016; Muriel 2017; Narotzky et al. 2013; Spyridakis 2013).

On an empirical level, the subject matter of this thesis owes much to Narotzky’s work. I too am interested in how people make a living for themselves through activities that may fall outside of the purview of conventional economics. Moreover, the people I encountered during my research certainly engaged in a radical re-thinking of what the economy meant for them and indeed tried to put into practice their own “folk” models of the economy. On an analytical level, however, I think that even though Narotzky and Besnier purposely leave open the content of categories such as “a life worth living” and “well-being”, they still seem to rely on the assumption that people in a situation of crisis ultimately desire a stable and/or comfortable existence. Narotzky and Besnier’s definition of well-being, after all, is as follows: “The accomplishment of socially reasonable expectations of *material and emotional comfort* that depend on access to the diverse resources needed to attain them” (2014, S4) [my emphasis]. In her reflections on alternative economic projects, Narotzky emphasizes that alternative

12 It is important to note that the move to open up empirical analysis beyond what is generally considered to be the economic domain was influenced by, and in fact already anticipated in, feminist anthropology and feminist economics. Scholars working in these fields have shown that practices of care, unpaid work, and all sorts of provisioning practices that usually fall beyond the purview of traditional economics are actually integral elements of a general process of social reproduction and, in turn, are therefore crucial to our understanding of the economy (Beasley 1994; Collins 1990; Edholm et al. 1977; Molyneux 1979; Robinson 2006; Waring 1988).

practices emerge from “the dire necessity of making a living in moments of crisis or endemically marginal situations” (2012b, 243).

Yet, as I will show in more detail in chapters two and three, my interlocutors were not exclusively motivated by a situation of economic duress born out of the 2008 economic crisis. In fact, many of my interlocutors eschewed a more bourgeois notion of comfort and consciously put themselves in what seemed, at first glance, to be rather uncomfortable and precarious situations. As we were getting some lunch after an assembly, Iker once put it this way: “*cobro una miseria* (I hardly get by), but I don’t complain ... it’s for the revolution”. We find parallels to these kinds of dispositions in research on livelihoods in the Global South, where people often avoid certain “formalized” ways of working in favor of remaining “informal” (Gandolfo 2013; O’Hare 2019). So here it is useful to turn to research on informal economic practices in the Global South where a number of scholars have come to a similar perspective as Narotzky’s through a re-thinking of the so-called informal economy, yet without relying on a limited understanding of what life or well-being means.

Disentangling Informal and Alternative

The category of the ‘informal economy’ or ‘informality’ brings forth some of the same analytical problems posed by the concepts ‘alternative economy’ and ‘alterity’. The informal economy, as it is conventionally understood since Keith Hart first coined the term, consists of all market and non-market activities that are neither officially recognized nor regulated in any ‘formalized’ manner by state institutions (1973, 68). Here we can think of professions such as street vendors, waste pickers, unpaid family labor, unregulated small-scale family enterprises, etc. Many alternative economic projects, such as indeed the eco-network and the Cooperative, could potentially fall into this category in the sense that they are not, or are only partially, regulated and recognized by the state. Some authors have in fact equated alternative economies with the informal economy (Collins and Windebank 2003). However, I align myself with geographer Michael Samers’s stance that we should be careful not to conflate informality with alternatives (2005, 876). After all, the highly formalized and multinational Mondragon cooperative would hardly be considered ‘informal’, even though it certainly could be considered ‘alternative’ to more conventional ‘capitalist’ business models.¹³

Similar to what we have seen above in the case of alternative economic activity, the informal economy is generally understood as everything the formal economy is not

13 I should note here that ‘alternative’ does not mean that there are no oppressive structures and power relations in these kinds of organizations. Indeed, Sharryn Kasmir (1996) has shown that the Mondragon Cooperative is not free from conventional modes of worker exploitation that we also find in more ‘capitalist’ firms.

(Breman 1976a, 1976b, 1976c; Peatie 1987). Several authors have noted this problem, yet often conclude that there is simply no other way of defining the informal sector (Millar 2018, 15; Roy 2005). The geographers Colin Williams and Jan Windebank, for instance, write that it is “problematic” to define informal activity in a dualistic frame such as informal/formal because this “fails to recognize the diversity of practices on both sides of the equation” (2003, 128). Yet ultimately they conclude that we simply must use this distinction due to the fact that “no other definition of the ‘informal’ is possible” (2003, 128). So even though several analysts have argued that the distinction between informal and formal is mostly an analytical construction that breaks down in practice, these categories continue to haunt much contemporary scholarship.

The anthropologist Kathleen Millar, however, has tried to go beyond an analytical position where informal practices can only be known in a negative sense as what they are not (2018, 15). In her research on *catadores* (waste pickers) in Rio de Janeiro’s largest garbage dump Jardim Gamacho, she noticed that this kind of informal work is often described in terms of a last resort, a survival strategy carried out by marginalized people at the edges of society, and is thus perceived as “the very embodiment of lack” (2018, 8). That is, waste picking as an unregulated, unprotected, and precarious activity is everything that a stable job is not. Millar, however, argues that instead of focusing on what waste picking supposedly lacks, we should “theorize the positive qualities” of informal economic practices where positive is meant “in the sense of what something is rather than what it is not” (2018, 15).

This is similar to Gibson-Graham’s (2006a [1996]) project of going beyond a “capitalocentric” discourse which obscures the existence of non-capitalist spaces and of economic activity that does not conform to a supposedly uniform capitalist logic. Instead, they propose to take alternatives seriously on their own terms. However, where Gibson-Graham keep certain categories or dichotomies such as alternative/mainstream or informal/formal alive in order to “bring to light” to different economic forms and “establish their credibility, vitality, and viability” (2006 [1996], xxii), Millar quite bluntly states that she “dispenses with the conceptual language of the formal and informal economies” altogether (2018, 15). Instead, she conceptualizes “the act of collecting recyclables on a dump not as a survival strategy, not as informal labor, not even as a purely economic practice” but, rather, as a “form of living” (2018, 9). I would like to explore her understanding of this term in somewhat more detail, as it is a useful way of seeing how alternative economies are constructed through everyday practices, but also discourses.

Forms of Living

For Millar, forms of living refers both to making a living in the sense of “income, sustenance, or livelihood” but also to “a specific mode of inhabiting the world”. It is, in short, “both a livelihood and a way of life” (2018, 9). What this means is that Millar, much like Narotzky, pays attention to the material ways in which people secure their livelihoods through a variety of activities that, importantly, go beyond just wage labor. Moreover, forms of living also refers to a particular way, style or form in which various life-sustaining activities are carried out. Drawing on the legacy of the historian E.P. Thompson and his “anti-economistic approach” (2018, 11), Millar emphasizes that people have all kinds of ideas and values that guide and give shape to their livelihood strategies. Working on the “dump”, rather than being just a survival strategy, also offered people a sense of flexibility and autonomy over their lives that a more conventional form of employment would not be able to give them (Millar 2014, 33-35). Similarly, my interlocutors, while often still employed in a conventional sense, would look to find ways to become less dependent on waged labor in order to act out a certain style, way or, indeed, form of living that was not possible within the confines of a more routinized or “capitalist” work rhythm.

In addition to an emphasis on the morality of economic action, Millar raises the point that life-sustaining activities that are considered to be informal do not, in fact, lack form. She shows that while the activities of her interlocutors did not conform to a particular formalized way of organizing economic life, the *catadores* most certainly engaged in creating spaces and forms of organizing their livelihoods. Rather than categorize certain spheres of the economy, Millar calls attention “to the ways that different materials, relations, and practices in economic life *take shape*” (2018, 15) [emphasis in original]. In emphasizing the generative capacity of informal practices, Millar writes that she moves away from a hylomorphic understanding of social life in which form (*morphe*) is imposed from the outside on formless matter (*hyle*). In breaking with this hylomorphic model, Millar joins a host of social theorists who preach a processual perspective of the world and posit that form is, in the words of Tim Ingold (2014, 433), “ever emergent instead of given in advance” (Barad 2003; Deleuze and Guatarri 2004; Latour 2005; Simondon 2007, Bryant 2012)

This generative potential of practices that do not conform to a particular formalized logic is undeniable in the case of the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks. As I will show throughout this dissertation, while they often operated outside of the formal requirements of the law, they created their own systems of exchange, organizations, and ways of doing that were structured in a very specific, and, indeed, highly formalized way. Members of the Cooperative, for instance, were at times relieved of the pressure

of dealing with state bureaucracies, but still had to navigate the formalized and complicated organizational structures of the Cooperative itself.

Despite slight differences in their approaches, both Narotzky and Millar draw us away from categorizing different supposedly oppositional value regimes, and towards an analysis of the economy in terms of how people live and make a living for themselves in the world. In this dissertation I want to draw on these insights in order to open up the meaning of an “alternative economic space”. That is, rather than assume that there are specific domains of economic life out there that can be categorized along certain oppositions such as alternative/mainstream, I will pay attention to how these categories emerge out of the life-sustaining practices and processes of valuation in which my interlocutors engaged. In so doing, I will go beyond discussions of alterity and dichotomous representations of the economy and contribute to rethinking the economy. However, while I draw substantially on this body of literature that deconstructs various taken-for-granted distinctions and categories, there are limitations to this work of deconstruction that need to be recognized in order to truly grasp the nature of alternative economies.

A Return to Form?

The above-mentioned developments in the social sciences are ultimately concerned with breaking down certain taken-for-granted categories. The central point seems to be that there is no *a priori* economic domain or economic subject that somehow pre-exists our attempts at understanding it, but that what we consider to be economic is always an emergent category that is, moreover, shaped by the very analytical constructs we use to describe it. The emphasis has therefore shifted from documenting a particular form of the economy (i.e., a “market economy” or a “gift economy”), to the process through which some kind of economic form is brought about. Millar talks about the economy as an “effect” of the “interplay between different forms of living” (2018, 15). Similarly, Gandolfo, in her study on street vendors in Lima, writes that the economy is the result of different forces that are in a process of “coalescing and colliding in a frenzy of mimesis and contagion” (2013, 90). In their influential piece “Gens: a Feminist Manifesto for the Study of Capitalism”, Laura Bear, Karen Ho, Anna Tsing and Sylvia Yanagisako make a similar argument when they write that any economic structure is always “heterogeneously made through process of aligning multiple projects, converting them towards diverse ends” (2015). These perspectives foreground the contingency, complexity, heterogeneity, and general messiness of how economic forms come into being.

This work of deconstruction, dissection, and disassembly of “the economy” has proven to be a fruitful endeavor that has greatly enriched our understanding of how

people make a living in the world. My interlocutors, in fact, engaged in a similar practice through rethinking the ways in which the economy should be organized. However, at the same time as they took apart in commonly held understandings of “the economy”, they also looked for different ways in which they could re-assemble it, and did so in very particular ways. That is to say, my interlocutors had very clear ideas about the kinds of economic forms they wanted to actuate. As I will explore in chapter four, this was to be an “*economía de confianza*” where goods and services would be produced locally and traded with known, trusted exchange partners. And in chapter three we will see how it was imperative that this economy was organized horizontally, without “bosses” and hierarchies. Moreover, in the process of constructing these forms, I will show how my interlocutors in fact mobilized certain reified categories and distinctions such as those between *capitalismo* and *alternativo*, formal and informal.

These kinds of well-articulated reflections on the structure of the economy may indeed not be as prevalent among, say, waste pickers in Rio de Janeiro or precariously employed workers in Greece (Millar 2018; Spyridakis 2013). Yet neither are they exclusive to bankers, economists, consultants, or corporate actors (Appel 2019; Holmes 2009). Indeed, my interlocutors were highly reflexive agents when it came to this matter. The members of the Cooperative in particular would often say that it was their “life project” (*proyecto de vida*) to create certain domains of economic life that were thought to be free from intrusion by global capitalism or *el Sistema* (‘the System’) and for this purpose developed elaborate systems, models, and theories about how the economy should look like. Here I will follow Stephen Collier (2011, 27) who, in his study on neoliberalism in post-socialist Russia, not only traces how “the Soviet social was assembled”, but also pays attention to how ideas about “the social” were mobilized by Soviet city planners themselves in their own attempts to assemble the social. To build upon Millar (2018), it was not just about seeking out and maintaining a particular alternative “form of living”, but it was also about bringing about specific *forms of the economy*. In practice, this proved difficult to achieve and the desire for the creation of alternative regimes of value was often, though not always, accompanied by failure and frustration. Moreover, there were diverging opinions of what the proper form of the economy should be. This often manifested itself in what I will call a battle of forms, where my interlocutors, through a variety of strategies, tried to convince each other of the best way to organize their alternative economy. This struggle showed me that certain forms of the economy had performative effects that greatly shaped the lives of my interlocutors.

Here I think Hannah Appel is correct when she writes that we need to not only see how the economy is “processual – continually made and remade in daily practice”, but also how these constructs themselves can become *compelling* emic categories that mobilize actors into taking specific actions (2017, 300). In her study on equatorial Guinea,

she shows how the “national economy” became a powerful category that mobilized all kinds of actors and made people take certain actions in the world. She therefore argues that the economy is not only a communicative field where various actors vie for resources and negotiate the terms under which they secure their livelihood, but a “*communicated* field of political contestation” (2017, 301). I therefore argue that when “rethinking the economy” (Mitchell 2008) we should not stop at the process through which certain forms of the economy are made intelligible, but also examine how these socio-material constructs themselves can bring about performative effects in the world. In this dissertation I will trace the construction of these forms and their performative effects through a morphology of the economy.

What I am arguing is that amidst the never-ending “frenzy of mimesis and contagion” (Gandolfo 2013, 90), the open-ended “interplay between different forms of living” (Millar 2018, 50), the continuous process of “economization” (Çalışkan and Callon 2009, 2010), and the perpetual unfolding of economic life, there are moments along the way where certain forms of the economy do ossify into tangible realities. Realities that, moreover, become *compelling* artefacts in their own right. The title of this dissertation, *Re-Assembling the Economy*, aims to capture this process. It refers to both the radical rethinking of the economy, and to how certain emergent or existing ways of doing are assembled and molded into intelligible, and tangible economic forms. It refers to a process of social ossification through which these forms were made durable and lasting, while at the same time acknowledging that these forms could also change and be intentionally broken down or disassembled. And it recognizes that economic formations are powerful and evocative forces that, in recursive fashion, inform the specific ways in which the economy is given shape.

Methods and Positionality

Thinking about alternative economic formations requires critically examining prevailing notions of ‘the economy’. Moreover, it urges us to reflect on the analytical tools that we can draw on in order to know this seemingly elusive object of enquiry. These ontological and epistemological considerations subsequently invite critical analysis of the methodology that we use, and call for a reflection about how to position oneself when doing research on alternative economies. In the following sections I will therefore explain what methods I used, and reflect upon my research positionality.

As I have explained above, the question of alterity, i.e. whether or not we can consider, for instance, a social currency alternative or not, is less of interest than analyzing how people make a living and understanding the experiential dimension of being alternative. Indeed, I find that often discussions on alternative economic spaces foreground organizational forms, discursive definitional battles over what ‘alternative’

is, and the ethics of being involved in an alternative economic project. While these are certainly important matters that I deal with in this dissertation as well, these kinds of inquiries often skirt over basic questions such as: Who are the people involved in alternatives? Where are they from? What do they do and where do they do these things? What kind of resources do they have at their disposal and what do they rely on for their livelihoods? What drives these people? And why is it so important to be ‘alternative’?

In getting at this day-to-day lived experience of economic life, it seems apt to draw upon the ethnographic methodological toolkit considering that ethnography is “a method of social science inquiry in which the researcher embeds herself in the ongoing interactions of a particular social setting or set of relations in order to understand and explain members’ lived experience” (Jerolmack and Khan 2018, xi). Ethnographic knowledge, therefore, is produced through relational encounters with a specific set of actors in an ever evolving “field” (Jerolmack and Khan 2018). There are numerous methods anthropologist draw on. In this research I have drawn on semi-structured interviews, document analysis, elicitation methods involving mostly visual material, and, most prominently, participant observation.

Participant observation revolves around a long-term stay in one or several places and “requires that researchers simultaneously observe and participate (as much as possible) in the social action they are attempting to document” (Hume and Mulcock 2004, i). This method is based on a number of practices such as participating in the activities of one’s interlocutors, but also informal conversations, hanging out or “being there”. One of the key characteristics of participant observation is therefore the (often awkward) “experience of being both inside and outside of the social action being documented” (Hume and Mulcock 2004, xviii). This dissertation is predominantly based on 14 months of participant observation in, mostly, two locations. From May 2016 until August 2016 I lived in a northern county (*comarca*) of Catalonia, where I carried out research with an eco-network, and a further ten months were later spent from October 2016 to July 2017 in Barcelona doing research with the Cooperative. While the Cooperative has a much larger online presence and is an internationally well-known example of an anti-capitalist project, these kinds of movements or projects are often reluctant to allow outsiders in. It is for this reason that I started my research at the Cooperative only after I had established connections with the members of the eco-network. This kind of snowball sampling, where harder to reach participants (or organizations) are contacted through previous connections (Noy 2008, 330), ultimately allowed me to gain access to the Cooperative and the alternative economy that its members were constructing. I will return to a discussion on the broader range

of methods that I used later on in this section. First, however, I will describe what participant observation in my field looked like.

Fieldwork in the eco-network

During one of my first visits to the weekly meetings of the eco-network I struck up conversation with one of the members. I told him I was interested in researching social currencies, as this was indeed the initial focus of my research. I was therefore surprised to hear him say: “the *moneda social* is an excuse to make networks (*hacer red*)”. As I became more involved in the network, I realized that the scope of this project was indeed much broader than I initially thought.

In terms of my participation, I joined the *xarxa* by opening an account in social currency and did my best to become an active member. Most of my social currency was earned through translating and by working for a beer brewer whom I would often help bottling beer or doing various chores around a house he was restoring. I spent my money on various foodstuffs in the *rebot* and even paid part of my rent in *moneda social*.¹⁴ Beyond using the social currency, I religiously attended the weekly meetings and any other events organized by the network. Here is where I established connections with the *xarxeires* and would ask if I could come visit them at their house or production site to see how they made the things they made. I made sure to attend all the assemblies. This is where political and organizational decisions were taken, but also was where the kind of performative work of shaping the economy that I was interested in was most visible. Moreover, through the members of the eco-network I learned about and visited a time bank, various consumer groups, and eco-villages, ultimately allowing me to get a good sense of what building an alternative economy looked like in this particular region. By “being there” I was therefore able to understand that what was at stake was indeed not just the promotion of a social currency, but the creation of networks and relations that allowed people to live a “life worth living” (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, S5).

During assemblies, the weekly meetings, my visits to the members of the eco-network, and any time I was in a situation where something relevant to my research interests happened, I always made sure to jot down observations in a small notebook I had on me at all times. At the end of each day, I would write more extensive notes based on the jots, headnotes, and observations that I had written down throughout the day. These longer observations were subsequently categorized according to specific themes

14 There are numerous ways in which we can refer to non-state-backed local currencies: alternative currencies, complementary currencies, community currencies, local currencies, or social currencies. My interlocutors generally saw their currency as an alternative to the euro, but would refer to their currency as *moneda social* to emphasize the fact that for them this currency (1) was more embedded in social relations, and (2) could in fact create these relations. In this dissertation I will therefore either use *moneda social* or the direct translation of social currency.

that I distilled throughout my research and which would later form the basis for my dissertation. I continued this practice during my fieldwork with the Cooperative, where I engaged in many of the same activities. However, because of the kind of organization that the Cooperative was, my fieldwork activities took on a slightly different form here as well.

Fieldwork in the cooperative

It was at an assembly that I first made contact with members of the Cooperative. The eco-network maintained ties with other alternative projects in the region and was represented at regional assemblies that were organized together with members of the Cooperative. After some e-mailing back and forth and a meeting in person with a member of the Welcoming Committee, I was given a space at the permanent assembly of the Cooperative in October of 2016. The way I explained my position as a researcher upon entering was that while being sympathetic towards alternative economic models, I was not an activist per se, in the sense that my research would not have any immediate practical application such as, for instance, replicating the model of the Cooperative in my country of origin. I did, however, offer my assistance with any tasks that members of the Cooperative thought they would need my help for. Below I will reflect more extensively upon my role as a researcher among activists. Here I will only state that my proposal was approved and that I ended up becoming a collaborating member of the Welcoming Committee.

My role in the Welcoming Committee involved assisted the committee in some of its tasks. In practice, this came down to helping out during the weekly welcoming sessions where newcomers and people interested in the Cooperative were given information about the organization and its many activities. Towards the end of my research, I even gave some of these welcoming sessions entirely by myself and became one of the 'go-to' persons to guide around international visitors to the Cooperative, explaining the Cooperative's goals and functioning, and sometimes even taking them to visit the eco-network or other projects in the region. In this way, I got a sense of the performative work that went into presenting alternative economic formations to "the outside world". Beyond these tasks, I also took up cleaning, occasional cooking tasks, and regularly covered the reception desk at the downtown office space of the Cooperative.

As part of the Welcoming Committee, I was not only able to attend assemblies, but also less publicly accessible internal meetings regarding interior affairs of the Cooperative. These mostly took place at the downtown location of the Cooperative in Barcelona known as Can Xim, a former high-end therapeutic center that the Cooperative was now squatting and which functioned as its base of operation. This was where

members of the Cooperative came to work, and some even lived in small rooms on the upper floor.¹⁵ When I was not attending assemblies or meetings, I would simply be present in Can Xim. Often I would sit next to Valerie or Isabel at the reception desk who would confide in me about the latest gossip and share their perspectives about what was happening in the Cooperative. Beyond more formalized events such as the assemblies and various meetings, I thus also came to experience the ‘back-stages’ of the Cooperative through hallway conversations, digital Telegram groups, and other more informal gatherings outside of the office space. In this sense my research follows a tradition of “organizational ethnographies” that “[reveal] the ‘black box’ of organizations” and “can capture both formal and informal organizing structures and practices, revealing both how organizations are supposed to operate and how they actually operate in practice” (Chen 2018, 35).

Beyond my responsibilities as a collaborating member of the Welcoming Committee, participant observation largely consisted of attending various assemblies and meetings. During one stretch of my research, it was common for me to attend at least two assemblies a week as I went to the assemblies of the Cooperative, the eco-network, the Bioregions, the Welcoming Committee and other committees. I also attended assemblies by other collectives such as the Xarxa de la Economia Solidaria (XES) or the Coordinadora de Monedas Sociales which was a network that consisted of various representatives of a number of different social currency systems throughout Catalonia. These assemblies not only allowed me to keep up to date with developments in the Cooperative and the wider social and solidarity scene in Catalonia, but were a fruitful source of ethnographic material in the sense that it was here that (1) the relational dynamics of the field were most clearly displayed, and (2) that an alternative economy was given shape through intense debate about the distribution of resources, the overall strategic vision of the Cooperative, but also about more mundane issues such as what software to use and how the tables should be arranged during an assembly.

Additional methods

In addition to participant observation, I conducted 55 semi-structured interviews guided by topic lists. These interviews were recorded and transcribed, except for two occasions when interviewees indicated that they did not want the interview to be recorded. With people that I met regularly during my fieldwork, such as members

15 I only spent the last month of my fieldwork living in Can Xim. I consciously chose not to live there, as I did not want to take up space in the Cooperative that could be used for other people who stayed for shorter periods of time. Moreover, the intensity of life at Can Xim could be very high indeed. The first day I entered, one of the residents jokingly said: “Welcome to the insane asylum!”. For the purposes of my research I therefore thought it would be more conducive to have some distance from this kind of high-intensity environment.

of both the eco-network and the Cooperative, these interviews took on the format of life history interviews with a particular focus on their previous 'careers' in social movements, alternative economic projects, and other associations that shaped their current position as members of alternative economic networks (Ladkin 2002). As the Cooperative was a dynamic organization that has gone through a number of changes over the past years, I also made sure to interview a number of former members of the Cooperative in order to get a sense of the development of the Cooperative over time. I have also interviewed people who made use of the Cooperative's services, but who were not involved in the same way as the core members. In addition, I have also interviewed key figures in the Solidarity Economy scene in Barcelona, and a small number of local government officials.

While my research was predominantly based on participant observation and semi-structured one-to-one interviews, I have drawn on a broader range of methods throughout my stay in Catalonia. In particular, I have done a fair amount of visual documentation in the form of both pictures and videos. This material was shared with my interlocutors in a number of ways. For the eco-network I edited a short video which they were able to make use of for promotional purposes. Other clips and pictures were used by members of the Cooperative in promotional material on their website and other digital spaces. I have also done some document analysis of the minutes of assemblies and various protocols set up by the Cooperative. These documents were held on the internal server of the Cooperative to which I did not have access. However, if there was a particular document that I wanted to access, I could always ask one of my fellow committee members to pass it on to me.

Lastly, I also helped conduct an observational survey during the assemblies of the Cooperative. This was an initiative started by a group of people in the Cooperative who wanted to bring awareness to the gendered power dynamics in the Cooperative. For this purpose, we counted the amount of interventions made by men, women and people who did not identify along this binary, and categorized these interventions according to their style. We looked at, for instance, whether someone interrupted another person, or whether they showed that they were actively listening (for more information see Appendix 1). The results of these observations were shared and discussed with other members of the Cooperative in an attempt to address the organization's gendered power structures. These elicitation techniques, where I shared my material and discussed my findings with members of the Cooperative and eco-networks, was not only a way in which I tried to make my research more collaborative, but also a useful way of generating ethnographic material. Elicitation techniques, after all, allowed my interlocutors to share their reflections about certain topics, evaluate the way the

Cooperative and eco-networks were portrayed, and share how they envisioned their ideal society (Harper 2002).

However, as Tom Boelstorff notes, elicitation methods are often “predicated on the belief that culture is something in people’s heads: a set of viewpoints that an interviewee can tell the researcher, to appear later as an authoritative block quotation in the published account” (2012, 54). Boelstorff raises the point that people can be very eloquent in formulating their world views and why they pursue certain activities, but that there are many things that people cannot articulate (2012, 54-57). These are the more embodied, tacit expressions of social life that are not so easily elicited through methods that explicitly invite verbalized reflections. For this reason I have followed Boelstorff and combined long-term participant observation with elicitation methods.

There were few formal barriers to the amount of access I had to the Cooperative. As long as I asked permission beforehand, I was allowed to attend any assembly, meeting, or other type of gathering that I wanted to. However, beyond the issue of access, there were other elements at play that affected the way I could carry out my research. As these were mostly related to my research positionality, I would like to dedicate the following section to a reflection on my position as a researcher.

Researcher not activist

Earlier we saw that Gibson-Graham intend to go beyond “capitalocentric” analyses of the economy (2006a [1996]). This analytical project is in fact part and parcel of a radical critique of a positivist, objectivist, and value-neutral understanding of the social sciences. Following postmodern reflections on the production of scientific knowledge, Gibson-Graham argue that a corpus of scientific writing is never a mere description or reflection of a given state of affairs (2008, 614-616). Rather than assuming some kind of distance through which a measure of so-called objectivity can be attained, then, Gibson-Graham and others call for a “post-capitalist politics” which revolves around “developing a new language of the diverse economy, activating ethical economic subjects, and imagining and enacting collective actions that diversify the economy” (Community Economies 2019). These are some of the core tenants of their research project which are embodied in initiatives like the Community Economies Collective and the Community Economies Research Network. Scholars who are affiliated to these projects often take on a position of advocacy or activism in order to actively promote and perform alternative, diverse, or community economies. This move towards more engaged research is mirrored in some recent ethnographic research on social movements that calls for militant or engaged scholarship (Juris 2008, Graeber 2009, Maeckelbergh 2009). These researchers see their academic work as an extension or even as a supporting edifice for their activist work.

Looking at my own research, I have also worked and lived with people who positioned themselves against the state and global financial systems and operated at the borders or legality. However, unlike more “militant” ethnographers (Juris 2008), I was not an activist already committed to social movements who then decided to carry out research with those movements. Rather, I started my project as a researcher with the intention of arriving at a better understanding of the complexity of alternative economies through long-term fieldwork. For these reasons, I would not consider my writing an activist practice. Yet neither do I intend to condemn, expose, or otherwise stifle alternatives. Rather, I follow the likes of Nazima Kadir, Yuson Jung, Andrew Jonas, and David Goodman who see their work as a critical tool that can be used for further reflection that can ultimately be useful in order to address or even overcome some of the contradictory dynamics and problems that those working to build alternatives struggle with on a daily basis (Goodman et al. 2012; Jonas et al. 2010; Kadir 2016; Yung et al. 2014).

Yet this position turned out to be harder to maintain than I had initially thought. Particularly once I became more involved with the Cooperative, the mantle of ‘outsider’ was indeed explicitly imposed on me while at other times, as my research progressed, I was seen and presented as part of the Cooperative. This oscillation between contrasting positions is of course inherent to the method of participant-observation (Hume and Mulcock 2004, xxi). Yet I feel that it is important to dedicate a few words to how my research positionality affected the type of research I was able to do, and, in particular, how I became caught up in the power dynamics of the Cooperative and was able to navigate this tricky terrain.

Part of my agreement with the Cooperative was that I would collaborate with the Welcoming Committee. By default I thus built close ties to this committee and its members. During an assembly of the Welcoming Committee, we were discussing the possible entrance of a new member, Laura, who would manage a number of websites of the cooperative. As she was someone with whom I had previously established contact during my fieldwork in the north of Catalonia, I offered to get in touch with her and communicate the Welcoming Committee’s proposal. I thought that this would be something non-political that I could do as part of my collaboration with the Welcoming Committee: making a connection so that they could then incorporate a new member. However, it turned out that Laura had already been approached by the Communication Committee. The following day the Welcoming Committee and myself promptly received an angry e-mail saying: “this proposal is out of line [*proposta descomunal*] and I don’t understand why agreements that were made in the assembly are not being respected. All will become clear next Monday at the *intercomisiones* [a special assembly held every three months, only attended by committee members]”.

Needless to say I entered into something of a panic, fearing that this would reflect badly on me and the committee. That is, it looked as if the Welcoming Committee had been going behind the back of the Communication Committee. The situation was all the more volatile considering that the Communication Committee members did not get along at all with certain members of the Welcoming Committee. In the end, however, this incident did not lead to any major confrontation. The Welcoming Committee apologized for the misunderstanding and I personally apologized to the person who had sent the angry e-mail, who was also one of the founders of the Cooperative and therefore a person with considerable weight in the organization. He accepted the apology but did not forget to remind me that I “shouldn’t have gotten involved (...) this was an internal affair and you shouldn’t get involved because you’re doing research”. This was a moment when I realized that there were simply limits to how participative my research could be and, moreover, that it would in fact be wise to respect these limits.

However, while on the one hand certain areas of the cooperative were less accessible to me or at the very least more monitored, on the other hand, sometimes I was given more access than I had anticipated. From the start, I think that some people saw me as an objective observer who could, from the outside, lay bare the truth or, rather, their truth about what was going on in the cooperative. In several occasions Niko, a member of the Welcoming Committee with whom I worked very closely, asked me to be present as a witness at certain meetings that were about mediating his personal conflicts. On one occasion he even asked me to publicly denounce certain practices in the assembly. Not wanting to ‘pick sides’, I always refused to help him in this way, but did always hear out his critiques. I think this led him to trust me and lay bare stories from the past of the Cooperative and share certain types of information that he would not have shared with just anybody. Similarly, though less explicitly, many people who were critical of the cooperative found in me a listening ear for their criticisms.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is about the construction of economic formations in Catalonia that are presented as alternatives to capitalism and the state. It is based on ethnographic research with two distinct yet related projects: a social currency network in the north of Catalonia that I refer to as eco-network, and an umbrella organization for multiple alternative economic projects that throughout this dissertation I will call the Cooperative. In my analysis of the Cooperative and eco-networks I will draw on insights from economic anthropology to analyze the ways in which the members of the Cooperative and eco-network fashioned alternative forms of living, and show how specific forms of the economy were given shape. The remaining chapters of this dissertation will analyze various aspects of this process.

Chapter One will sketch the context of the research setting and introduce my principal interlocutors. Alternative economic formations have often been read against the backdrop of (economic) crises upon the assumption that a crisis propels people to look for alternatives, either out of necessity or because of a rupture in a particular moral order. Recent ethnographies on how people make a living in times of crisis in Southern Europe follow this line of thinking and have paid attention to how the 2008 financial crisis and the implementation of austerity measures have caused an experience of rupture in the daily lives of “ordinary people” across Southern Europe (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, 55). However, I will draw on insights from social movement studies in order to question the explanatory power of crisis as a lens through which to make sense of how people make a living. Instead I will argue that in addition to the effects of the crisis, it is important to pay attention to the longer history of social mobilization in Catalonia and how these have informed the recent proliferation of alternative economic networks.

In Chapters Two to Five I present the bulk of my ethnographic material arranged around a number of relevant themes. The first empirical chapter will be devoted to a discussion of ‘alternative’ work which I will see in relation to the reconfiguration of contemporary work more generally. I will describe how my interlocutors often consciously withdrew from the waged labor market (*el món assalariat*) and sought out a wageless life ‘at the margins’. This is mapped onto the distinction made between labor (*treball*) and work (*feina*), where within capitalism one labored like a hamster in a cage, and outside of this cage one was free to do socially fulfilling work. Yet this celebration of alternative forms of work as liberating went hand in hand with the experience of precarity, (self-)exploitation, and relational and physical fatigue. Moreover, particularly in the Cooperative, this kind of alternative work was subjected to processes of formalization. This was seen by many members as a form of encroachment by the corrosive logic of “the System”, and attempts were made to counter this tendency.

Chapter Three will elaborate on how the Cooperative and eco-networks were performed as alternative. As shown by Callon and others, economic models have profound performative effects in the world in the sense that both expert and folk theories, such as rational choice theory or, indeed, the idea of ‘alternative’ work espoused by my interlocutors, configure social relations in a particular way and generate certain kinds of behavior. However, adopting a dramaturgical perspective, I will argue for the importance of looking at the particular culturally and historically specific ways in which models *themselves* are performed. In particular, I will draw on and elaborate upon the work of Erving Goffman and his notion of the front and back stages of social life to show the various ways in which members of the Cooperative and eco-networks presented themselves and their organizations to a variety of audiences as an alternative.

This chapter will therefore predominantly revolve around an ethnographic analysis of the assembly, as this was a space where the separations between these stages were created and fortified, but also broken down and questioned.

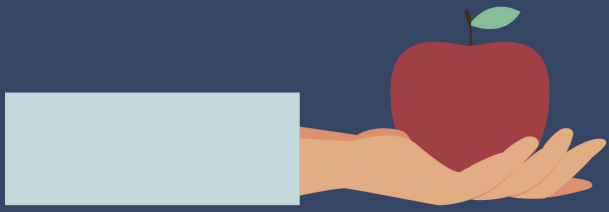
Chapter Three is also where we will start to see more clearly the contours of a battle of forms between people with competing visions on what an alternative economy should look like, and the effects of the internal crisis of the Cooperative. That is, the back and front stages of the Cooperative are also where the power relations between various groups of people in the Cooperative were played out. I will show that these conflicts were not just about personal differences, but about determining the specific form that an alternative economy should take. The assembly is where these competing visions on alternative economic formations were brought forward through carefully rehearsed performances. These conflicts and the battle of forms became more evident as the Cooperative fell into a financial and relational crisis. In this context, the members of the Cooperative either tried to keep certain less-accessible parts and knowledge domains of the Cooperative more hidden, while others tried to expose these back stages through performative displays in the front stages. This led to increasing relational conflicts, mutual suspicion, and distrust among the members of the Cooperative.

Chapter Four will therefore revolve around a detailed examination of the issue of trust and mistrust in alternative economies. In a context of mistrust and disenchantment with the Spanish state and economy, the lived experience of the construction of an alternative network was embedded in an explicit discourse of trust (*confianza*). In practice, however, there was a significant amount of mistrust among many participants in this alternative economy. Yet, similar to the question of whether or not the Cooperative can 'really' be considered alternative, in the fourth chapter I am not interested so much in whether or not members of the cooperative and eco-networks actually created trust or mistrust. Instead, drawing on recent anthropological perspectives on mistrust, I will introduce the notion of an economy of (mis-)trust to focus on how various discourses of (mis-)trust were produced and mobilized for various purposes, and how these discourses then circulated and fed into certain practices that produced the experience of trust and/or mistrust.

In the final ethnographic chapter, I will analyze the relation between alternative economic networks and the state. Researchers of alternative economies as well as people involved in alternative economic projects have tended to interpret alternatives against the backdrop of the failure of formal institutions, relegating the state to a kind of contextual background and as an analytical non-factor. Yet the eco-networks and especially the Cooperative were subject to regulation by the state and as a result were put in a position where they needed to formalize their operation. This forced mode of formalization operated alongside a process of formalization that was generated within

the Cooperative itself as it started to scale up. These different processes of formalization were often experienced as a loss of the radical character of the Cooperative and provoked a counterreaction in order to maintain the purity of the alternative economy. Drawing on the anthropology of the state, I will therefore analyze how these processes of formalization became sites of contestation and further compounded the battle of forms that I start to describe in chapters three and four.

In the conclusion I will bring together the different strands of the individual chapters and summarize the contributions this dissertation makes to the study of alternative economic formations. Rather than focusing on categorizing certain activities as either alternative or mainstream, I will argue that it is more productive to analyze how certain practices and discourses are mobilized in the creation of specific alternative economic formations, and how these forms can themselves become compelling social artefacts that provoke meaningful action in the world. In the concluding chapter, I will examine the broader significance of this perspective and reflect on the new avenues for research that this dissertation has opened up.



Chapter One

The Cooperative and Eco-Networks on the Canvas of History

Introduction

“The Cooperative is a political name,” Niko said in nearly every welcoming session that I attended at the Cooperative’s downtown office. “What I mean is that there is no officially registered cooperative that has this name”. The Cooperative, Niko explained, was in fact more like a social or political movement, and its name was chosen “because [a cooperative] is the kind of organization that most closely resembles the way we like to do things”. Yet its name was also intended to resonate with a long history of *cooperativismo* in Catalonia. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Catalan government, in contrast to the central government, stimulated the creation of all kinds of cooperatives, particularly in the agricultural sector (Planas 2003; Planas and Valls-Junyent 2011). Vera Zamagni writes that, in a period of market expansion and the rise of large-scale production, these early cooperatives could be seen as “a general effort by the working classes ... to counter the excessive growth of wealth concentration in the hands of capitalists” (2017, 2).

Catalonia in fact has a rich history of left-wing politics, popular labor movements, and anti-capitalist collective action (Dolgoff 1974). Perhaps the most famous event in this history is what is known as the 1936 Social Revolution. In July 1936, the Spanish right started a military insurrection under general Francisco Franco against the Second Republic in what was to be the start of the Spanish Civil War. In Barcelona, Franco’s forces were successfully held off through the combined effort of republicans, socialists, communists, and militant anarcho-syndicalists (Seidman 1982, 416). Following this victory, many ecclesiasts but also industrial proprietors and wealthy land owners were either killed, imprisoned, or forced to flee Catalonia. Substantial swathes of industry and agriculture subsequently came under worker control in a process of large-scale collectivization (Seidman 1982, 417-419). This was the start of the Social Revolution (1936-1939) where for a few years, in what some observers have called the historical realization of what was referred to as *autogestió*, everyday economic and social life came under the control and management of workers and labor unions rather than the capitalist class (Mintz 2006; Souchy et al. 1974).

I bring up this history because the discourse of *autogestió* (self-management) and the historical memory of 1936 is alive and well among many activists collectives in Spain. Indeed, it was not uncommon for members of the Cooperative and eco-networks to make celebratory reference to this and other historic events from Catalonia’s revolutionary past. In fact, though their content has changed over time, many practices and values from this time, such as self-management, autonomy and horizontality, are being mobilized once again by the Cooperative, eco-networks, and other alternative projects and social movements in Catalonia that look to challenge the hegemony of capitalism at various scales.

This continuity is not just interesting as a matter of historical fact, but actually urges us to question taken-for-granted explanatory frameworks in the study of alternative economies. Alternatives have often been read against the backdrop of economic and political crises. In the Spanish and broader Southern European context in particular, there has been a tendency to rely on the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent implementation of austerity policies as an explanation for the rise and proliferation of alternatives. However, in this chapter I will critique this narrative of crisis as an analytic through which we can understand alternatives and, more broadly, the ways in which people make a living for themselves in Southern Europe. Instead, while not downplaying the importance of the crisis and, in particular, the anti-austerity protests that followed the implementation of austerity measures in Spain, I propose to read the Cooperative and eco-networks as part of a broader culture of opposition that can be traced back to at least the period after Spain's transition to democracy in 1975-1978.

I will start this chapter by briefly describing and explaining what the *ecoxarxa* and the Cooperative are and how they relate to one another. I will then go on to critique the notion of crisis as a lens through which we can understand the existence of alternatives. Drawing on insights from social movement studies, I will go on to show the continuity between the Cooperative and eco-networks, and earlier forms of social mobilization. Then, I will discuss how the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent implementation of austerity measures featured in the increased visibility of the broader Solidarity Economy in Catalonia. The latter half of this chapter will be devoted to an explanation of what the Cooperative and eco-networks are and how they function.

Alternative Economic Networks in Catalonia: From the Countryside to the City

There are several eco-networks spread throughout Catalonia and their most characteristic feature is that the members of these networks use an alternative currency to exchange goods and services amongst each other. While in principle everything could be offered in an eco-network, the most common goods were foodstuffs such as bread, vegetables, rice, olive oil, and beverages that the members of the eco-network had produced themselves or procured through trading with other networks and local producers. Services varied from translation and language classes, to hairdressing and health services such as massage therapy. First appearing in 2009 in Montseny, the exact number of *xarxes* is hard to determine due to new ones springing up or older ones dying out, but I would say that the number of active eco-networks was between 20 and 30 throughout my research. The size of these networks varied greatly, with some consisting of just a small group of four or five people, while others had over one hundred members. Most *xarxes* are located in rural areas, because it is here that many *xarxeires*

believe it is feasible to achieve a form of living outside the logic of “the System”. The eco-network where I did my research was indeed located in a rural area in the north of Catalonia and with approximately 140 accounts, it was one of the largest networks in the region. However, participation was also a fluctuating variable, meaning that only a certain percentage of these 140 accounts was truly active. At the time of my research, there was a core group of around 30 active members. The size of an eco-network, then, was comparable to some of the consumer groups in the region which generally consisted of 12 to 20 households.

In terms of the people who were involved in these networks, I would like to draw attention to the fact that practically all the members of the eco-network originally hailed from Barcelona. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of the members of the eco-network were so called neo-rurals. These are people who move from urban areas to the countryside in search of a more peaceful life away from the hustle and bustle of the city (Robertson 2012). My interlocutors, moreover, were highly aware of this fact and sometimes took on the term neo-rural as a way of describing themselves. As Álicia told me when she recalled why she moved away from the city: “I always had this romanticism about moving to *la montaña*, probably inspired by the hippie movement”. The *muntanya* (mountains) or *camp* (countryside) were seen as places where a more sustainable, peaceful, and fulfilling life could be led that was contrasted with an alienated life in the city. Pep, although he certainly had a penchant for exaggerating, put it in quite forceful terms when he told me during an interview: “In the city you don’t exist, you’re completely disconnected from nature, you’re forced to be a city rat”. This was a sentiment shared among the majority of the members of the eco-network.

Most of the *ecoxarxeires* belonged to a group of neo-rurals between 45 and 55 years of age who came to the north of Catalonia at the beginning of the 1990s. They mostly hailed from lower middle-class or working-class backgrounds, generally did not have any university education, expressed strong distrust towards the state, had been in other social or alternative movements before, and often had low-paying or precarious jobs. These formed the majority of the active core of the *ecoxarxa*. In addition to this group, there was a slightly younger group of neo-rurals aged between 30 and 35, with a university education. This group was part of a generation of Spanish young adults who are increasingly disenchanted by conventional political and economic systems partly due to the fact that they are unable to find jobs even though they have all the necessary qualifications. Moreover, being neo-rurals and engaging in various forms of social activism, my interlocutors were also seen as *hippi* by the local population of the *comarca* and at times also used this moniker to ironically describe themselves. In Chapter Four I will explore the dynamics between the members of the eco-network and

the local population in more detail as this was a matter of concern for my interlocutors as well.

It is important to mention that these members did not live together in a community or eco-village, although some members did indeed participate in these kinds of collectively-run projects. Rather, they lived spread throughout the region, and would come together on a regular basis at the *rebot* (storage) where they would socialize, exchange goods and services in social currency, and participate in assemblies. During my research, the *rebot* was first located in an old *masia* (mansion) just outside of the capital city of the *comarca*, before being moved to a more conveniently-located *masia*. The *ecoxarxeires* had brokered a deal with an affiliated environmental association that agreed to share its office space with the members of the eco-network. Far from being self-contained networks, these eco-networks maintained relations with other *ecoxarxes* to acquire goods and services they did not produce, interacted with socially-oriented projects in the region, and, importantly, were affiliated to an anti-capitalist Cooperative in Barcelona.

The Cooperative was officially established in 2010 and was an ambitious project that resulted from the coming together of activists from a variety of networks such as the anti-corporate globalization movements, squatter movements, and De-Growth activists. Their goal was to create an economic system at “the margins of capitalism”. This was envisioned to be a space where people could be free from the yoke of the state and capital, and could construct an economy that was (1) controlled by local actors instead of transnational elites (e.g., bankers and politicians), and (2) was based on a number of values that were seen to be lacking in “the System”. Not unlike other alternative economic spaces, this alternative economy was said to be based on values such as solidarity (*solidaritat*), equality (*igualtat*) trust (*confiança*), and mutual aid (*suport mutu*). Or, in the discourse found on the Cooperative’s website, this was a space that “allows for overcoming our dependence on the structures of the System and ... [reconstructing] society from the bottom up by recovering affective human relations based on proximity (*proximitat*) and trust (*confiança*)”. Moreover, in terms of organizational structure, these networks were, like many social movements in Catalonia, based on principles of horizontality, direct democracy, autonomy, and self-management (*autogestió*). Later on in this chapter and throughout this dissertation, I will examine the history and practical content of these values and organizational principles.

During the first years of the Cooperative’s existence, the core group of members consisted of highly educated, young (in their twenties to mid-thirties at that time), predominantly middle-class Catalan speakers. As the Cooperative grew and attracted more people, however, this profile became more diverse. It is complicated to gauge the number of people that were involved in the Cooperative. Members of the Cooperative

often also liked to include the people who made use of some of their services and members of eco-networks, social currency users, affiliated consumer groups, and other projects. Whenever I asked my interlocutors how many people were part of the Cooperative and eco-network, I heard various estimates with some claiming that there were over 15.000 people directly involved. Irrespective of these estimates, the truth was that there was no reliable statistical data about this, and the members of the Cooperative were still trying to map the scope of the organization during the time of my research.

If we restrict ourselves to the people working directly for the Cooperative, there were approximately 40 people during my research period who received remuneration from the Cooperative. In terms of age, the youngest member of the Cooperative was 24 and the oldest was close to 60. I estimate the average age was somewhere between 35 and 40. So while some had experienced Spain's transition in the (1975-1978) and were even active in some libertarian movements during the dictatorship, most of the people involved in the Cooperative came of age during the 1980s and 1990s. Most had enjoyed a university education, and the majority hailed from middle-class backgrounds, while others proudly identified as working class. There were roughly as many women as men, and at least two people who did not identify according to this binary. In general, Catalan speakers outnumbered non-Catalan speakers and there were a few non-Spanish members.

While the eco-networks actually preceded the existence of the Cooperative, the Cooperative became a kind of umbrella organization for a variety of alternative projects and nuclei throughout Catalonia. The online social currency used by many but not all eco-networks, for instance, operated through a virtual platform that was managed by the Cooperative. This allowed the social currency to be used all across Catalonia to exchange goods and services with other *xarxes*, shops, projects, and any other people who accepted this type of *moneda social*. Later in this chapter we will see exactly how the social currency worked and what the organization of the Cooperative and eco-networks looked like in practice. Before we do so, however, it is necessary to discuss the broader historical and socio-cultural context in which we need to situate the Cooperative and eco-networks.

From Rupture to Continuity

Alternative economic practices have often been read against the backdrop of (economic) crises. As one reviewer of the literature on alternatives put it: "diverse economic practices often play a significant role in subsistence strategies and the significance of diverse economic activities may be increased if formal economic institutions fail" (Fickey 2011, 240). More specific to the Spanish case, Neil Hughes (2015, 6) writes

that: “there is general consensus amongst academics, journalists, practitioners, and activists that the economic crisis has been the main catalyst for increased interest in alternative economic practices ... in Spain”. He then proceeds to document the rise of social currency systems in Spain and shows how these systems have become more prevalent since 2008. Similarly, Conill et al. (2012, 212-215) have shown how, in the years following the crisis, the amount of people engaging in alternative economic practices in Catalonia has risen substantially.

Going beyond alternative economies, crisis has also become a common analytic through which to make sense of the ways in which people sustain themselves and future generations across Southern Europe (Castells et al. 2012; Knight and Stewart 2016; Muriel 2017; Narotzky et al. 2013; Narotzky and Goddard 2017; Orlando 2019; Spyridakis 2013). The point of departure for many of these works is indeed the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent implementation of austerity measures. Narotzky and Besnier (2014, S8), for instance, write that “the current worldwide financial crisis of 2008 ... has produced uncertainty of both an economic nature ... and a political nature” and that these developments have drastically affected “people’s ability to reproduce materially and emotionally, creating difficulties in forming new families, maintaining existing ones, forming caring relations, and feeling respected”. Daniel Knight and Charles Stewart work along a similar line of inquiry and explore how people, to borrow a phrase from Laura Bear (2015), navigate austerity in their day-to-day lives. They interpret austerity as an experience of rupture or “extreme crisis” that “throws the issue of human dignity into high relief” as people are forced to deal with increased anxiety and uncertainty about their livelihoods. It is in this light that Knight and Stewart, and the other contributors to a special issue on *Ethnographies of Austerity*, make inquiries into how “people across Southern Europe have come to understand their experiences of increased social suffering, insecurity, and material poverty” (2016, 2).

I would certainly agree that economic crises drastically change the way people can sustain themselves and future generations. Moreover, there can be no doubt that the 2008 financial crisis has altered the organization of the worldwide economy in important ways and has had severe consequences for hundreds of millions of people around the globe. In the European context, the devastating effects of this crisis were felt most severely in the so-called GIPSIC countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Cyprus) where we have seen the collapse of housing markets, rising unemployment rates, the growth of sovereign debt, and substantial drops in GDP (Vale 2014). With the sovereign debt of all these countries rising rapidly due to the immediate effects of the crisis, a number of these countries received financial aid or bailouts by, what in popular discourse has become known as, the ‘Troika’, consisting of the European Central Bank, European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund. These bailouts were

followed by a series of so called “structural adjustment policies” or austerity measures that boiled down to reducing public expenditure in order to make paying off debts more feasible which, in turn, would allow for retaining membership in the Eurozone (Petmesidou and Guillén 2017, 1-2).

While these adjustments may look beneficial from the standpoint of neoclassical economic orthodoxy, critics point out that the consequences of these budget cuts effectively amount to a further dismantling of the welfare state and have in fact deeply affected the everyday lives of ordinary people in a variety of negative ways (Knight and Stewart 2016, 2-3). In the Spanish context, it has been shown that the austerity policies that were adopted in 2009 have made healthcare more expensive (Navarro 2012), housing less accessible (Palomera 2014), work more precarious (Riesco-Sanz 2012), and have caused an overall increase in socio-economic inequality. This is in fact similar to what has happened in all Southern European countries that have implemented austerity measures, although the exact consequences of these policies will of course differ from country to country (Karanikolos et al. 2013; Matsaganis and Leventi 2017; Mckee et al. 2012; Shahidi 2014).

Among my interlocutors, there were indeed people whose lives were shaken up by the crisis and austerity politics. Andreu, for instance, lost his job due to the labor reforms of 2012 that were part of the structural adjustment policies adopted by the Spanish state. With no stable employment in sight, he then decided to become a beer brewer and became more actively involved in the eco-network where he would, in addition to satisfying certain material needs in social currency, also find a degree of emotional comfort among like-minded people living in similar conditions. Crises, then, are not just destructive, but, when seen in this way, can also be generative in the sense that they indeed compel people to develop their own folk models of the economy (as Narotzky and Besnier express it), that can, in the case of my interlocutors, take the shape of what was performed as an alternative economy (2014, S5). However, there are a number of problematic assumptions in this narrative of crisis that obscure rather than clarify the ways in which people make a living for themselves in Southern Europe.

Beyond crisis

Firstly, the notion that alternatives should be regarded as fallback systems wherever and whenever formal institutions fail, falls into an almost functionalist and survivalist paradigm where people are seen to be acting purely out of necessity. I am not denying that poverty and hunger indeed compel people to pursue certain livelihood strategies, but we know from a long history of ethnographic work that even people who find themselves in situations of extreme precarity are motivated by more than just economic necessity (Bossen 1984; Chibnik 2011; Sahlins 1972; Scott 1977). Several more recent

works in economic anthropology have made precisely this point through a rediscovery of the social historian E.P. Thompson's anti-economistic stance that he most clearly developed through his notion of the moral economy (Carrier 2018; Millar 2018; Narotzky 2013; Palomera and Vetta 2016). Writing about 18th century bread riots in Great Britain, Thompson took a stance against what he called the "spasmodic view of popular history" in which it was assumed that "people protest because they are hungry" (1971, 77). Instead, Thompson argued that we should pay attention to the social norms, obligations, and moral frameworks or what he called "the moral economy of the English crowd" that structure social action (1971, 79). Adopting this perspective, Thompson was able to see that people protested not just out of hunger or necessity, but because the ruling classes broke with a manner of economic functioning that was seen as morally legitimate and acceptable to all parties involved.

As distinct from the assumption that crises automatically give birth to alternatives, an emphasis on the morality of economic action is a more useful starting point that can convincingly account for why people participate in alternative economic projects. Andreu, for instance, did not merely join the eco-network because he was short on cash, but because he was, as he told me, "totally opposed to the IMF, the euro, and capitalism". Moreover, as we will see in more detail in the next chapter, many of my interlocutors spoke of willfully putting themselves in precarious positions. One member of the Cooperative told me that he used to be a consultant at various multi-nationals firms before joining the Cooperative where, as he put it, he "threw [himself] into precarity". It should be apparent, then, that people involved in bringing about alternatives often do so out of strong beliefs of what is socially legitimate and illegitimate, and act upon normative ideals of how the economy should be organized.

The second problem that I find with a narrative of crisis is more historically and regionally specific. That is, recent analyses that are framed in terms of crisis somewhat overextend the uniqueness, singularity, and generative capacity of the 2008 financial crisis and the austerity regime that has taken hold of Europe of late. Both Theodoros Rakopoulos and Laura Bear, however, have shown that outside of Europe there is in fact nothing new about austerity politics (Bear 2015; Rakopoulos 2019). Going beyond regional exceptionalism, moreover, Rakopoulos argues that analyses like those of Knight and Stewart that emphasize a historical breach or rupture do so "partly because they report on subjects who enjoyed stable employment" (2019, 4). In contrast, Rakopoulos argues that while austerity may have taken the middle classes by surprise, "institutional precarity was a structural condition in Europe long before austerity settled in" (2019, 4). Rakopoulos therefore argues that we should pay more attention to the continuity that the current austerity regime shows with economic policies going back a number of decades.

For the Spanish case I would dispute Rakopoulos' claim that austerity was not experienced as a form of rupture. Up until the 2008 financial crisis, the 'Spanish economy' was doing comparatively well (López and Rodríguez 2010, 2011). The apparently sudden turnaround of the economy (in combination with the response by political institutions) is part of why the anti-austerity protests starting in 2011 resonated so widely across practically all layers of the Spanish population. I will explore these protests in more detail below. Here I want to point out that the policies and macro-economic models adopted in the 1990s, based on the "reduction of public spending, inflation-targeting and the deregulation of labour markets" (López and Rodríguez 2011), are in fact very similar to the austerity measures that I described above.¹⁶ It is in this sense that I would agree that it is important to pay attention to continuity. Seen in this way, crises are not singular events that singlehandedly reshape the course of history, but are perhaps best seen as moments in which longer term developments become more apparent, with narratives of crisis then forming a frame of reference that inform the lived experience of the flow of history.

Without downplaying the significance of the crisis and austerity measures, I therefore wish to follow this perspective that also foregrounds continuity instead of just focusing on rupture. To be sure, many of my interlocutors certainly recalled the crisis and how it affected them, and many actively participated in the anti-austerity protests of 2011. Yet much like Cristina Grasseni found in the case of alternative provisioning networks in Italy (2013, 20), most if not all of my interlocutors came from a much longer history of being active in social movements and other alternative circuits such as consumer collectives and environmental associations. What this shows is that alternatives do not just arise spasmodically in times of crisis or rupture, but that these models are at all times embryonic and incipient. Instead of solely foregrounding the 2008 financial crisis as an explanatory framework for the emergence of alternative economic spaces in Catalonia, then, I wish to read this emergence in relation to a longer history of social mobilization and political organizing that goes back a number of decades.

Alternative Economies and a Culture of Opposition

In the Spanish context, Cristina Fominaya (2007) makes a distinction between two different styles of politics: autonomous movements and the institutional left. Juris, in his

16 As Lopez and Rodriguez show, however, these policies alone are not enough to explain Spain's economic prosperity during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Additional factors include: dropping credit rates, Spain's inclusion in the monetary union and Eurozone, privatization of sectors such as electricity and telecommunication, and the liberalization of equivalent markets in Latin-America, enabling the Spanish bourgeoisie to "go global" (2010).

analysis of Catalan anti-corporate globalization movements, makes a similar distinction between movements that are rooted in “direct participation via decentralized networks” and more institutionalized leftist organizations such as unions and political parties (2008, 119). That is, on the one hand there is a more conventional style of institutionalized politics, organized through trade unions and mass political parties that operate through a representative model and have a clearly defined hierarchical structure. This model is predicated on engagement in the public sphere through a number of strategies, such as strikes, legal reform, and electoral politics. Moreover, this model, as Fominaya writes, “defends the transformation of society through its institutions, either by controlling them or influencing them” (2007, 338). I will return to recent developments in the Spanish institutional political landscape in the next section. For now it will suffice to say that this is the style that was ultimately adopted by Podemos, the national left-wing party that tried to bring about change by taking control of existing political institutions through electoral politics during the 2014 elections.

At the other end of the spectrum are autonomous movements. Fominaya describes these as movements that reject representative democracy and majority rule, and strive to construct more participatory models based on direct democracy, self-governance, horizontal organizational structures, and decision-making based on consensus in an (usually open) assembly (Fominaya 2015, 145). She writes that autonomous movements are therefore both denunciative, in the sense that they reject a particular political order, and propositional due to the fact that they prescribe an alternative way of organizing society (Fominaya 2007, 337). It is interesting to note a parallel with social mobilizations in Spain of the early twentieth century which according to Álvarez Junco showed “disdain for parliamentary politics and reform” and sought to “topple ... or at least expose” the weakness of the ruling classes through collective action directed against the state (1994, 306).

Indeed, the ideas and practices espoused by modern social movements and in alternative economic networks in Catalonia should not be seen as novel inventions. Juris has shown how precisely these values of “self-management, autonomy, decentralized coordination, and direct action” come from a history of anarchism in Catalonia and have been repeatedly mobilized in a number of movements and associations in the past two centuries (2008, 65).¹⁷ He analyzes how the anti-corporate globalization movement, in all its diverse forms, grew out of what he calls a culture of opposition

17 Juris emphasizes political terms and practices, yet it is important to note that some of the affective notions mobilized by my interlocutors also spring from a history of anarchism. The idea of mutual aid (*suport mutu*), for instances, derives from the Russian naturalist and anarchist philosopher Peter Kropotkin (2012 [1914]) who, contrary to Darwin, emphasized the importance of cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual aid in the evolution the animal and human life.

that germinated during the Francoist dictatorship. After the civil war and the installment of the dictatorship, the Second Republic was disbanded, the powerful anarchist and communist labor movements from the civil war era were crippled, and Catalan was prohibited as a spoken language (Narotzky 2019, 39). This repression, it should be said, was not distributed evenly and was most acutely felt by those on the left (Narotzky 2019, 39). According to Juris, this would therefore eventually create a fusion of sorts between Catalan Nationalism and Catholic and Marxist traditions, and would ultimately result in a “counterhegemonic frame around anti-Francoism and democracy, reinforced by an oppositional culture based on Catalan language, symbols and identity” (2008, 66). The new social movements that sprang up in the 1980s, such as the squatter movement, and the Conscious Objector Movement (MOC), as well as the more recent social movements that grew to prominence in the early 2000s drew heavily from this cultural archive.

Here I will argue that both the Cooperative and eco-networks can be placed within this tradition of grassroots political organizing due to the fact that they were based on some of the very same principles of horizontality, self-governance, and collective decision-making. As one prominent member of the cooperative repeatedly iterated: “Here, there are no bosses”. What this meant is that, in theory, there was no higher-ranking figure of authority who would take decisions regarding, for instance, the distribution of resources or the overall political strategy taken by the Cooperative. Instead, decisions were arrived at through debate in an open assembly and needed to be based on a unanimously shared consensus. In Chapter Three we will see that the reality of this was, of course, much messier, and that the assembly was in fact an arena in which power struggles were rehearsed, performed, and played out. Regardless, this practice of horizontality was held in high regard by all of my interlocutors, along with values such as self-management, autonomy, and decentralized organization.

Moreover, while the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks showed great diversity in terms of their socio-economic and cultural background, all of them did, to varying degrees, express a form of critical political consciousness. Edmon, for instance, was part of the Conscientious Objector Movement (MOC), became a monitor in the Scouts, and joined a number of consumer groups before eventually starting an eco-network. In political terms, Edmon was an anarchist who was critical of parliamentary democracy and favored a model based on direct participation. Or take Pep, another long-standing member of the eco-network who had been an environmental activist, had worked as a youth monitor in the Scouts, and was active in a number of consumer groups before becoming a member in the *ecoxarxa*. Andreu was also involved in alternative circles and in his youth frequented the squatter scene in Barcelona. Moreover, those who had not been actively involved in any kind of social movement did engage in other

alternative projects. Àlicia, for instance, before moving to the north of Catalonia in the early 1990s, had previously created a cooperative for female carpenters in Barcelona.

Turning to the Cooperative, we see a similar pattern of prior involvement in social movements. A minority was already politically active in various labor unions during the dictatorship, but most members of the Cooperative started their activist careers through participation in some of the new social movements that arose after 1978. Many of them were involved in precisely the kinds of spaces of opposition that Juris and Fominaya discuss: squatter movements, anti-globalization mobilizations, and, importantly, the De-Growth movement. It should be noted, moreover, that people combined different types of activism. Many members of the Cooperative's IT committee, for instance, were also involved in hacker collectives. Others had side projects, mostly in the form of various smaller cooperatives. In fact, in the next chapter we will see that members of the Cooperative were encouraged to engage in multiple forms of income-generating activities in order not to be entirely dependent on the Cooperative.

What I have tried to illustrate here is that prior to their involvement in the eco-network or Cooperative, and also prior to the financial crisis of 2008, my interlocutors were already involved in social movements, ethical consumption, political mobilizations, or other kinds of socially-oriented projects. Rather than reading these networks as somehow spontaneously bursting on to the scene in the wake of the economic crisis, it is important to take into account the much longer history of social mobilization in Catalonia in order to come to an understanding of what is at stake in the construction of alternative economic systems.

However, it is true that the more recent anti-austerity protests starting in 2011 mobilized a great deal of Spanish population into political action. In fact, the Cooperative, eco-networks and alternative economic formations more generally have become more visible within the context of the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent anti-austerity protests. Before we move on to a description of the Cooperative and eco-network's organization, it is therefore necessary to chronicle some of the more recent developments in the Spanish and Catalan political landscape and to show why the alternative economic formations that I discuss became more visible. I will pay specific attention to the anti-austerity protests and the emergence of a new form of institutionalized politics on the left, as these served as a springboard of sorts for the increasing prominence of the Solidarity Economy.

Crisis, Austerity, and the Solidarity Economy

Since Spain's transition towards a democratic state during the 1975-1978 period, the Spanish political system has favored large, traditional political parties with relatively marginal activity by social movements in the public sphere (Fominaya 2015, 337). This

started to change as the effects of austerity measures became more and more palpable in people's everyday lives, and a wave of anti-austerity and pro-democracy protests started to spread across Spain (and Europe) (Fominaya 2017, 1-2). The most well-known manifestation of these protests was the *indignadas* or 15-M movement. In 2011, amidst ever-increasing unemployment rates, the Socialist government implemented a series of policies aimed at saving financial institutions and keeping the sovereign debt in check in order to preserve Spain's membership in the Eurozone (Castells 2012, 113). For many people, this felt as if the ruling classes, seen to be consisting of corrupt politicians, bankers, and other elite transnational actors, were trying to safeguard their own positions and privileges while ordinary citizens were left to bear the brunt of the crisis. In this context, a number of grassroots, decentralized networks started to mobilize using mostly digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, email lists, blogs, and online forums (Castells 2012, 114-115).

On 15 May 2011, just before the municipal elections on the 22nd, a group known as *Democracia Real Ya!* (Real Democracy Now!) called for people to demonstrate in the streets. In subsequent weeks, the movement, later becoming known as 15M due to the day of its first public protest, gained more and more critical mass and hundreds of thousands of citizens, many of whom had never been politically active before, took to the streets and occupied public squares in hundreds of cities across Spain (Gerbaudo 2016; Hughes 2011). Estimates vary, but anywhere between five and eight million people participated, in one way or another, in this mass mobilization fueled by indignation over the state of the economy and the political system (FnFEurope 2013). Among them were indeed many of my interlocutors. This expression of indignation is what gave the movement its alternative moniker *indignadas*¹⁸, although some activists argue that this labelling amounts to a narrow reading of the movement and ignores the positive, hopeful, and propositional thrust of the movement (Castells 2012, 148). Indeed, the movement can in fact be seen as an explicit cry for widespread social change aimed at political elites and ordinary citizens alike.

However, despite its scale and reach, it became clear to a number of activists that other strategies needed to be utilized in order to maintain the movement's momentum. Alongside grassroots mobilizations, 15-M therefore somewhat unexpectedly also brought about the proliferation of more traditional style political parties and associations (Fominaya 2015, 591). The most famous example of this is Podemos, a left-wing political party that has its origins in grassroots politics organized through local assemblies during 15-M. Both Podemos and the emerging center right party Ciudadanos gained a considerable part of the electorate in the 2015 elections, effectively marking

18 Following my interlocutors in reversing the male-dominated connotation of language, I use the feminine form of Spanish and Catalan words except when referring to specific individuals.

a break in Spain's bipartisan political system that had been in place since the country's transition to democracy in the 1975-1978 period (Gil-Torres 2018, 83).

Since the death of Franco, the socialist Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and the center-right conservative Partido Popular (PP) have taken turns in governing the country. After almost forty years of this bipartisan hegemony, Podemos initially seemed to offer the promise of radical and progressive change in Spain's political landscape. However, the party was not able to capitalize on its electoral success in 2015. In 2016, in order to increase its reach, Podemos therefore entered into an electoral alliance called Unidas Podemos with United Left, Equo, and other, smaller left-wing parties (Delclós 2019). Yet this alliance was unable to achieve majority rule, and has adopted a more conventional top-down and hierarchical style of politics reliant on charismatic leadership. This shift has not always been beneficial to the party, a fact that became evident in the elections of April 2019, when, as one commentator put it, "a climate of disenchantment ... drove almost half of its [Unidas Podemos] voters to the socialist or other parties" (Delclós 2019). After another inconclusive election in November 2019, however, Unidas Podemos did ultimately enter into government in a collation with PSOE (2019).

The current institutional popularity of the Solidarity Economy (SE) in Catalonia can still be seen as part of the aftermath of the rise of a seemingly new and progressive form of political organizing at an institutional level. That is, in Barcelona, the Catalan offshoot of Podemos, *Barcelona en Comú*, became the ruling party under former activist turned mayor Ada Colau. The party has shown itself to be favorable to a progressive style of politics that includes stimulating the SE through a number of grants and projects. Colau has showed support for the implementation of a social currency in Barcelona to stimulate the local economy in some of Barcelona's poorest areas. Under Colau we have also seen the creation of the Comissionat d'Economia Social i Solidaria, and in 2016 the municipality made 24 million euros available for a Pla d'Impuls in order to stimulate the social economy over the 2016-2019 period (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2016). This stimulus package involves reinforcing existing projects and facilitating new initiatives through financial aid, workshops and education, and increased coordination between the various actors that form part of the SE. In achieving this goal, the municipality has begun working together with organizations such as the Xarxa D'Economia Solidaria (XES). The XES has its roots in the alter-globalization movements from the 1990s and works towards facilitating mutually-beneficial connections among various alternative economic projects across Catalonia in order to expand, strengthen, and make visible the network (*xarxa*) of the SSE in Catalonia.

The Cooperative and eco-networks, while certainly part of the SE, should, however, be seen in a somewhat different tradition than the XES. As we have seen,

both the Cooperative and eco-networks in fact preceded the *indignadas* movement, yet show considerable parallels to the grassroots activist networks that became more visible during 15M. Indeed, while 15M is often read as resulting directly out of the 2008 financial crisis and the adoption of austerity measures, Fominaya is right to point out that there could have been no 15M without the key role played by autonomous movements that proliferated after the death of Franco (2015, 336). As I have shown above, it is important to recognize that the seemingly spontaneous development of social movements and alternative economic projects has a history that goes back much further than the 2008 financial crisis. However, it is equally important to recognize that organizations like the Cooperative and eco-networks did in fact benefit from 15M in the sense that that it drove many people to actively search for alternatives to political and economic institutions. So what do these alternative economic formations look like exactly? In the remainder of the chapter I will give a detailed overview of some of the key features and activities of Cooperative and eco-networks. I will start with a description of the eco-network, before moving on to an analysis of the Cooperative and the way it related to various alternative economic projects in Catalonia.

From Burbuja to Xarxa

“Have I ever told you the story of how we came up with the *xarxa*?” Edmon asked me as I sat next to him during one of the weekly encounters organized by the eco-network. Every Friday afternoon the members of the eco-network would gather at the *rebot*, the storage place where various products that the members of the network produced were kept. At the time, the *rebot* was temporarily located in one of the barns of Mas Jorda, an old mansion close to a renowned natural park in the north of Catalonia, which was also my home away from home during the first part of my research. With the *xarxa* being a geographically dispersed network, the *rebot* was one of the few material focal points or nodes where people would interact in a face-to-face mode (*cara-cara*) and would develop the sort of intimate social ties based on mutual trust that the *xarxeires* were interested in cultivating. Indeed, it was during these weekly meetings that people exchanged goods, shopped for groceries in the *rebot*, socialized, and discussed matters that were related to the organization of the network. It was during these meetings that I too got to know the members of the eco-network as we often chatted until deep into the night.

The mansion consisted of two parts: the main building which is where me and my housemates stayed, and the barn area. It was there, in a stone courtyard just outside of the structure that housed the *rebot*, that Edmon told me the origin story of the eco-network. “This all coincided with something *muy heavy* that happened in the *comarca* (county), which was the introduction of the *burbujas* (bubbles),” Edmon told me as

he casually took a drag from his cigarette and directed his gaze towards the campfire we were sat around. Back in his early twenties, Edmon moved from the working-class neighborhood in Barcelona that he grew up in to the northern countryside in order to work as a coordinator in a *casa de colònies*, which could loosely be translated as the scouts. The scouts do not only offer an opportunity for children to spend their summers in the Catalan countryside, but is also where they are taught a particular set of skills and values. To be more specific, Juris has shown how, during the Francoist dictatorship, these *cases de colònies* formed a relatively safe space where Catalan could be spoken and certain Catalan traditions could continue to be practiced. According to Juris, this was therefore another space where the above-mentioned counterhegemonic, oppositional culture of social mobilization that later became infused with Catalan nationalism could be cultivated.

Edmon continued: “When I was a kid there were already pyramid schemes in my neighborhood ... but here, in order to *enrolar a los hippis, a los alternativos* (trick the hippies), they called it *burbuja*.” Edmon had been a *punki*, as he termed it, and a more alternatively-oriented person throughout his teenage years and had been actively involved in the Conscientious Objector Movement (MOC). This movement promoted the refusal of military service and was part of a broader florescence of so-called New Social Movements in the 1980s and 1990s (Junco 1994). He would continue to develop his critical consciousness after his move away from Barcelona, and became involved in a number of socially-oriented projects by becoming a youth monitor in the scouts, and by joining consumer groups and various social movements. He could not believe, however, that “*la gente alternativa*” that he surrounded himself with were now participating in the *burbuja*. As he later told me in an interview: “It’s like a pyramid [scheme], once it explodes, the one at the top is the winner, but those at the bottom are the losers. And this happened between friends, within families even.” As a result of this, Edmon said that “instead of investing in things like this [the *burbuja*], which really is like a *mini capitalismo*, we started investing in something that benefits everyone.” This “something” turned out to be the *ecoxarxa*.

As I have written above, one of the eco-network’s most characteristic features was its social currency. However, while the use of this social currency was what drew me to study *ecoxarxes* in the first place, I would quickly find out that the currency was seen as just one of many tools that were needed in order to work towards the creation of economic relations based on principles such as trust and reciprocity. In fact, during one of my first encounters with members of the eco-network, Artur, a founding member of the first *ecoxarxa* in 2009 in Montseny who is now starting up an ecovillage in the *comarca* (county) where I did my research, literally told me that the social currency is “an excuse” for being able to “build networks” (*fer xarxa*). Indeed, Edmon’s story

of the origins of the *ecoxarxa* also points to the fact that the social currency was part of a broader project of realizing a truly alternative system that would be, as he said, beneficial to all instead of being another *minicapitalismo*.

The eco-network itself was not regulated by the state either and the organization of the network was determined by the members themselves. In this sense, the organization of the *ecoxarxa* resembled that of other autonomous movements in Spain that reject parliamentary democracy and are instead based on principles of horizontality, self-governance, direct democracy, and collective decision-making taken in a usually open assembly. In the case of the eco-network, the assembly was held every month and was a space where members came together to discuss any matters that were relevant to the organization of the network. This could involve the finding of a new location for the *rebot*, deciding how to organize a market or a fair for exposure, distributing various tasks among the members, or deciding whether or not an anthropologist can come and do research with them.

Tasks were taken on a voluntary basis and, in general, none of the members received any kind of remuneration for their labor. Some exceptions were made for a core group of volunteers who sometimes received a small amount of social currency from a common fund for their troubles. As is common in these kinds of projects that are run through voluntary labor, the bulk of the work of the day-to-day operations fell on the shoulders of a core group of four people. I will come back to this imbalance in the distribution of labor in the following chapter. For now it will suffice to point out that the *ecoxarxa* was said to be based on values such as horizontality and self-governance, and its organization was determined through a collective decision-making process.

Beyond attending assemblies, being a member of an *ecoxarxa* also meant making a promise that one would, at one point in time, offer something of value to the network. This idea can best be clarified through the distinction that members of the eco-network made between consumer groups and *ecoxarxes*. In an interview with Edmon and Álicia, they told me that a number of years back they started to see the limitations of consumer groups. As Edmon said, “When we left *el Trajecte* [a consumer group] to start the *ecoxarxa*, we were thinking that, it’s all well and good to be part of a consumer group, but in the end you’re still a consumer.” For many *ecoxarxeires*, consumption was ultimately an overly passive stance and could not be an effective strategy when trying to bring about changes to the economy. Álicia continued: “We wanted to go *más allá* (beyond) [consumption] ... to be both producer and consumer.” This amalgamation of producer and consumer was often referred to as *prosumidor* (prosumer). Originally a term put forth in the 1980s by the futurologist Alvin Toffler (1980), this idea has now gained traction in digital technologies (e.g., wiki commons) and also as a political tool among many food-oriented social movements, including the *ecoxarxa*.

So while the social currency was not necessarily seen as the most important feature of the *ecoxarxa* by some of the members themselves, I would nevertheless like to dedicate a few words to this topic. By examining how the social currency worked, it will become clear how my interlocutors (both members of the eco-network and the Cooperative) envisioned their alternative economy and the practices through which they attempted to make it a reality.

Creating Alternative Spheres of Exchange

In the *ecoxarxa* where I did my fieldwork, the social currency was called *trok*, which literally translates as ‘barter’. First and foremost it is important to mention that *troks* are not legally-recognized tender. No aspects of *troks* (such as transactions, income, flow) were recognized by any kind of state-sanctioned legal institution, and neither were they subject to any form of taxation by the state. While many complementary currencies or social currencies are backed by local or even national governments, the *trok* therefore had no official legal status and could not be used outside of the group of people that chose to accept it as a means of payment. This makes sense if we bear in mind that a core idea that many of my interlocutors upheld was the creation of a domain of economic life that was exempt from state control and where they themselves could decide about the value of things and how value circulated. To illustrate how such a domain was created, I will discuss the practice of *descapitalizació*.

Descapitalizació is a neologism that means the conversion or ‘de-capitalizing’ of capital – be it fiat currency or resources acquired in fiat currency – into *troks*. There were several ways in which this could be done. One possibility was to convert euros into *troks* at a 1:1 exchange rate by giving an amount of euros to the administrator who would then put the same amount in *troks* on the user’s account. These euros then went into a common fund used to finance small communal expenses (e.g., printing posters for a promotional fair) or buying products, such as rice or olive oil, from producers outside of the network. Another way decapitalization worked, was through converting euros by buying products in euros and then selling these in the network for *troks*. An example I observed during fieldwork: at a weekly encounter of the *ecoxarxa*, two members brought a large box of tobacco that they had bought in euros from a friend of theirs. They placed this in the *rebot* (the storage) and charged *rebot* social currency accounts the equivalent amount of the tobacco’s cost in euros. The tobacco, meanwhile, gradually circulated in the network by way of people buying it from the storage. In this way, they were able to convert a product brought in euros into several exchanges mediated through social currency, thus successfully de-capitalizing their capital.

There is here, then, a desire to create what the anthropologist Paul Bohannan may have called two distinct spheres of exchange. First, a sphere of exchange where goods

and services circulate mediated by a social currency that is said to create and fortify social ties. This sphere is then separated through, for instance, the above described process of de-capitalization from what is seen as a capitalist sphere of exchange where commodities are exchanged via fiat money by supposedly alienated individuals in the market. Much like in Bohannan's analysis of Tiv spheres of exchange, there is a moral hierarchy to these spheres which influences the way products move between them (1955: 64-65). That is, de-capitalization or the transformation of resources foraged in 'the System' into social currency is viewed positively and is strongly encouraged, while movements from the *ecoxarxa* sphere of exchange back into the 'capitalist' sphere of exchange is viewed negatively. So buying a gallon of olive oil in social currency but then reselling it in euros, is simply not done. Neither is it acceptable, as I mentioned above, to buy products from the *reboost* in euros. In sum, where Tiv strived to turn food into prestige items and prestige items into expansive kinship relations, *ecoxarxeires* strived to turn euros into *troks*, then circulate these *troks* in order to ultimately generate and strengthen social bonds.

While the above was an ideal state, in practice it would turn out that these circuits sometimes leaked and spilled over into one-another (cf. Callon 1998b). I will come back to this dynamic of closure and spill-over throughout the following chapters. Here I would like to underline, however, that what we are discussing are not already-given, supposedly incompatible circuits, spheres, or regimes of value. Beyond the fact that these constructions were always imperfect, it is important to acknowledge that there was a *desire* to bring about such circuits and maintain a distinction between them. This desire came forth out of a conception of a societal model where the sovereign power to decide on matters of economy would lie within that circuit itself, instead of being an imposition from 'el sistema'. As Edmon put it in an interview: "To bet on the *trok* is to bet on us to control the economy. This is, in reality, economic sovereignty. On a very small scale, so it seems we don't even hurt capitalism, but every *trok* created is a victory against capitalism. . . . Here it is us who control our own economy; the euro is something we don't control."

This notion of economic sovereignty or taking control of the economy was shared by almost all of my interlocutors and often intertwined with the idea of *autogestió* or the ability to self-organize and collectively take ownership over one's existence without relying on the state or capital.¹⁹ This explicitly political gesture was, I contend, informed by my interlocutors' prior involvement in social mobilizations. That is, we see the same

19 This sounds similar to neoliberal and libertarian views of individual selfhood acting with complete autonomy without interference from the state. However, in this context *autogestió* was also a collective act. Self-managing also meant taking up the responsibility to create relations with other people and collectives and care for others.

kind of rejection of existing socio-political orders and economic systems that I described in the above-mentioned autonomous movements. What this shows us is, firstly, that we need to read the emergence and existence of alternative economic networks against a history of social activism that goes back several decades, and, secondly, that it is important to pay attention to how this history informs the way an alternative economy is imagined and put into practice. The following section will therefore show how various eco-networks worked together with the Cooperative in order to realize a decentralized model of the economy.

Decentralizing the Economy

The eco-network is not its own microcosm. We have already seen that its origin was informed by a history of social mobilizations. Moreover, the *ecoxarxa* was also part of a much wider landscape of alternative projects. Small scale organic producers from the region, eco-villages, sustainable communities, neighborhood associations, and other socially-orientated projects were all familiar and maintained relations with the eco-network. Most significantly, however, the eco-network was affiliated to the Cooperative. This conglomerate of networks, projects and organizations came together in order to create a regionally dispersed alternative economy that was organized in the following way.

In 2016, the Cooperative initiated a process of *descentralizació* (decentralization). The rationale behind this process was a collective realization that the Cooperative was centralizing all its resources - in terms of monetary resources, but also knowledge and infrastructure - in Barcelona, with the rest of Catalonia falling by the wayside. This concentration of power and wealth was of course antithetical to the core principles of the Cooperative and was seen as a reproduction of the logic of *el Sistema*. Indeed, much like the eco-network and other autonomous movements in Spain, the Cooperative in fact preached the abolishment of hierarchies and a more horizontal organizational structure. In practice, however, all the monetary resources were managed by the Economic Management Committee in Barcelona and nearly all decisions regarding the distribution of these resources were taken at the monthly *assemblees permanents* (general assemblies) at the Barcelonan headquarters of the Cooperative. These centralizing tendencies were consciously countered by a process of decentralization that was intended to more evenly distribute resources and power among regional and locally organized alternative economic networks.

As part of the *descentralizació*, the members of the Cooperative came up with a spatially-organized division of their alternative economic system in the form of Global-Bioregional-Local (General – Bioregional – Local) division. Resources and information flowed from the Global to the Bioregional and eventually to the Local, but the idea was

that, once the Cooperative had been decentralized, these exchanges would be more equal or even reversed. The *ambit Global* or simply *el Global* was the term used to refer to the Global structure of the Cooperative. Decisions that affected the Global were taken in the monthly general assembly of the Cooperative in Barcelona. The Global, thus, was the totality of projects, networks, and activities that were seen to fall under the responsibility and authority of the *permanent* in Barcelona.

In the context of the *descentralizació*, two so-called Bioregions were erected in the North and South that had their own (in principle) sovereign assemblies, and a third Bioregion in the East, was in the making. Here, the 'East' basically encompassed Barcelona and surroundings. While in geographic terms this was actually the central area, it was called East in order to avoid the word 'central'. These Bioregional assemblies were attended by representatives of local alternative economic projects (such as *ecoxarxes* or consumer groups), but lived in one of the Bioregions. While ultimately these Bioregions wanted to form a sovereign structure more or less independent of the Cooperative, during my research they still continued to use resources provided by the Global structure. Indeed, throughout my research the overwhelming majority of the Cooperative's monetary resources were managed from the permanent assembly in Barcelona, with talk of decentralizing the budget still heavily debated.

The Local, meanwhile, was a kind of umbrella term that was used to refer to all the projects, networks, individuals, nuclei, and groups that, in one way or another, operated at what was seen as the local level. The prime example of this was the eco-network. These were often romanticized as concrete manifestations of how an alternative economy was not only possible, but already existed. Indeed, during my time as a collaborating member of the Welcoming Committee, I was often encouraged to take visitors to the eco-network where I had done some fieldwork so that people could see a real example of an alternative economy at work. At the Local level, however, feelings towards the Cooperative were more ambiguous. As Alba told me: "In reality, we're not really part of the Cooperative, I think we mostly just use their *herramientas* [tools or devices]."

In terms of organization and coordination among these different levels, each Bioregion and Local node had its own assembly that was sovereign and could decide on matters pertaining to its territory. For instance, each eco-network could decide whether or not the products in the *rebost* could also partially be bought in euros or not. However, decisions that required, for instance, resources from the Cooperative's fund to be allocated could not be taken in the Bioregion or Local level, but had to be taken at the general assembly in Barcelona. For instance, if a Local eco-network wanted to have one of its members receive a remuneration from the Cooperative, this would first have to be agreed upon in the Local assembly of the eco-network. Then representatives

of this network would take up this matter in their relevant Bioregion. If a consensus was reached in the Bioregion, Bioregional representatives would take the matter to the general assembly in order to seek approval of the decision. This was, as one can imagine, often a very complex, and drawn-out procedure to which I will return in Chapter Four.

Beyond these political ties, there were also many socio-infrastructureal relations between the various levels. Indeed, the social currency used by various eco-networks was managed by people who received a remuneration from the resource fund of the Cooperative. Another example is the food distribution committee of the Cooperative. The objective of this committee was to facilitate the exchange of goods in social currency between various producers, eco-networks and consumer groups. How this worked was that the committee members had a number of vans in which they transported goods from producers to various networks and in-between networks. That is, using funds received from the Cooperative, the committee would buy products in euros that were not easy to produce on a household scale, such as olive oil and rice, and would subsequently transport these goods to various eco-networks where they would be sold in social currency.

The Cooperative, then, worked as an aggregator for a number of eco-networks and other alternative projects throughout Catalonia and facilitated the creation of a decentralized, self-organized economic model in a number of ways. At this point, however, the question arises what kind of organization the Cooperative actually was.

The Cooperative

The founding of the Cooperative more or less coincided with the appearance of the first eco-networks in 2009 and was the brainchild of similarly-minded, and at times even the very same, people that were involved in the first *ecoxarxa*. The Cooperative was officially founded in 2010 as the result of the efforts of activist collectives looking to establish connections amongst themselves in order to construct an alternative economic system “at the margins of capitalism”. Its name would indicate that it is indeed a cooperative, i.e., a legal entity made up of members who collectively own an enterprise and work towards some kind of shared goal. However, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Niko would always say in the welcoming sessions: “The Cooperative is a political name.” This means that the Cooperative was more like a social movement using juridical structures designed by the state in order to ‘hack the system’ and create autonomously-governed economic spaces that were thought to lie outside of the state’s reach. Or, as Valerie put it whenever she gave the welcoming sessions instead of Niko : “the idea is to use the law [*utilizer la ley*] to subvert the system.”

The Cooperative was in fact, in a legal sense, made up of five different cooperatives. These were purely legal forms that were used for specific purposes and not separate

organizations in the style of the Cooperative or eco-networks. The most commonly used legal form was the *cooperativa mixta*, which on the one hand allowed for the production of goods for third parties (i.e., for non-members), and allowed the Cooperative to receive goods and services (e.g., donations) and to redistribute them among any affiliated members. The activities that fell under the operational scope of the Cooperative were multiple: from an interest free bank to an alternative employment system, and from a telecommunications service to a food distribution network. All these projects were designed so that people could become less dependent on “the System”. The social currency for instance, was thought to make people less reliant on what was seen to be volatile fiat currency controlled by banks and the state. The responsibility of realizing these projects fell in the hands of a group of remunerated activists that were organized in a variety of committees. The table below gives an overview of the committees that were in existence during the time of my research.

Welcoming Committee	The welcoming committee was in charge of welcoming people who were interested in the Cooperative and maintaining relations with local networks. The members of the welcoming committee also organized weekly welcoming sessions where people could find out what the Cooperative was all about and how they could potentially collaborate.
Communications Committee	The communications committee was in charge of internal communication (maintaining the webpage, facebook, etc.), and through a related extension of the committee (<i>extensió</i>) also handled external communication with the media and overseas collectives.
Coordination Committee	The coordination committee was burdened with the task of coordinating activities between committees and making sure that the committees actually carried out their tasks. Another important function of the committee was to prepare the monthly assembly. Due to its function and the fact that its members had to know what all the other committees were doing, the coordination committee concentrated a lot of power and was therefore the topic of much controversy and conflict.
Communal Spaces Committee	The communal spaces committee was in charge of overseeing collectively owned spaces. During the time of my research, the only commonly-owned space that was managed by this committee was the downtown office of the Cooperative in Barcelona called Can Xim.
Food Distribution Committee	This committee facilitated the exchange of goods between various eco-networks throughout Catalonia. In more concrete terms, this meant that the committee transported non-perishable products from network to network. The committee did not just transport goods produced by the members of the eco-network, but also supplied the eco-networks with goods such as olive oil and rice from small-scale third-party producers in the region.

Finance Committee	At the time of my research this committee consisted of only one person who was in close contact with the Coordination Committee and the Economic Management Committee. However, for the majority of my interlocutors (and myself as well) it was rather unclear what the tasks of this committee were. This committee ceased to exist in the final two months of my research.
Economic Management Committee	The Economic Management Committee was the largest and arguably the most important committee of the Cooperative. The members of this committee were charged with preparing the annual budgets and dealing with the bureaucratic and administrative tasks that came with managing the alternative employment system of the Cooperative.
IT Committee	This committee was in charge of the IT infrastructure of the Cooperative (servers, web domain, mailing lists etc.). It was the second biggest committee in the Cooperative and, like many IT committees in conventional settings, often got the blame whenever things did not run smoothly or malfunctioned.
Legal Committee	The Legal Committee basically functioned as a lawyer's office. The members of this committee, who also worked as lawyers outside of the Cooperative, determined the Cooperative's strategy when dealing with the state and offered legal services to the members of the Cooperative.
Relational Mediation Committee *	This was a special committee that was not officially part of the structure of the Cooperative, but was external to it. The members of this committee were tasked with mediating relational conflicts among the members of the Cooperative. This is why this committee was placed outside of the larger structure of the Cooperative, so that conflicts of interest could be avoided.

Apart from the committees, there were also so-called *projectes globals*. These were projects that had a more specific purpose than a committee and were often of a more temporary nature. During the period of my research, there were basically two *projectes* that were still functioning. At the downtown offices of the Cooperative, there was a co-working space which was in fact a productive project that belonged to the general field of action of the Communal Spaces Committee. Here people from 'the outside' could rent rooms where they would carry out some kind of income generating activity. Another *projecte global* was a telecommunication service. Using a legal cooperative form, the Cooperative had applied for a business account with a large telecommunication provider. Through this account, members of the Cooperative were subsequently able to get cheaper mobile phones and mobile phone contracts that, moreover, were not linked (and therefore not traceable) to anyone's personal name.

The members of these committees mostly gathered in an office space of sorts that the Cooperative has been running in Barcelona since 2014. During the time of my research in 2016-2017, this was the Cooperative's base of operation and arguably the most important node in the alternative economy that my interlocutors were creating.

Staying true to its activist origins, the Cooperative's 'office' was in fact a squatted therapeutic center in downtown Barcelona that had gone into foreclosure after the 2008 financial crisis. Just a few blocks away from the famous Sagrada Familia, the Cooperative's squat was a spacious, well-equipped building that held a number of different spaces that were integral to the functioning of the Cooperative.

During my first visit, I entered through a sliding glass door and approached a large, curved, gleaming reception desk. The receptionist told me to take a seat and wait until Niko, who was going to introduce me to the Cooperative, would arrive. As I sat there waiting, perhaps belying my own assumptions of what the 'office' of an alternative economic project should look like, I was surprised by the size, style, and overall aura of the Cooperative's squat. The reception desk gave way to a veritable labyrinth of hallways and doors that led to windowless yet airconditioned offices used mostly for meetings. In addition to these smaller rooms, there was a larger rehearsal room that was perhaps originally intended for gym or yoga classes, but was now used for the general assemblies of the Cooperative. Cooperative members would meet here once a month in order to debate, discuss, and hopefully arrive at decisions regarding the distribution of resources and the overall political direction of the Cooperative. It was not uncommon for these assemblies to go overtime and sometimes they could last for up to nine or ten hours.

On the upper floor, the labyrinth of hallways and miscellaneous rooms continued. This is where several of the Cooperative's committees held their internal meetings. As the rooms of this former therapeutic center were already well equipped for this purpose, some of these spaces were also rented out to people from 'the outside' who used them for therapy sessions. A small number of rooms, moreover, were turned into living spaces by a number of activists who lived out their daily lives in the squat. The upper floor also housed a fully equipped kitchen that was mostly used by the inhabitants, but also for collective lunch breaks. The crown jewel of the Cooperative's squat was the large rooftop terrace that looked out onto the balconies of the surrounding high-rise buildings. The welcoming sessions were held here, particularly during the warmer months of the year, under a large, colorfully-decorated canopy near the raised bed gardens where some Cooperative members cultivated flowers and vegetables.

Returning to my point that the committees' work was carried out by a group of *remunerated* activists, this money was generated through a specific project of the Cooperative, namely its alternative employment system. I will explain how this system worked as it will allow us to (1) gain an understanding of what the Cooperative is and does, and (2) lead us into a discussion on the broader significance of the Cooperative (and eco-networks) in relation to the post-2008 Spanish landscape.

Becoming Liberated from Capitalism

The Cooperative's alternative employment system needs to be seen within the context of the current Spanish labor regime. While in 2019 Spain emerged out of the recession it fell into after the 2008 financial crash and the unemployment rate has indeed dropped from its peak of over 25 percent in 2011 (and nearly 60 percent among young people), overall unemployment, particularly among young people, is still high (OECD 2018). Moreover, a series of labor reforms in 2011 and 2012 has made it easier for workers to be fired, and more and more employers rely on temporary contracts (Riesco-Sanz 2016; Picot and Tassinari 2017, 469-471). In this climate of structural unemployment and job insecurity, one option to work outside of wage labor is to become self-employed, i.e., *autónoma*. However, there are considerable financial barriers to being an *autónoma*, most notably the mandatory minimum monthly tax of 278 euros. This is one of the highest rates in Europe and makes securing a livelihood as a small business holder complicated.

The alternative employment system of the Cooperative offered a way to still be self-employed and have a degree of legal coverage, yet without having to pay the taxes required by the state. How this worked is that as a small business holder or a collective project one would become a *sòcia* (member) of one of the aforementioned legally-registered cooperatives of the Cooperative, while still maintaining one's autonomous economic activity as a regular *autónoma*. Yet instead of paying 278 euros a month to the state, *sòcies* would pay a minimum trimestral fee of 75 monetary units²⁰ to the Cooperative. After a certain income threshold was reached, this base amount would increase proportionate to one's earnings, in a manner similar to a marginal tax system. In general, however, being a *sòcia* was nearly always cheaper than being an officially registered *autónoma*, making this an attractive option for those who struggled and/or refused to pay the self-employment taxes required by the state.

The trimestral payments of the *sòcies* constituted about 90 percent of the Cooperative's revenue in euros which, during the time of my research, amounted to around 450,000 euros a year. These commonly sourced funds were used for a variety of purposes, such as the financing of projects like the social currency or the food distribution network. Around 80 percent of these funds, however, were used for the remuneration of people who dedicated their time to the Cooperative. While these people receiving a salary could be called 'employees', these types of terms were generally not used in the Cooperative and it was preferred to speak of *liberadas*²¹ or *assignats*. That is, by receiving a so called *assignació* or remuneration for their labor, these people were seen as being liberated from the need to engage in waged-labor in

20 A part of this fee could be paid in social currency as well.

21 I more often heard the Spanish term *liberada* than the Catalan translation which would be *alliberat*.

the capitalist system. The maximum remuneration permitted was set at 900 monetary units – 15 percent was required to be in social currency and was calculated in terms of hours, with 30 hours set as a maximum. The *liberadas*, then, were able to devote their time and energy towards creating alternatives, while the *sòcies* were able to continue to engage in their own economic activity.

I will come back to the legal status of this particular construction at length in chapter six when I discuss the relationship between the Cooperative and the state. Here it will suffice to mention that, since the inception of this alternative employment system, both the *sòcies* and *liberadas* were, in legal terms, volunteers who were working for the Cooperative. While this had apparently worked flawlessly for a time being, in October 2016, right before my research period began with the Cooperative, two *sòcies* were caught in a series of inspections by the Ministry of Labor. This had a number of consequences for the Cooperative, including the legalization of their alternative employment system. Towards the end of my research in the summer of 2017, the Cooperative was in the process of switching towards a model wherein the *sòcies*, but not the *liberadas*, were given small contracts. For many in the Cooperative, however, this meant a move into the wrong direction and was experienced as a concession to legal hegemony of “the System”. This existential crisis, moreover, was compounded by an internal financial and organizational crisis that I will return to throughout this dissertation.

It is important to note, however, that I do not intend to bring up this crisis as a way of saying that alternatives are ultimately prone to failure. To the contrary, the fact that the Cooperative achieved the remuneration of labor through common resource pooling without any kind of state aid, corporate funding, speculative investing, or large-scale commodity production is indeed remarkable and has, to my knowledge, not been replicated at this scale. Yet neither should we romanticize the achievements of the Cooperative. As I will show in the following chapters, the Cooperative and eco-network were not free from abuse of power, conflict, and exploitation. What I wish to emphasize here is that the Cooperative and eco-networks, far from being a static entities, were dynamic organization that were caught up in continually shifting social fields that required careful navigation by its members.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the 2008 financial crisis had considerable impact on the lives of millions of people across the globe. Moreover, the austerity politics that were adopted in many Southern European countries had drastic consequences for the livelihoods of people across different classes and generations. In this context, we have seen large-scale political mobilizations and the increased visibility of alternative economic projects,

among them several eco-networks and the Cooperative. Indeed, we have seen how within this context the members of both the Cooperative and eco-networks employed various tools, such as a social currency and an alternative employment system, in order to become less dependent on 'the System' and to establish an alternative economy perceived to be free from the hegemony of the global financial system and the Spanish state.

Yet we should be careful not to overextend the explanatory power of crisis. That is, while the crisis can be experienced as rupture, it is important to be attentive to the continuity that certain seemingly novel and highly visible practices show with already existing forms of social and political mobilization that were simmering beneath the surface. As I have shown, the practices and ideas of my interlocutors were shaped by a long history of social mobilization that goes back several decades. We should be wary, then, of positing a simple causal, functional relation between crises and alternatives where, as E.P. Thompson would say, alternatives "intrude occasionally and spasmodically upon the historical canvas, in periods of sudden social disturbance" (1971, 76). Instead, it is important to examine the norms, social obligations, ideas of right and wrong, and overall moral universe that motivate people, in conjunction with their material well-being, to pursue certain livelihood strategies. In the next chapter, I turn to a detailed examination of the life-sustaining practices that my interlocutors engaged in.



Chapter Two

Life and Work Outside of the Hamster's Cage

Introduction

What does it mean to lead an alternative life? And how is an alternative form of living given shape? Like many other alternative economic projects, the eco-network and Cooperative were run largely on volunteer basis, without any wages in the conventional understanding of the word. The absence of waged labor is in fact a common characteristic of many alternative economic spaces, particularly the more grass-roots and/or unregulated variants (Gibson-Graham 2006a [1996], 63). While many of my interlocutors were, in varying degrees, still dependent on waged labor, they actively looked to minimize their time spent working for a wage in order to engage in various forms of small-scale production, self-employment, and different kinds of paid and unpaid work. Moreover, these activities were valued and performed in ways that were opposed to what they saw as labor in the capitalist system. The remunerations received by the members of the Cooperative, for instance, were called *assignació* instead of salaries or wages because the latter terms were considered too *capitalista*. The absence of waged labor as a desirable livelihood strategy therefore invites us to critically reflect on the relation between life, labor, and work within the context of the construction of alternative economic formations.

A number of scholars have argued that structure of labor and class relations in the Global North are becoming similar to that of the global South in the sense that the labor condition in “advanced economies” is now also increasingly characterized by precarity and informality (Beck 2000; Davis 2006; Kasmir 2018; Standing 2011). The hegemony of wage labor is on the decline and instead we see the rise of what some observers have called the post-wage economy wherein people rely on a variety of income-generating activities that fall outside of the waged labor relation. In general, analyses of these forms of work focus on freelancers, informal migrant workers in the agricultural and construction sector, and more recently also platform or gig economies such as Uber and Deliveroo where workers are formally self-employed (Cant 2019; Dubal 2017; Friedman 2014; Hua and Ray 2018). However, many so-called alternative economic activities also fall within this category as they are generally not compensated in the form of a waged labor contract. In this chapter I will therefore situate the Cooperative and eco-network within this context of the changing configuration of work in the Global North, in order to shed light on the changing ways in which people make a living.

While the re-configuration of work is a more general structural development, the way it unfolds is always tied to specific regional or national labor markets. In Spain, a series of labor reforms that were part of the austerity measures adopted by the state have indeed eroded worker rights and incentivized the creation of temporary contracts, ‘flexible’ positions, and other forms of employment that are arguably less secure than before. It seems that in Spain and other Southern European countries,

more and more people are forced to pick up these precarious forms of employment. However, in the case of the eco-network and Cooperative, we see that people are not only being 'forced' into these precarious positions, but that people also consciously choose employment opportunities outside of the waged labor contract. This often involved an active negation of a more conventional, 'capitalist' salaried employment and class position in favor of what was experienced as more fulfilling and purposeful work. These latter, 'non-capitalist' forms of work and life were celebrated for their liberating potential and seen as a way to gain a sense of ownership over the economy and one's own existence. At the same time, however, these forms of work were also experienced as precarious, tiresome, and exploitative.

In order to make sense of the manifold configurations of the relation between life, work, and labor, I will make use of ethnographic perspectives from the Global South that foreground the way people shape their lives through forms of work that are normally characterized as precarious (Gandolfo 2013; Millar 2014; O'Hare 2019; Thieme 2017). In this chapter, I will draw on these insights to decenter waged labor as an analytic for making sense of how people make a living and will instead foreground alternative work as a mode of provisioning. Throughout my analysis, however, I will emphasize that 'alternative' work can itself be highly (self-) exploitative and was also experienced as such by my interlocutors (Gray 2013; Guthman 2004; Samers 2005). Using work as an analytical entry point into unpacking the social reconfiguration of livelihoods in contemporary Spain, then, this chapter will showcase the manifold ways in which labor was performed and valued in the Cooperative and eco-networks, thereby highlighting the multidimensional nature of work and life in an alternative economy.

Precarity and Life Outside of the Wage

With the development of industrial capitalism, wage labor became "the locus of personal identity, socioeconomic security, and political entitlement" (Monteith et al. Forthcoming). The "employee", moreover, subsequently became the central value-generating subject and the institution of employment "became the central figure through which work was imagined in the industrial world" (Monteith et al. Forthcoming). In contrast, a "wageless life", as Michael Denning conceives it, has generally been seen as "a situation of lack, the space of exclusion; the *unemployed*, the *informal* [emphasis in original]" (Denning 2011). Those without wages are the proverbial wretched of the earth, the "surplus populations" that are excluded from the spaces of capital accumulation and left to a precarious existence at the margins (Breman & van der Linden 2014; Davis 2006; Li 2010.) The loss or absence of stable employment, moreover, is often accompanied by experiences of existential insecurity or what is known as "ontological" precarity (Allison

2013; Berlant 2011; Butler 2004; Molé 2010). As Anne Allison puts it: “unstable work destabilizes daily living” (2012, 349).

This issue of the precaritization of work has come to the fore amidst the emergence of a post-Fordist configuration of work in the Global North. That is, life-long waged employment, so characteristic of the post-WO II Fordist regime of production, is on the decline and in its place we see the “flexibilization” of labor and an increasing amount of people forced to take up jobs that fall outside of the waged-labor relation (Kalleberg 2009; Riesco-Sanz 2016). Guy Standing (2011) even claims that we are witnessing the rise of a new social class which he calls “the Precariat”.²² This development has been critically regarded as the spread of a neoliberal governance model, the retreat of the welfare state, and an attack on organized labor (Barbiere and Scherer 2009; Fraser 2003; Hewison and Kalleberg 2013). Underlying this literature is a sense of loss or a fall from a period of grace in which workers had stable jobs and their rights were protected under the welfare state (Monteith et al. Forthcoming). This is evident in the usage of terms such as the “Brazilianisation” or “South-Africanisation” where the Global South features as a negative referent to describe the decline of the hegemony of waged labor in the Global North (Beck 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Gorz 1994). In the face of this reconfiguration of work, the assumption in the literature on precarity is that people desire a measure of stability and generally aspire towards a “proper job” through which a comfortable life can be led (Ferguson and Li 2018).

To be sure, the image of the waged employee is an evocative frame of desire for many people across the globe and the expansion of waged labor markets has been a powerful organizing principle within policy circuits. Yet within the context of alternative economic projects, it is important to remember that there is often a specific intentionality to the act of participating in these projects. As we have seen in the previous chapter, my interlocutors consciously chose certain ways of living that reduced their dependence on ‘the system’. With respects to work, the goal was to minimize one’s dependence on waged labor and engage in forms of work (*feina*) that were seen as more fulfilling. In some instances, my interlocutors even wanted to dissolve the distinction between work and life entirely; to turn *feina* (work) into a *projecte de vida* (life project). To make sense of the way the members of the eco-network and a Cooperative made a living, I will therefore heed Ferguson and Li’s call for “a profound analytical decentering

22 Standing’s conceptualization of modern processes of class formations has been critiqued for: glossing over the vast plurality of experiences of marginality and exploitation by very different groups of people (Neilson and Rossiter 2008; Waite 2009), for being based on a Northern experience of work and ignoring that precarity has been the norm for the majority of workers across the globe (Munck 2013), and for perpetuating stigma’s of lower social classes as “dangerous” and “volatile” (Millar 2017).

of waged and salaried employment as a presumed norm or telos, and a consequent reorientation of our empirical research protocols" (2018: 1).

In decentering waged labor as an analytic to make sense of how people make a living, it is useful to instead turn to perspectives from feminist economics and economic anthropology. Within economic anthropology, the recognition that wage-labor is not the be-all and end-all of economic life and that livelihoods are built upon a wide variety of work has proven to be a fruitful way of thinking about laboring activity in relation to the social reproduction of livelihoods (Dove 2011; Dunn 2004; Goddard 2017; Gudeman and Hann 2015; Humphrey and Mandel 2000). Similarly, feminist thinkers have shown how activities that lie outside of the waged labor relation, such as domestic and care work, are in fact crucial to the reproduction of the waged labor force and of life in general (Beasley 1994; Collins and Gimenez 1990). It is therefore important to recognize the *value* of these activities in relation to the constitution of "the economy". Or, as Gibson-Graham put it, "to include all of this work in a conception of a diverse economy is to represent many people who see themselves (or are labeled) as "unemployed" or "economically inactive" as economic subjects, that is contributing to the vast skein of economic relations that make up our societies" (2006a [1996], 63).

We should, however, be careful not to romanticize these forms of work. Indeed, non-waged work or non-capitalist work does not equal good work or work that is free from exploitation. Samers writes that since Gibson-Graham's project is ultimately a political one that looks to perform alternatives (Gibson-Graham 2008; Roelvink 2015), they mostly focus on non-capitalist practice and neglect the "myriad of mundane, yet 'exploitative' ... sites of informal employment that exist throughout advanced economies" (2005, 877; c.f. Williams and Round 2008). We need not follow Samers' critique all the way and look for where certain forms of alternative work and labor cross the threshold and become exploitative. Yet I agree with his underlying point that insufficient attention has been paid to the many ways in which labor in alternative circuits can potentially be experienced and valued beyond merely their supposedly transformative capabilities or, for that matter, their exploitative character. My interlocutors in fact often simultaneously affirmed the liberating potential of alternative work, as well as express feelings of fatigue, frustration, precarity and frustration. In the following sections, I will turn to the manifold ways in which the relation between life and work was articulated in the context of alternative economic formations.

Moving to the Countryside

I will begin this ethnographic section of the chapter with a description of the life and work trajectory of Andreau. When I met Andreu, he was a member of the eco-network up in the rural north of Catalonia, *soci* of the Cooperative, and a well-established beer

brewer who supplied the eco-network and local businesses with tasty craft beers. However, as one can imagine, it had taken him a long time to reach this point in his life. In the following section and throughout this chapter I will show how his life trajectory spoke to issues such as the reconfiguration of work, the desire to live outside of ‘the System’, and the vicissitudes of leading an alternative life.

I first met Andreu at one of the weekly encounters of the *ecoxarxa* where I asked him if I could come to see his beer brewery. He replied enthusiastically and the following week I found myself cycling to the village he lived in just west of Mas Jorda. Upon arrival, he invited me into his home and offered me a drink before showing me his place. It was a large, though very rundown single-family home at the end of a small group of houses that were separated by a narrow street which led to the old part of town. He told me that he had bought the house, and with some money he inherited from his father who used to work as a truck driver in the south of Spain, and was slowly remodeling the place. Born and bred in the sprawling suburbs of Barcelona, Andreu remained proud of his Southern roots; “*No soy Catalan*” as he would often say with a slight tinge of irony. Yet it was in this small village in the Northern Catalonian countryside where Andreu would decide to make his home.

As we sat there in the still unfinished kitchen chatting away, I was struck by Andreu’s calm, and friendly demeanor. A tall, middle aged man with dark features and a crooked nose that he had gotten from a car accident, his face would light up when talking about his brewery and the travelling he had done. Yet there was somehow also always a sort of tired sadness about him, and his expression would often turn to a fatigued yet wistful gaze. Though he raved about the quality of life in the countryside, not all was always well with Andreu. He had recently divorced his wife and was trying to balance renovating the house, keeping the business afloat, taking care of himself, and looking after his son, whom he would have over during weekends. The brewery, although generally doing well, had its ups and downs and he would sometimes have considerable stress about the bills he had to pay. I would later learn that he had been having trouble sleeping and was overcome by a sense of restlessness.

Andreu moved to the northern countryside in a fairly typical fashion. Like the majority of the members of the eco-network, he too was from Barcelona and in his adolescence was involved in the alternative scene. He played in a punk band, went to demonstrations, and frequented politically active squats, but eventually got tired of it and tried to “disconnect from this alternative circuit” as he later told me during an interview. This was during a time when he, together with his child and then wife, were looking to move away from the hustle and bustle of the Catalonian capital. Andreu’s wife had known of this part of Catalonia from when she used to work there as a guide in a youth camp together with Edmon, another *xarxeire*, and always spoke of how beautiful

it was. Their decision to move was aided by the termination of their rental contract and the landlord wanting to increase the rent from 500 to 800 euros a month. “And that’s when we said, ‘Let’s get out of here,’” Andreu recalled while recounting their decision to move. In a way, this was a fairly typical example of what migration studies terms ‘the network effect’ where the first people to migrate, the trailblazers as it were, establish a path that makes it easier and less risky for others to follow in their footsteps (Epstein 2008; Neto and Mullet 1998). It was thanks to people like Edmon and Alba who moved to the North, “before there were any highways and it was like you were at the of the world” as Alba would say, that others like Andreu and his family could follow suit and try to make a living in the *camp* (countryside).

Before setting up his brewery, Andreu worked a number of odd jobs: “I worked at an airport, distributing potatoes, all kinds of stuff, I did a bit of everything.” After hopping from one job to the next, he eventually got a more steady, salaried position at a big distribution company. Then, however, came the labor reform in 2012. This was the Real Decreto Ley 3/2012 passed on the 12th of February as part of a series of labor market reforms that were required under the austerity measures Spain had to take (Picot and Tassinari 2017, 471). “Suddenly it became really cheap to lay people off, and they fired 26 of us,” recalled Andreu. Indeed, the law made it easier for companies to fire people on fixed contracts, and the work Andreu and his co-workers did was outsourced to an external company that could do the work at a much lower cost (Molina and Godino 2013; Martínez-Pastor 2011). Now without employment and with no other secure, salaried position in sight, Andreu decided to “start doing this beer thing” and registered as a self-employed person (*autónomo*).

Until now, Andreu’s story seems to be indicative of the changing nature of work under austerity in contemporary Europe (Knight and Stewart 2016). That is, the flexibilization of the labor market forced him out of his waged labor contract and into a non-waged form of work that lacked the security of a monthly minimum salary. However, the story becomes more complex once we start to understand what drove Andreu and others to pursue forms of non-waged and “alternative” work in order to make a living.

Between Waged Labor and an Alternative Life

When I spoke to Andreu about his previous employment, he recalled that although it provided him with a stable income, it was a boring and tedious job with many “*horas muertas*” (wasted hours) where he basically had nothing to do. In a sense, Andreu had what David Graeber (2018) might call a “bullshit job”; a job that is unfulfilling, useless, and of which even the person performing the task cannot conceive of a good reason why they ought to be doing it. So while there may not have been many salaried positions

on the horizon for Andreu, he was not forced outside of the waged labor relation as such. Rather, he did not desire to work for a wage any longer. Roc, who received a remuneration for his work from the Cooperative, expressed it in this way: “I don’t have any desire of returning to the *mundo asalariado*. In fact I reject it, entirely.” This rejection of a salaried life was a broadly shared sentiment among my interlocutors, who generally tried to minimize their dependence on waged labor or to use their wages for creating alternatives.

Practically all the members of the eco-network divided their time between formal wage-earning activities and practices that were for them essential to the social reproduction of what was presented as an alternative way of living. Alba, for instance, worked on a temporary contract as a postal worker and spent her non-waged time doing various tasks for the *ecoxarxa* and producing apple juice that she later sold in social currency. Álicia and Edmon worked part-time jobs as a teacher and youth camp guide respectively, and spent a great deal of their non-waged time farming livestock and selling cow meat in social currency under the ingenious name Vakunin (a contraction of the Spanish word for cow *vaca* and the anarchist thinker Bakunin). My housemates, similarly, all worked part-time or seasonal jobs outside of the house. Ínes worked as a part-time teacher, Álex as a guide in a youth camp during the summer, and Vicenç occasionally worked in maintenance at the nearby natural park. The rest of their time was spent setting up their rural tourism project and cultivating their home garden in order to be as self-sufficient as possible. Joana, another *xarxeire*, rented out an apartment in a ski resort a few hours south of Barcelona where she would earn, or siphon off enough money from ‘the system’ in order to be able to spend the summer months living in an eco-village up in the mountains trying to construct an alternative livelihood.

At the Cooperative, meanwhile, we see a similar practice of finding ways to reduce dependency on waged labor and to use resources from “the system” in order to create alternative economic structures. To briefly recap: the Cooperative generated common resources through an alternative employment system that allowed people to be self-employed without having to pay the self-employment fees required by the state. Andreu in fact transitioned from being a regular state registered *autónomo* towards using the Cooperative’s services. As he said: “At the beginning I was paying *autónomos* [monthly self-employment fees] and doing it in a conventional way for quite some time.” Then, however, he realized that if he really wanted to start and grow an external distribution company, his brewery would not in fact be able to handle the capacity: “I realized it was going to be small.” Beyond these material constraints, Andreu was at a point in his life where he was tired of running his business in this conventional way. The constant stress, pressure to make certain targets, paying the self-employment fees, and the

overall workload had taken its toll. Andreu preferred to work less and have more time for his house and kid.

The Cooperative offered Andreu an alternative where, instead of paying 275 euros a month to the state, he only had to pay a base trimestral fee of 75 monetary units to the cooperative in exchange for using the Cooperative's fiscal number to make invoices. Moreover, these monetary units could be paid either in euros or social currency. For Andreu and over 400 other *sòcies*, this was a way to disconnect from the financial constraints present in more conventional circuits while still holding on to an infrastructure that allowed for the maintenance of a relatively secure economic flow. It is for this reason that the people making use of these services were officially referred to as *autoocupats*. The word *autocupat* referred to the idea that these people, by using the services of the Cooperative, were enabled to define the conditions under which they could make a living by pursuing an economic activity of their choosing. The profile and occupations of these users varied tremendously, from beer brewers and various types of craftsmen, to yoga instructors and software developers. Regardless of their specific activity, what the *sòcies* had in common is that they were not working for a wage, but were self-employed outside of the officially sanctioned self-employment framework of the state. Though, to be sure, some *sòcies*, much like the members of the eco-network, engaged in multiple forms of income-generating activities that could also include waged employment.

Sticking with the Cooperative, it is worth noting that the *sòcies'* fees were used to remunerate the labor of a selected group of activists, the so-called *liberadas*. In the way this was formulated, this quite literally was meant to convey that these people were liberated from capitalism and were now free to dedicate themselves to constructing alternative and autonomous spaces. While in theory this payment system would therefore eliminate the above-mentioned practice of balancing between formal wage labor and the desire for an alternative way of living, in practice many *liberadas*, particularly those who did not receive the maximum possible remuneration of 900 monetary units, did supplement their income through other activities. Isabel, for instance, worked at a call center, while Valerie worked at a production cooperative. Moreover, and I will return to this in the next section, at certain times *liberadas* were encouraged to not just depend on the Cooperative for money, but instead also set up their own income generating projects (*projecte productiu*). Jana, for instance, at one point started her own restaurant, and Sara and Sofia had set up a kind of financial consultancy for other alternative projects that struggled to manage their finances.

The actual work done by these *liberadas* displayed great variety and consisted of a multitude of tasks that were assigned to various committees. The IT committee, for instance, was tasked with designing non-hierarchical software that served for internal

and external communication and for supporting the virtual platform through which the accounts of the *sòcies* were managed. Managing these accounts was the task of the Economic Management Committee who were also in charge of managing the Cooperative's finances. Others, such as the members of the welcoming committee, gave workshops on the usage of social currency and attended the reception desk of the Cooperative's downtown office. Other tasks involved setting up food distribution networks, maintaining an interest-free banking system, coordinating communication between various committees, and preparing assemblies.

This work was also differentiated along gender lines. That is, shortly after I arrived in Barcelona, a so called *Grup de Gènere* was formed that was meant as a space where women, men, and non-binary persons affiliated to the Cooperative could come together to share experiences, analyze structures of gender oppression, and think of measures to change these dynamics within the Cooperative. Echoing debates in feminist economics (see Narotzky 1993, 147-154 for an overview), the group identified that there was a sphere of reproduction and production in the Cooperative. Reproductive tasks consisted of cleaning, cooking, working the reception desk, welcoming and guiding newcomers to the organization, and general caring tasks such as conflict mediation. Participating in assemblies, legal matters, maintaining social currencies and the actual construction of alternatives were seen to be more productive tasks. The group identified that, in general, women were more engaged with reproductive tasks than men and that productive tasks were valued over reproductive ones. At a later point in this chapter we will analyze the specifics of this gendered division of labor.

So this collection of alternative economic networks formed a very "diverse economy" indeed (Gibson-Graham 2006a [1996]), with forms of work that ranged from household farming and unpaid cleaning tasks, to both informal and more formalized forms of collective- and self-employment. I would like to emphasize that waged labor did not feature centrally in the imagination of an alternative economy and alternative forms of work, although many of my interlocutors still held some kind of temporary or more permanent waged labor contract. Indeed, while many of my interlocutors strived to minimize their dependency on salaried employment, for others this was not so easily done. In an interview, one member of the eco-network put it this way:

"Right now I'm working at a multinational company, which for me is a contradiction, but ... what I'm doing with this job is use the capital it gives me to do things that help make my surroundings better. I don't want cars that pollute, I don't want big tv screens or big cellphones. I want to live in a simple manner and use renewable energy, make the most from what the earth gives me and educate my kids in a conscious way."

This statement neatly summarizes the dynamic between pursuing and realizing alternative forms of work and life, while at the same time trying to make a living in the sense of keeping up with daily living expenses and providing for future generations. Regarding the question of whether or not my interlocutors belonged, then, to an 'alternative' class, we can clearly see that they were still involved in known processes of class formation. However, and I will return to this at a later point in this chapter, they also tried to negate or transform their class positions through pursuing alternative forms of work and life. Yet this was not an easy balance to maintain and there were different ways in which the relation between work and life were articulated among my interlocutors. The following sections will show how the experience of alternative work and life oscillated between empowerment and fulfillment on the one hand, and feelings of precarity and exhaustion on the other.

Liberating Work

That the relationship between the experience of an alternative life and labor on the one hand, and concrete socio-economic conditions on the other could be articulated in seemingly contradictory ways – i.e., as simultaneously empowering and precarious – became evident to me in an interview with Bernat. Like so many Spanish young adults, Bernat was unable to find secure employment even though he had attended university, held a degree in agricultural engineering, and had all the necessary qualifications. One of the youngest members of the eco-network, he too hailed from Barcelona and, just like Andreu, spent much of his adolescence in alternative and *punki* circles, as he dubbed them. Unlike Andreu, however, Bernat did not nor did he intend to disconnect from this circuit and proudly presented himself as *anti-sistema*. That is to say, he was severely critical of hegemonic political and economic institutions and looked for ways to destroy, disconnect, or otherwise disentangle himself from these structures. Through a combination of personal ideological convictions and structural developments in the Spanish economy, then, he was now in a situation where he was working in the informal sector "*todo en negro*", not having an insurance, and not building up a pension.

After he told me all this, I asked him whether he thought this was a precarious situation. He paused, took a breath and answered: "Yes, . . . but for me it isn't." He continued: "Objectively speaking, it's a precarious life [*una vida precaria*], it's *una vida de mierda* [a shitty life]. But we're happy because we don't want all this bullshit that they're selling us. . . . The hamster who lives in a cage lives like a king [*de puta madre*], he's got food, a television, but at the end of the day he's still a hamster." Here, Bernat made a critique of consumerism and emphasized that while life on the margin or outside of the hamster's cage may be precarious, at least he could determine the conditions of his own life. Or, in his words: "I'm precarious, but I don't have a boss."

Outside of the cage, moreover, he did not labor like a hamster, but instead did work as a free man: “In fact, I don’t *trabajar* [labor], y do *feinas* [work/tasks]. The origin in Latin is different, *trebalare* comes from when they took slaves and forced them to labor, whereas the free man did *feinas*, from *faenare*.” This distinction between labor and *feina* was not unique to Bernat and I found different iterations of this division among my interlocutors. I have previously mentioned that Roc rejected the *mundo asalariado*. When I asked him how much he earned he quickly corrected me and said: “I don’t talk about ‘earning’. I might be mistaken, but earning is . . . in my mind I’ve linked earning conceptually to a salary. But it’s not a salary. It’s a compensation, for the time I dedicate, for the energy I spend.” Indeed, while we can see the *liberadas* in the Cooperative as workers and their remunerations as salaries, these terms were generally avoided. *Assignació* was used instead of salary, and the word *activista* (activist) was almost always used over *trabajador* or *treballador* (worker). These *activistas*, moreover, did not engage in labor, but, like Andreu, did *feinas*. This was meant to convey that the work done by the activists of the Cooperative was different than the forms of labor in the ‘outside world’.

This distinction, moreover, is also found in social scientific writings on work where labor is the “human effort which pertains to capitalist relations of production” which is contrasted to work understood as “the rest of human energy expenditure in relation to non-capitalist realms” (Narotzky 2018, 31). Narotzky is right to be critical of this distinction at an analytical level, as it implies that these forms of energy expenditure are inherently different, i.e., that labor is somehow devoid of affect, emotion, and existential fulfillment and that work is never alienating, exploitative, and degrading. Later on in this chapter we will indeed see how the experience of alternative work was also articulated in terms of exploitation. Yet here I would like to emphasize that my interlocutors mobilized this distinction in order to erect a space where (alternative) work or *feina* was valued and presented as morally superior to conventional waged labor.

This valuation of work over labor, moreover, was part and parcel of a conceptualization of politics and what it meant to be a political agent in the world. Here we can recall Edmon’s comments about economic sovereignty from the previous chapter where “every *trok* we create is a victory against capitalism. . . . Here it is us who control our own economy.” It is in this sense that participating in an eco-network was as much about creating alternative value circuits, as it was about establishing a type of autonomous political space where the de facto sovereign control over local economic processes could be held by those occupying this space. In the face of a system that was perceived to have, as Bernat said, “taken away our structures of sovereignty, to be able to walk in the mountains or to be able to have your own garden,” many members of the *ecoxarxa* and Cooperative looked towards other means to fashion a “life worth

living” (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, 556). Time and energy were therefore invested into developing skills and carving out spaces where a feeling of sovereignty over their own lives and a sense of self-worth could be cultivated.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, these political reflections are aligned with the political strategies of autonomous movements that, rather than pursue some kind of recognition by the state, explicitly reject national and global political structures. Instead, it was believed that the correct way to act politically in this context was to create one's own alternative and autonomous systems. In this sense these types of expressions of political agency bear resemblance to those found in indigenous movements in South America or anti-globalization movements where similar conceptions of autonomy refer, in the words of Millar, “to the relinquishment of state power as an end, to a withdrawal from capitalist markets and modes of consumption, and to the carving out of spaces in which other forms of sociality and co-existence can flourish.” (2014, 47; see also Nash 2001; Graeber 2009; Williams 2008). The livelihood strategies and modes of employment my interlocutors developed were articulated in relation to these political convictions and it is in this way that participating in alternative economic projects was experienced as empowering and liberating.

However, while it is important to take these emic political conceptualizations seriously and analyze how they relate to the social reconfiguration of livelihoods in contemporary Spain, we should be careful not to romanticize these statements. Life and labor in alternative economies may have been talked about in terms of autonomy, freedom, and empowerment, but it was also experienced as exhausting, stressful, and precarious.

Precarious Work

While Bernat raved about the ability to be his own boss, I would like to draw attention to the pause he took before responding to my question about whether or not he thought he lived a precarious life. What this made evident to me is that he, and many of his fellow *ecoxarxeires* for that matter, were very aware of their own economic conditions. Indeed, Bernat did not stand alone and I often heard the simultaneous acknowledgment of precarity and the negation of that precarity in discourse and practice. I recall when Alba and I were on our way to yet another assembly and we ended up talking about how her income, as a postal worker on a temporary contract, was never secure. However, she later said, “but in *troks*? Uff, I've got so much social currency, I'm rich!” indicating that while in the context of the Spanish labor regime her work may be considered precarious, in the eco-network her labor could in fact produce more (surplus) value than she needed. Living an alternative life, then, was also about giving up a degree of material comfort and finding different ways to produce value. But this was an unevenly

distributed practice in the sense that some people went further in this regard than others.

Earlier I briefly mentioned how Joana rented out an apartment in a ski-resort during the winter months, in order to live the other half of the year in an eco-village. This eco-village itself was in fact also the result of a conversion of previously acquired resources that were now being used in order to carve out an alternative economic space. Artur, an activist of some renown who had started up projects in Spain and abroad, had used part of an inheritance and his own capital to buy nearly 70 hectares worth of land in the northern countryside, including a patch of land that held the remains of an old farmhouse. Among these ruins he sought to construct a “self-managed” and “autonomous” eco-village, in his terms. The idea was to attract people willing to live in the village, collectively build it up, and slowly collectivize his investment by having the future inhabitants pay a monthly fee. However, this value conversion was far from smooth and Artur would often, albeit in a half-joking manner, say that he was continuously ruining his life by starting up all these projects.

At the time of my research in 2016, Artur’s project had been up and running for about two years and yet many of the most basic facilities were missing. There was no running water, no toilet, no electricity, and no proper shelter. Moreover, the only way to reach the ecovillage was on foot. This made transporting building materials or even just supplying the eco-village extremely complicated. So while the potential of the site was obvious to notice with its lush patches of green and a nearby river and cascades, it was still largely uninhabitable. It should not be surprising, then, that Joana was the sole human inhabitant during my fieldwork period. For a couple months a year, she would, quite literally, camp out in the eco-village and carve out a way of living for herself among the sheep and goats that, much to her disgruntlement, Artur had decided to populate the eco-village with. Though Artur was a respected member of the eco-network, as an intellectual and a city dweller who came from an upper middle-class background, he was also the subject of much gossip and ridicule for his lack of more practical skills necessary to set up a functioning eco-village in the *camp*. Indeed, learning how to generate and acquire certain livelihood resources was a very time-consuming process and required using these resources in inventive ways. This was certainly evident in Joana’s case.

While food production was planned for - Artur always spoke of how delicious the home-made goat’s cheese was going to be - it was certainly not a reality yet in the eco-village. Once a week Joana would go down to the nearby village in order to do some grocery shopping at the supermarket and, of course, at the *rebot* of the eco-network. Because of the absence of refrigerated storage space, she gathered mostly non-perishable goods that would, hopefully, last her throughout the week. Up in the

eco-village, she enjoyed foraging in the nearby forest to see if she could find edible berries and vegetables. Her diet consisted mostly of raw foods, bread, and vegetarian stews. In fact, the very act of cooking was a fairly arduous process done by placing a pot or pan in a so-called solar parabolic cooker, a collection of reflective surfaces bent into a half circle which reflected the sun's rays onto the pan. This solar cooker was just one of the many nifty and inventive devices Joana used in order to make life a bit easier for herself. Probably one of the most intriguing contraptions she had was an old battery powered by a pair of solar panels she had acquired through social currency and that, with some modifications, allowed her to charge her laptop and phone. In the region's rain-filled spring and summer, however, both the solar cooker and the battery were only useful in those sunny moments in between the torrential rainfalls. A resourceful and eternally enthusiastic person, Joana felt at home in these circumstances. Yet not everybody went to the same extent as her in the pursuit of an alternative way of life.

Andreu was not the only one supplying beer to the eco-network. One of his competitors, so to speak, was Sam. While the brewery was Andreu's primary source of income, Sam made his living by working for a multinational telecommunications company. Like many of his fellow *xarxeires*, he too had made his way from Barcelona to the countryside in search of a more peaceful existence. While he tried to make "as little a connection as possible to the capitalist system," he realized that he "formed part of it for reasons related to my work and economy in the sense of my debts and mortgage." A firm believer in anarchism as a "way that society should function," Sam plainly stated that working for a multinational company "contradicts the way I see life." In fact, he had thought about quitting a number of times but never pulled through due to his responsibilities towards his children: "My daughters were living with me and my life was kind of, well not kind of, entirely devoted to them. . . . I did not want to take a gamble [by becoming a beer brewer]." Indeed, though for him it was a contradiction, he recognized that the job gave him the peace of mind (*tranquilidad*) to not worry about whether he would be able to pay off his mortgage and provide for his family. Yet it did remain, for Sam, an internal struggle: "but [my work] also held me back. . . . I didn't want to get into the beer making thing for real, because it would have involved my family."

As we continued to talk about and whether or not he would have liked to become a full-time brewer, Sam told me that he had thought about it but that he saw that Andreu was "living on the edge [está en una *situación de limite*]". Indeed, though Andreu would often remark about how he lived *de puta madre*, he was certainly not well off in an economic sense and was continually striking a balance between having to respond to economic pressures and being able to live according to his own political principles. In fact, towards the end of my research he was in a situation where he was losing a lot of sleep over the brewery and was organizing his operation in such a way as to

start producing more again in order to pay off some accumulated bills. He even told me that he was considering starting to pay the self-employment fees required by the state again like a regular self-employed person and that he was going to quit using the Cooperative's services.

What these conversations illustrate is that the relation between precarious work and a precarious life was articulated in different ways. While recognizing their precarious conditions, some of my interlocutors attempted to negate this precarity in both practice and discourse and found solace in finding different ways to provide for themselves and their families, friends, and partners. Others, however, were not able or did not aspire to go to these same lengths due to various existential concerns. Indeed, as Andreu's restlessness and sleepless nights already allude to, the returns on the work put into creating alternatives was rarely proportionate to the actual time invested into this process. In the following section, I will examine how the experience of alternative work was also formulated in terms of fatigue and (self-)exploitation.

Reaping the Rewards of Alternative Work?

Earlier in this chapter we saw that even though many of my interlocutors still engaged in forms of waged labor, it was not a central element in the imagination of an alternative economy. Instead we saw a great variety of income-generating activities that ranged from care work to various forms of self-employment. These different forms of work, moreover, were also compensated in a variety of ways. In the case of the *sòcies*, they took home the earnings generated through their own economic activity. My housemates, on the other hand, relied on the rents that visitors would give them for staying in their *masia*. In the Cooperative there was an accord in the assembly that established the maximum amount of an individual's remuneration at 900 monetary units, of which at least 15 percent should be paid out in social currency. There was always the option to voluntarily raise this percentage. Some members of the Cooperative were compensated in direct exchange (*intercanvi*), which could range from food to housing at the downtown office of the Cooperative or anything else the exchange partners would agree on. We therefore see forms of compensation that could either be in social currency, direct exchange, collectively pooled fiat-currency, or a combination of all three. A great deal of work was also done voluntarily and was compensated through gift-exchanges or more emotive forms of compensation. The cleaning tasks done by the core members of the eco-network, for instance, were not remunerated through any type of currency, but were certainly appreciated and valued by the other members of the *ecoxarxa*. However, money, gifts, appreciation, and respect were not the only things that my interlocutors got in return for their troubles.

A recurring theme throughout many of the assemblies I went to was participants stating, sometimes jokingly but sometimes more seriously, that nothing ever seemed to get done or that progress was incredibly slow. This was particularly evident at a regional level in the Northern Bioregion. Here is where representatives of a number of eco-networks, the Cooperative, and local nuclei scattered throughout northern Catalonia met and discussed how to coordinate relations among them. As the months went by, however, certain members became more and more vocal about the fact that nothing seemed to be getting done. "It's always the same, we always get together, talk and talk and talk, and then afterwards nothing happens," exclaimed Leo after yet another long day of debate. Indeed, these assemblies could last up to eight hours or more, could often turn very personal, and were physically and emotionally exhausting. Similar to what the anthropologist Federico de Musso found in alternative provisioning networks in Italy (Musso 2017), fatigue was a core embodied experiential category of the construction of alternative economic networks in Catalonia and went hand in hand with frustration.

I recall a particular altercation in an assembly of the Northern Bioregion where Lena and Jana, two *liberadas* posted in Girona, explained that from the permanent Global assembly in Barcelona there was a demand to create another legal cooperative form, because the one they were using to register the *sòcies* was now so full that the amount of money they were invoicing could potentially start to raise suspicion with the state. When nobody put themselves forward and no decision could be reached on who would take up this task, Lena exploded: "It's been six months since I've been saying this, and nobody has even lifted a finger [*y nadie se ha movido el culo!*]" Her partner Milo shared her desperation and exclaimed: "You don't see the urgency! I can't take this anymore!" Both of them ended up storming out of the room, with Lena crying out: "I won't participate anymore in these assemblies." A particular problem in the Northern Bioregion was that there were participants who received a remuneration from the Cooperative and could therefore dedicate more time to the movement (e.g., be present in both the Bioregion as well as the Global), while others participated in these assemblies entirely on a voluntary basis and did not have the time and resources to be as active. On more than one occasion, this would lead to what was talked about as *cremar* (burnout) or *cansar* (growing tired),

Indeed, the figure of the burned-out activist (*cremat*) is found in many social movements and was a common figure in the context of my research as well. In the Cooperative especially, many people had in fact left the organization over the years due to burnout. A former member of the IT committee put it this way: "I realized it [the Cooperative] is a *quema-activistas*, a *quemagente* [it burns through activists and people] because of the intensity and energy drain [*desgaste de energia*] it requires."

Though the reasons could vary, a common explanation given by various ex-members I interviewed was indeed expressed in terms of the running out of energy, i.e., in terms of physical fatigue. In addition, ex-members of the Cooperative often talked about what we can call relational fatigue, whereby the constant personal conflicts and altercations grew too much to bear. In explaining his decision to leave, a former member of the Communication Committee recounted: “I’m very tired of how things have been going here [the Cooperative] in the past two years ... so many uncomfortable situations, so many fights.” After recalling a particularly heavy relational conflict that he had in his committee he said, “It’s been very tiresome, both physically as well as mentally.” Those who left felt drained, exhausted, and disillusioned. The former member of the IT committee I interviewed said he had only recently deleted all his files related to the Cooperative from his computer and was only just now starting to be able to talk about the entire experience.

It is tempting to think of this as a form of self-exploitation which is indeed common in alternative economic circuits and among the informally self-employed more general (Friedman 1978; Galt 2013; Guthman 2004; Schmitz 2013). The term self-exploitation is usually employed to signify a lack of equivalence in monetary terms between the value of labor spent and the actual returns on that labor (Guthman 2004, 83). While the monetary compensation received by the *liberadas* gave them some sense of economic security, it was, certainly in an urban area such as Barcelona, still hard to get by on 900 monetary units a month. Speaking to Roc about his remuneration, he admitted that it “barely” covered his expenses, especially now that his daughter was going to university. Yet this lack of wealth was never the only or even prime reason people left the Cooperative. In fact, not being sufficiently compensated for one’s labor was at times seen as a necessary element of being part of an alternative economic project. As I continued to talk with Roc about the height of his remuneration and how he was able to live of this amount he said: “If we were to earn 1500 a month and if we’d have a high standard of living, we’d conform a lot [to the system]. He continued: “It’s important to just barely cover one’s necessities, so that people will continue to work for the project [the Cooperative].” For Roc and many of the more dedicated activists among my interlocutors, it was important to not live too comfortably as this would impede people from creating alternatives.

Performing Precarity

While the low amount of individual remuneration may not have been the sole reason people left the Cooperative, it was certainly key to a structural dynamic that we can identify as the performance of precarity. Earlier we saw how members of the *ecoxarxa* in particular, but certainly also activists at the Cooperative acknowledged that

economically they were not well off, but that they negated this precarious existence in discourse and practice. In the assemblies of the Cooperative, however, the reverse would often happen. “*No tenemos ni un duro* [we don't even have a dime]” was a phrase I often heard Iker say during his long orations at the permanent assemblies of the Cooperative. Using the plural form, he invoked a shared sense of precariousness supposedly felt by all the activists of the Cooperative. This was meant to convey a sense that those in the Cooperative had eschewed a comfortable, capitalist existence in order to dedicate their lives to a revolutionary project while receiving the bare minimum in return.

Indeed, while many members of the Cooperative and eco-networks came from a longer history of social activism, others were more recently converted and previously enjoyed comfortable salaried positions before choosing to become involved in the Cooperative life. Jaume, an influential figure in the Cooperative during my research, recounted his labor trajectory to me which involved consultation jobs at numerous firms and organizations, before, as he said, “I threw myself into precarity”. Similarly, Sara worked at a multinational cosmetic firm before deciding to dedicate her life to activism. One of my closest informants, Valerie, used to work at a large company in a management position. But, much like we saw in the case of Andreu at the start of this chapter, this was a boring and tedious job that did not give her any fulfillment. In fact, she told me that “I became an expert at making it seem as if I was busy. . . . When people would see me, I would say that I didn't have time because I had to go to a meeting.” At the Cooperative, however, she felt like her job actually mattered even though the monetary compensation was significantly lower. In the case of the *liberadas*, we therefore see the active negation of their previous class positions and desire to lead a life that was perceived to be outside of conventional labor and class relations. A desire, moreover, that was continually performed through discourses and practice.

In the context of paid work in an alternative economy, the performance of precarity was a way to separate the work done in the Cooperative from conventional labor and sometimes even to negate the distinction between work and life entirely. I recall one instance during an assembly in the Northern Bioregion where there was a dispute about certain tasks that had not been done. Aida, who was thought to be in charge of carrying out these tasks, felt like there had been some miscommunication about who was supposed to do the work. Lena, however, did not want to hear it and reminded Aida that “This isn't *trabajo*, it is a calling, a life's dedication.” Indeed, the core nucleus of activists at the Cooperative often expressed that it was their “life's work” [*proyecto de vida*] and not just some kind of job to be taken up or left whenever one pleased.

Erasing the distinction between life and work was one of the ways in which the power relations at the Cooperative were given shape in the sense that it became

about showing who was more dedicated to the cause. This was evident in the fact that Aida ended up in tears during the assembly after the continuous questioning of her dedication. She later told me that these kinds of instances were part of the reason that she ultimately decided to stop participating in the Cooperative. Later on in my research I would see similar patterns where people would question each other's motives and think of ways to purify the Cooperative from those who were felt not to be in it for the long run, or who were in it for the wrong reasons. In the following chapters I will go into detail about the way these power relations manifested themselves and brooded suspicion and mistrust amongst the members of the Cooperative. What I have shown in the above is that the notion of work as a calling or life project was something that had to be continually reaffirmed through public performances and was something that was used in order to regulate the way that work was structured within the Cooperative and eco-network.

Yet this notion of work as a freely taken up dedication to the cause was not the only way that work was viewed within the Cooperative and eco-networks. That is, work was not just experienced in different ways, there were also competing notions of what alternative work actually was and how work relations needed to be organized within an alternative economy. In the final section of this chapter, I will frame these competing notions as part of a broader value struggle between those who wanted to 'formalize' the Cooperative in a sense, versus those who felt that work should remain more 'informal' and not be subjected to mechanisms of control and regulation.

Formalizing Alterity

the Cooperative received a large influx of members and *sòcies* after the 15-M protests in 2011. The organization grew more and more complex as various projects were started in a wide range of areas, from health and education to finance and transport. (The Cooperative at one point even acquired a bus for public transportation.) As the cooperative grew, it became increasingly difficult to manage the amount of work. This became most evident in the Economic Management Committee (EMC) which was in charge of accountancy and managing the various flows of money. An ex-member of the Cooperative, Mateo, became aware of the overwhelming workload when the stressed-out members of the EMC started to approach him more frequently so that he could give them some massages. In an interview he told me that he saw that the members of the EMC managed all their work on personal computers, which were often of poor quality. There was no system in place that helped them manage the work that had to be done, leading to stress and physical complaints. Upon seeing this, Mateo told the committee that he could help them get organized, but only on the condition that they do it his way: "*nada de asamblea*". With his background as an engineer in a large company, he

proceeded to make an advanced excel sheet, created a clear organizational structure in the committee, and in general helped to “professionalize” the committee, as he would say. Yet he did so in a decidedly hierarchical way, running directly against some of the principles of horizontality and consensus that were so crucial for many people participating in alternative economic networks.

This dynamic was not just present in individual committees, but also across the entire organization. About three years before I started my research, there was a strong push towards formalizing the activity of the Cooperative. This was to a great extent the work of Jaume and a small group of supporters. When Jaume arrived, he noticed that there was no structure to the work that was being done: you would have the same persons appear in various committees, nothing was being documented, and everything was very “informal” as he told me. Starting in his own committee, he implemented, much like Mateo had done before him, a more structured way of doing things. Later he also would attempt to do so at the level of the entire cooperative by introducing several protocols that served to formalize various aspects of the cooperative’s functioning.

When I first met Jaume, he was already core member of the Coordination Committee and was in charge of preparing the agenda and chairing the assemblies. A tall, athletic figure in his mid-40s, Jaume directed the assembly in a decisive manner, speaking in a determined and calm way and surveying the room with a steely, focused gaze. He seemed to command a great deal of respect, although I would later learn that he was also seen as having concentrated too much power and was criticized for being too controlling and *capitalista*. Among the things that Jaume tried to implement was, for instance, a fixed structure for preparing, organizing, and carrying out the general assemblies of the Cooperative. I will return to the assembly in depth in the next chapter. Above all, however, he was concerned with finding a way to make sure that people, as he said, “*cojan su responsabilidad* [own up to their responsibilities]”.

In the absence of both an officially recognized boss to whom people would have to be responsible, as well as formalized labor control, an eclectic culture of regulation had emerged consisting of personalized forms of control and social pressure, and a constant questioning of each other’s work. During a preparatory meeting before the general assembly of the Cooperative, Valerie put it this way: “When you first enter the Cooperative, because there’s no obligations to a boss, everyone monitors [*vigila*] each other’s work, you feel so watched”. After she said this, Marco chimed in by pointing out that this was “the tyranny of informality [*informalidad*]”, referring to the fact that when an organization ostensibly does not have any hierarchies, informal, unrecognized hierarchies eventually form. Marco here seemed to obliquely reference Jo Freeman’s (1972) essay “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” where she showed the dangers of an

unwavering commitment to abolish all structures and hierarchies in feminist social movements.

In the face of the Tyranny of Informality, Jaume said that “I want to suggest some norms so that people own up to their responsibilities and do what they said they would do, something that forces them, because there’s no *presión de euros* or state laws here.” Jaume thought of introducing a chronogram that he was familiar with from his previous jobs. This was intended to map the exact tasks that each member carried out and what the exact amount of hours were that were spent on these tasks. This chronogram would then form the basis for performance reviews that would evaluate the work of each committee and each individual committee members.

Jaume’s efforts, while recognized as necessary by the members of the Cooperative, were also met with heavy resistance. Jaume was seen as being too *cuadrado* (square/rigid) and as stifling the activist spirit of the Cooperative with his protocols. Certain influential members of the Cooperative saw these chronograms and protocols as capitalist mechanisms of discipline and as contrary to the very nature of the activist work they were doing. As one member put it during an assembly in the Southern Bioregion: “it’s time to liberate ourselves [*liberarnos*] from the Barcelonan chronogram”. When I spoke to Jaume about his attempts to professionalize the Cooperative, he admitted that his attempts “were felt [by others to be] like an imposition”. Ultimately, Jaume was forced to leave the Cooperative after months of relational conflict. I will return to the details of this conflict in the next chapter. Here I wish to emphasize that there were different ways in which the organization of alternative work was imagined. Some saw it as a life project, as an activist calling that could not be quantified in formalized mechanisms. Others thought that these kinds of strategies could still be functional in constructing an alternative economy, even though they came from *el Sistema*.

This value struggle would manifest itself in various forms throughout my research and I will return to this issue in the following chapters. While I personally witnessed this most obviously in the case of Jaume, my interlocutors assured me that this had been going on in the Cooperative for quite some time. After Jaume left, a number of members of the Cooperative and myself were hanging around in one of the rooms in Can Xim discussing the future of the organization. Isabel said that it all felt very “static”, “cold” and “formal” to her in Can Xim and that she thought that it was time to start to stimulate creativity. In response, Gina recalled how the Cooperative seemed when he joined: “When I arrived it was during a time when they gave a lot of space to creativity, . . . people just did what they wanted to. Then, Sandro [a former member of the Communal Spaces Committees] was *la mano dura*.” Gina told us about how Sandro tried to put some more order in the way the downtown offices were run, and that he too was seen as *cuadrado* and *capitalista*. Valerie then shared a reflection that

she thought that things seemed to go in cycles: "There are cycles of bureaucratization . . . and then cycles of, like, everything is possible and let's do whatever we want." For Valerie, the departure of Jaume seemed to usher in a new cycle that would rekindle the Utopian flame of the Cooperative: "It's maybe not a very realistic view, but it's *bonito*." What was at stake here was also what the proper form of an alternative economic network should be. Should it be "formal" and "structured" or less governed by rules and more spontaneous? Should there be recognized hierarchies or an entirely horizontal governance structure? I will return to this battle of forms and how it manifested itself in the eco-network and Cooperative in the following chapters.

Conclusion

I started this chapter by asking what it means to live an alternative life and how my interlocutors gave shape to an alternative form of living. Throughout this chapter I have shown that waged labor did not feature centrally in the way the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks imagined their lives, except in a negative fashion as something to be avoided. Such "wageless lives" are often described as precarious, in the sense that they do not provide material nor emotional comfort. In the literature on precarious labor and precarious life, there is therefore an unspoken assumption that the wage is something desirable and, moreover, crucial in leading a life worth living.

However, as I have shown throughout this chapter, the majority of my interlocutors desired to rid themselves of the dependency on waged labor and "the System" more generally. As such, they undertook various activities that were seen as essential in bringing forth and reproducing an alternative way of life. These activities ranged from formal self-employment and informal small-scale production, to activities that we normally would not necessarily consider to be "economic", such as care work, and (paid and unpaid) activism. While these alternative lives could at times indeed be seen as precarious (and were also experienced as such), they were nonetheless considered desirable forms of living. Some of my interlocutors, particularly those involved in the Cooperative, even consciously gave up comfortable, salaried class positions in order to dedicate themselves to constructing alternative economic systems. I have argued that the literature on precarity is at a loss when trying to explain why people would willingly, as Jaume would say, throw themselves into precarity.

Drawing instead on ethnographic insights from the Global South, I have shown how my interlocutors fashioned particular forms of living through supposedly precarious work. I have emphasized that living and working outside of the wage and in an alternative fashion gave my interlocutors a sense of autonomy; of being able to decide the conditions of their existence without being trapped within the confines of the system. Recall Bernat's evocative metaphor of the hamster, who may live like a king, but

is in the end still a hamster trapped in a cage. Outside of the cage, however, is where one could be one's own boss. As I have shown, the experience of alternative life and work was part and parcel of how my interlocutors imagined themselves as political subjects.

Life outside of the hamster's cage, however, was not without its complications. I have shown that not everyone was able to escape the cage due to various existential concerns. Despite their desire to disentangle themselves from certain class relations, then, many of my interlocutors were still firmly embedded in capitalist class relations. Moreover, particularly among the members of the Cooperative, the experience of alternative work was also expressed in terms of fatigue (both relational and physical), and exploitation. The Cooperative was seen as a *quemagente* that required an extraordinary amount of energy and dedication from its participants. Indeed, some of the more dedicated members of the Cooperative regarded it as their life project or calling to be involved in a revolutionary project, instead of just another job to be taken up and left whenever one pleased.

What I have shown in this chapter is that the relation between life, labor, and work was articulated in different and sometimes contradicting ways. This became particularly evident in the final section of this chapter where I showed that there were conflicting visions on how work in an alternative economy should be given form. I have sketched the contours of a value struggle between those, like Jaume, who believed that if a horizon of social transformation was ever to be reached, it was necessary to put some kind of order within the structure of work. His vision of the proper form of the economy, however, was opposed to those who believed that working for the Cooperative was a calling or a vocation that could not be regulated by quantifying mechanisms. These debates about the proper way of organizing work (and the economy) bring us to the question of how and why certain imaginations of the economy are more seductive and have more staying power than others. In other words, what makes certain economic models stick? And how are certain imaginaries made to ossify into intelligible and tangible social forms? It is to these issues that I turn in the next chapter.





Chapter Three

The Dramaturgy of Alterity

Introduction

There were different ways in which my interlocutors talked about and imagined the economy. This was true both for the economic structures of *el Sistema*, as well as the alternative economic systems they were constructing. As we have explored in the previous chapter, there was not simply one model of alternative work that all my interlocutors agreed upon. This was a very contested terrain indeed and the minute details of what it meant to be “alternative” were debated in both formal and informal spaces. In what kind of formation should an assembly be held? How much of one’s remuneration should be in social currency? What kind of software and hardware should be used? What kind of language and behavior was appropriate within an anti-capitalist collective? And how should all these things be presented to the outside world? It was through continuous deliberation about questions such as these that my interlocutors gave shape to the economy.

The study of how both folk and expert models of the economy are turned into tangible realities is a research path that is becoming well-trod within economic sociology and anthropology (Hébert 2014; Mitchell 2011; Muniesa 2014; Narotzky and Besnier 2014). This process is generally referred to as the performativity of the economy (Callon 1998a), and scholars working within this framework explore how the economy is brought into being through performative discourses and practices. Yet why are some performances successful and others not? What makes certain models appealing, and consequently makes them stick? And why and how are some configurations of the economy broken down while others last? In this chapter I will argue that the literature on performativity has paid insufficient attention to these issues. Instead, I will explore these questions by drawing on the work of Erving Goffman and his dramaturgical perspective on the performative. His metaphor of the front and back regions of social life will be the lens through which I explore the performative dimension of alternative economic networks and explain why these networks took on the particular shape that they had.

In particular, I will pay attention to the continuous creation of front and back stages and how the separations between these stages were at times upheld yet at other times broken down. That is, for many of my interlocutors it was of particular importance to have the Cooperative and eco-networks appear as alternative and anti-capitalist projects to the “outside world”, as they dubbed it. To this end, a carefully constructed image was upheld and performed in the public arenas and channels of the Cooperative and eco-networks. At the same time however, particularly at the downtown offices of the Cooperative, a clear demarcation was made between this more publicly accessible part of the Cooperative and those areas which were only accessible to a select few. This more hidden part was where certain types of knowledge were produced and circulated

(often involving legally and/or financially sensitive information), and decisions were made regarding the future of the Cooperative.

However, while considerable effort went into the production of this back region and in keeping it separate from the front, the activity that went on in these back stages was made visible and drawn onto the front stage at specific moments in performative ways. This was most evident at the public assemblies of the Cooperative and eco-networks. The public assemblies was where all the preparatory work that was done leading up to the assembly, mostly in closed meetings and informal gatherings, was made visible in order to bring about certain performative effects. This often took the form of a power struggle that involved “exposing” parts of the back region in order to bring about shifts in the organizational structure and general orientation of the Cooperative. Far from assuming a neat separation between the front and back regions of social life, then, this chapter will instead analyze how this distinction came about through everyday practices and discourses, and how certain forms of activity were translated from the one into the other. I will show that whether or not certain models of the economy were successful or not, the bringing things from the back to the front region (and vice-versa) in performative ways resulted in what I will call performative conversions.

This chapter is structured as follows: I will begin with a theoretical discussion where I focus on the notion of performativity in relation to economic practices. I will discuss Michel Callon’s performativity thesis, and juxtapose this body of work to a more dramaturgical perspective on performance. Following this theoretical discussion, I will describe some of the key elements of the front stages of the Cooperative and eco-networks and how this was kept separate from the back region. The remainder of the chapter will then zoom in on the assembly, showing how this was an ambiguously-placed space that straddled the separation between front and back-regions. In particular, I will argue that the assembly was an arena where internal power differences that were generally only visible in the back regions were performatively brought into the light. These performances of power, moreover, intersected with the gendered experience of working in an anti-capitalist cooperative. The final section of this chapter will show how attempts were made to change these dynamics by breaking down the distinction between the front and the back-region.

Performing Economies

The “performative” or “performativity” belong to the most widely deployed concepts across the social sciences, as Paul du Gay notes (2010, 171). Indeed, these concepts have become household notions in fields as diverse as anthropology, literature studies, geography, gender studies, and certain more qualitative strains of sociology (Butler

1990; Nash 2000; Worthen 1998; Turner 1988). I do not intend to give an exhaustive overview of the many uses of performance and performativity in all these fields. In this section, rather, I will limit my discussion to the relation between performativity and the constitution of everyday economic activities. Specifically, I will discuss and subsequently juxtapose the work of Michel Callon to a more dramaturgical approach based on the work of Erving Goffman, and discuss the merits of both when it comes to taking account of the performative dimension of alternative economies

Callon's so called "performativity thesis" is considered to be a major contribution to economic sociology and has sparked a substantial line of research into the everyday construction of markets (Hébert 2014; Mackenzie et al. 2007; Muniesa et al. 2007). Callon emphasizes that the social sciences do not merely describe a reality separate from it called "the economy", but rather that science, as a body of knowledge and a set of "mediating instruments", is in fact constitutive of its object of study (1998a, 23-32). Things such as accounting tools, financial pricing models, and rational choice theory actively, in the words of Callon, "perform, shape, and format the economy" (1998a, 2). As I have explained in the introduction, Callon therefore shows that what we consider to be 'economic' is always a variable outcome of what he, in his later work with Calışkan, calls "economization", i.e., the continuous assembly and disassembly of heterogeneous elements into an intelligible social form (Calışkan and Callon, 2009; 2010).

In this dissertation, I draw on this perspective in my analysis of alternative economic spaces, yet do so from a decidedly anthropological point of view. Anthropologists such as Daniel Miller, Katherine Hébert, Laura Bear, Janet Roitman, and Narotzky and Besnier all point us to the fact that while performativity in the sense described above may tell us a lot about the relation between social practice and knowledge production, it seems to be too blunt a tool for analysis when trying to come to terms with the messy lived reality of social life in 'economic' settings, and it tends to sideline power relations and practices of exploitation (Bear 2020; Hébert 2014; Miller 2002; Narotzky and Besnier 2014; Roitman 2013). Instead, these anthropologists place more emphasis on the unevenness, instability, and volatility of performativity, much like Judith Butler (Butler 1990; 2010). Writing specifically about everyday economics, Narotzky and Besnier, for instance, while accepting the thesis that "economic reality" is partially produced through abstract models, nevertheless emphasize that people do not passively await the imposition of these models. In actual practice, they "undermine or sidestep hegemonic models in the actual conduct of their lives" (2014, s12).²³ Moreover, it is important to recognize that it is not just expert models that are endowed with the performative

23 Narotzky and Besnier emphasize the way that people undermine certain models through everyday conduct, but I would add that we need to recognize that sometimes people may also welcome, embrace, and internalize expert models.

power to shape economic practices, but that people create their own “folk models” that are equally performative (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, S12-S13; cf. Robben 1989).

The Cooperative and eco-networks seem to be clear case of how people ‘undermine or sidestep’ hegemonic models and try to materialize folk models of the economy (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, S12). Yet there is still considerable ethnographic and analytic ground to be gained here. Models (folk or expert) may have performative capabilities, but these models *themselves* are also performed in culturally and historically specific ways. For instance, what is the significance of having an assembly in a circle rather than in a square formation? Why does it matter that the receptionist at the downtown offices of the Cooperative speaks Catalan? Why is it important to have gender-neutral bathrooms in a leftist collective? In other words, how is a certain understanding of ‘alterity’ performed in alternative economies and who gets to decide in what way and what the terms of this performance are? And why do some models have more performative power than others? Alongside the above described analytical tools, I will therefore draw on dramaturgical approaches to performance in order to come to an ethnographically-informed understanding of the performative nature of alternative economies.

Bringing Goffman Back In

The above-mentioned literature on performativity operates on a conceptualization of the performative that is aligned with the work of the linguist J.L. Austin. In *How to Do Things with Words* he famously argued that certain ways of speaking are not simply descriptive, but are actually constitutive of reality (Austin 1962). Dwight Conquergood has called this view “performance as *poiesis*” which for him is related to what he calls “performance as *kinesis*”, where the performative is seen as the dynamic restructuring of stable orders. Conquergood contrasts these perspectives with performance as *mimesis*, whereby performance is viewed as the imitation of life rather than as a creative process in and of itself (1992, 83-84). He writes that mimetic conceptualizations of the performative, particularly those of Erving Goffman, run the risk of reproducing “the Platonic dichotomy between reality and appearances”, thereby ultimately reinforcing an “antiperformance prejudice” in the social sciences (1998, 31).

Conquergood presents this development as a progression in our understanding of the performative and I would agree that it has indeed proven to be a productive move. However, it is important to pay attention to the specific ways in which things are made to appear in a certain way, the kind of roles people adopt and enact, and the meaning that this conveys. In this case we should therefore take care not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. That is, while it is imperative that we analyze how ‘alternative’ social worlds come into being, it is equally important to pay attention to the particular

ways in which these worlds are performed through the roles people play and the way certain scenes are set up. In this respect, I find the work of Erving Goffman to still be relevant and helpful for the following reasons.

Goffman employed a dramaturgical metaphor of theater to view social life as a kind of stage where people present favorable impressions of themselves to certain audiences. He understood performance as the “activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his [sic] continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observer” (1959, 32). This performance, moreover, takes place in what Goffman called the front-region, where individuals try to give the appearance that their activity “maintains and embodies certain standards” (1959, 201). Goffman contrasted this to the “back-region” which he understood as the place where performers can not only rehearse their performances, but also relax, let down their guard, and take a break from the compulsion to present an image of themselves that conforms with the moral standards and values of society (1959, 114-115).

Goffman’s construction of the front and back regions of social life has been criticized for perpetuating an overly place-based understanding of social action (Jeffrey 2013), being based on Eurocentric notions of personhood (Abu-Lughod 2016 [1986]), and relying on a reified distinction between reality and appearance (Roziq 2002). However, in the context of the Cooperative and eco-networks, I find this dramaturgical metaphor apt in the sense that my interlocutors were constantly preoccupied with how to present their alternative projects to different types of audiences. That is, on the one hand the Cooperative and eco-networks had to be presented as radical, anti-capitalist alternatives to those Spanish citizens who felt excluded by and were fed up with “the system”. However, at the same time care had to be taken not to appear as a group of *hippis* who did not contribute to society. To the state, moreover, the Cooperative had to appear as just another cooperative that operated within the boundaries of the law.

Moreover, my interlocutors made clear divisions between more publicly visible stages and the more hidden areas of the Cooperative and eco-networks. The legally grey areas of the Cooperative, for instance, were either presented in ways that made them seem legal in the eyes of the state or simply kept out of sight. Returning to Goffman once more, his observation that the back region is where “the vital secrets of a show are visible” explains why the back region is often kept hidden through what he calls “stage control” (1959, 116). This kind of stage control was indeed ubiquitous among my interlocutors, and an activity through which the separation between front and back regions became very evident to me.

Yet it is important to bear in mind that the distinction between the front- and backstage is not always so self-evident. Goffman himself admits as much when he

writes that there are “many regions which function at one time and in one sense as a front region and at another time and in another sense as a back region” (1959, 127). This points us to the fact that the distinction between front and back regions is not a natural occurrence and is to a large extent an analytical construction. Therefore, in the following sections, rather than assuming the existence of clearly demarcated front and back regions, I will analyze (1) how specific regions were constructed as either more open and public while other spaces were kept hidden, and (2) how the separation between these regions was continually produced and fortified, but also exposed and broken down.

I will argue that it was through the continuous construction, manipulation, and fusing of various front and back-stages that a specific form of ‘the economy’ came about. I will refer to these processes as performative conversions. By this I mean the transformation of social organizational structures and relational interactions by bringing certain materials, ways of doing, and discourses from the front to the back stages and vice versa. In other words, my interlocutors changed the way the Cooperative and eco-networks were constituted by converting certain spaces into either front or back stages, or performatively undoing this distinction entirely. It is in this sense that I pay attention both to specific performances as well as inquire into the performative effects that these performances bring about. In this way, I answer the question of how certain economic forms take shape and why certain representational models have more sticking power than others.

The Dramaturgy of Alterity

In the following sections I will explore the front and back regions of the Cooperative and eco-networks. To be sure, any front and / or back stage is, to a degree, always an analytical construction. Yet there were certain areas of the Cooperative that were experienced by my interlocutors as being either more accessible and publicly visible, or, conversely, as being less accessible and hidden. Moreover, from the side of the Cooperative and eco-network, a great deal of work went into creating these front and back regions and maintaining a separation between these domains. While later on in this chapter I will show how this distinction was also broken down, I would like to start this chapter with an exploration of the construction of front and back stages.

Front Stages

In Chapter One I showed the similarities between eco-networks and the Cooperative on the one hand, and Spanish social movements on the other. Moreover, I have shown that we can in fact trace the origins of the Cooperative and eco-networks back to some of these movements such as De-Growth and the anti-corporate globalization movement.

Niko's oft-repeated statement during the welcoming sessions – “the Cooperative is a political name” – is evident of the affinity that the Cooperative in particular showed to contemporary social and political struggles in Catalonia. Like other social movements, both the Cooperative and eco-networks therefore presented a carefully constructed image to the “outside world”.

In social movement studies, it is common to analyze these discourses and representations and their dissemination across various media in order to shed light on how social movements achieve their goals (Jenkins 1983; Snow et al. 1984). As Kadir notes, these studies, by focusing on issues of representation, generally stick to the front-stage of social movements. The front-stage is, after all, as Kadir writes in the context of the squatter movement in Amsterdam: “the performative realm during which squatters form a united front against the Mainstream” (2015, 68). Though she writes specifically about the squatter movement, I think her argument is valid in the case of social movements more broadly in the sense that it is in the front region where internal differences are evened out and a unified discourse and image is presented towards those on the “outside” (Benford 1992); be it the Mainstream with capital M as in the case of Kadir or *el mundo fuera* (“the outside world”) as in my case.

For Goffman, there are a number of standard parts that make up the front. The front, moreover, is bound to a particular “setting”, which involves “furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it” (1959, 32). This is the background context that is necessary for a performance to make sense. For Goffman, a setting “tends to stay put, geographically speaking” (1959, 33). However, when dealing with the public image of any organization, business, project, or network, the first point of contact with particular audiences often occurs through less spatially-bound platforms and digital means. Indeed, *la web*, as the Cooperative's website was referred to by my interlocutors, had garnered significant renown not only within Catalonia, but also abroad.

The website is where the radical discourse of the Cooperative and the scope of its activity was presented most clearly and attractively to the “outside world”. Many of my interlocutors told me that they felt amazed and *il·lusionat* after first seeing the website. Take Mar, an active member of the Northern Bioregion, who recounted her experience with the webpage as follows: “I saw the Cooperative's website and thought ‘*que bien!* It's about time!’ . . . All of a sudden it was like, ‘We're not so weird after all, looks like there's more weird people out there.’” She continued by saying that for people like her who lived in what was perceived as an alternative manner and were seen as “weird” or “hippie” in their immediate environment, the Cooperative's webpage seemed to offer entry into a space where like-minded people were not only preaching

about alternatives to “the system”, but were actually working towards putting these alternatives into practice.

While there are stages that are less spatially bound than Goffman allows for, we should not be so quick to dismiss spatially bound stages all together. Besides these digital front stages, an image of the Cooperative and eco-networks was also presented in more directly physical arenas. In the case of the Cooperative, an important manifestation of its frontstage was its downtown office and, in particular, the reception desk and welcoming sessions that were held there. The reception desk, or perhaps more aptly, the front desk was the first point of contact for any ‘outsiders’ entering Can Xim, and both the receptionists and those in charge of hosting the welcoming sessions were trained to reproduce a discourse that had been approved by the assembly to anyone that might be interested in learning more about the Cooperative. Moreover, anyone taking shifts at the reception desk ideally had to be able to speak Catalan, so as to present the image of a Cooperative embedded within the wider, largely Catalan-speaking Solidarity Economy scene in Barcelona.

In practice, however, not all those who took shifts at the reception desk, myself included, spoke Catalan. Working at the reception was one of the tasks that was seen as “reproductive” and was hence undervalued and perceived as a rather tedious job that could also be done by people who were only temporarily visiting the Cooperative. Yet this was also an advantage, seeing as the Cooperative also placed itself in relation to the broader Solidarity Economy outside of Catalonia and maintained relations with organizations such as the P2P foundation, other social currency networks, and a number of researchers, journalists, and students who were interested in exploring the construction of alternative economies. Particularly towards the end of my research, I assisted in welcoming these often non-Spanish or non-Catalan speaking visitors from abroad and explaining certain principles of the Cooperative to them.

Turning now to the eco-networks, these were in fact absorbed by the Cooperative in the presentation of its public image. Because I had spent a number of months conducting research with the members of an eco-network, I was often asked to take people who were visiting the Cooperative to one of these eco-networks so they could see what a ‘real’ alternative economy looked like where people were, as Garbí always said (in English), “living outside of capitalism”. From the perspective of the Cooperative, the eco-networks, along with other projects such as eco-villages and autonomous communities, were the prime examples of what an alternative economy should look like and were therefore integral to the presentation of the Cooperative in everyday life. To what extent the members of the eco-network shared this sentiment, was a matter of debate in the Local assemblies of the eco-networks and Bioregions. Some, like Alba, thought that “in reality we’re not really part of the Cooperative; I think we mostly just

use their *herramientas* [tools or devices].” However, in practice, the discourse that was found on the websites of the eco-networks was fairly similar to that of the Cooperative, although the eco-network placed more emphasis on the social currency and practices of exchange.

The eco-network where I did my research, for instance, was described on the website in the following way:

An Eco-Network is a space of exchange and self-organization [*autoorganización*] at a Bioregional level which promotes the development of self-management [*autogestión*] in all aspects of life in an integral fashion. . . . We strive towards recovering the ethical and human dimension in economic activities, to overcome individualism and capitalist competitiveness, and create an economy based in trust, reciprocity, solidarity, mutual aid, cooperation, and sustainability.

We can see that the eco-network’s discourse above - of self-management, trust, affect, and an emphasis on whether this was to be an integral or total societal transformation – echoes the discourse presented by the Collective:

[The Cooperative] is a propositional platform of disobedience and self-management that strives to reconstruct society from the bottom up (in all aspects and in an integral fashion) and to recover affective human relations based on proximity and trust.

As we can see, both the eco-network as well as the Cooperative were presented in such a way as to convey a sense that these were radical platforms through which society was to be restructured around values such as self-management, ethical practice, and trust.

The discourse that was presented on the website, in the welcoming sessions, and in any other point of interface between the Cooperative and the “outside”, moreover, needed to tread a fine margin between giving an impression of the Cooperative as being an *anti-sistema* movement on the one hand, and, on the other hand, avoiding any suggestion that the Cooperative was engaged in illegal activities. This stemmed from the issue that, from a strictly legal point of view, the legality of the alternative employment system of the Cooperative was in fact questionable. For this reason the Cooperative had undergone a number of inspections by the Ministry of Labor and was aware of the risk that an inspector might show up at the publicly accessible areas of the downtown offices of the Cooperative as well. I will deal with the relation between

the state and the Cooperative and eco-networks at length in Chapter Five. Here I will merely point out that the state was another audience to which the Cooperative had to present a particular image of itself from the front regions. So we see then, in a manner similar to Kadir's description of the squatter movement in Amsterdam (2015, 68), that the front region of the Cooperative consisted of multiple realms where a more or less unified front was performed towards the 'outside'.

Yet we should keep in mind that this front and the messages and performances that were displayed within this frame did not spring from a void. Any performance, as Goffman notes, is carefully put together, rehearsed, and prepared in the back stages. These back stages, moreover, are generally kept separate from the front through what Goffman referred to as stage control. As I was to find out, there were indeed many areas and domains of the Cooperative that were quite deliberately kept hidden from view. In the following section I will turn to an exploration of the back stages of the Cooperative.

Back Stages

As I walked into the common area of the upper floor in the downtown offices of the Cooperative, I suddenly noticed that a door at the end of a hallway had been left ajar. I must have walked by this door hundreds of times, yet could not remember having ever even registered it being there, let alone seeing it open like this. Perhaps even more so than downstairs, Can Xim's upper floor was a veritable labyrinth of small, dark hallways, crowded by miscellaneous doors that opened up to differently-sized and often windowless spaces that were used for a variety of purposes. Some rooms were rented out to *sòcies* as part of a co-working space run by the Welcoming Committee, while others served as the offices of the legal advisors of the Cooperative or as private meeting rooms for the all-powerful Coordination Committee. Beyond its function as an office, the top floor, which also housed a fully equipped kitchen, simultaneously served as a residential space where a select number of activists lived out their daily lives. Indeed, walking here truly felt as if one was trespassing into the backstage of the Cooperative.

Curious to find out what was behind this mysterious and elusive door, I slowly and deliberately made my way towards it. Inside the small, windowless yet well-lit room I found Lucas tending to a computer server. Lucas was a former member of the IT committee whose status as a *liberado* had been rescinded just a short while before. He had been working on a new software program that would help the Economic Management Committee manage the accounts of the *sòcies*. Yet certain members of the EMC thought he was not doing the work he was supposed to do and had engaged in numerous conflicts with Lucas over the previous months. The mounting tension

between the EMC and Lucas eventually led to his expulsion from the Cooperative in an emotionally charged assembly where tempers ran high and many tears were shed.

I was therefore surprised to see Lucas inside the main offices of the Cooperative and was intrigued to find out why he was still hanging around Can Xim. We greeted each other and I asked him whether this was the notorious data-center I had heard so much about. The Cooperative had their own servers on which, among other things, the webpage, internal archive, and the online social currency platform were hosted. The location of these servers was unknown even to many *liberadas*, and those who knew its exact location were often reluctant to talk about it, as the data housed in these servers was extremely valuable and had to be protected. When I asked about the servers in an interview with the coordinator of the IT committee, for instance, I was jokingly told to not even ask about it and we quickly moved on to another topic. The data-center seemed to be another one of the things that was preferably kept out of sight from not only the general public, but also from certain members of the Cooperative themselves through what Goffman would call “stage control”, i.e., the conscious separation of the back from the front-region (1959, 116).

These back stages, moreover, were integral to the maintenance of a front region. In the case of the Cooperative, the server did not only host the e-mail domain and internal archive of the Cooperative (including all financial and legal documents), but this was also where the Cooperative’s website was hosted. This meant that if the server were to break down, the website and any form of online communication within the Cooperative and towards the outside would cease to work entirely. This was in fact why Lucas was tending to the server that day. The air-conditioning which kept the server from overheating had recently started to leak. As a temporary solution, the water that leaked out of the air-conditioning was caught in a bucket so that it would not flood the room and cause the server to short-circuit. Together with the rest of the members of the IT committee, Lucas agreed to periodically clean out the bucket and make sure that no water had spilled onto the server. This is the kind of cumbersome labor which was crucial for the maintenance of an alternative economy, yet remained mostly behind the scenes. I will return to the issue of the visibility of labor in the following chapter. Here I will point out that there were certain parts of the Cooperative that were kept out of sight, often deliberately so, but that these were, as Goffman already showed, crucial to the maintenance of the front-region.

While the downtown office of the Cooperative was a public space that was accessible to all, there were parts of Can Xim that were kept out of sight. The offices of the Economic Management Committee (EMC) were a particularly good example of this. They were located at the very back of the headquarters of the Cooperative in what Valerie called “the dark part of the Cooperative, . . . where the dark arts are practiced.”

According to her, this was where those who actually ruled the Cooperative from behind the scenes plotted and schemed away, hidden from plain sight. Valerie contrasted this to the entrance and reception area which was, indeed, much more well-lit and was where, as she said, “those of the light” dwelled. These tongue-in-cheek comments were tied up with various relational conflicts in the Cooperative that I will turn to later on in this chapter and in Chapter Four. But her comments do point to the fact that the back offices were more hidden from view and, much like the server, were bestowed with an aura of secrecy. Indeed, often I would hear newcomers to the Cooperative ask: ‘What goes on in that mysterious office at the back there?’

I found this kind of deliberate stage control much less visible among the members of the eco-network. That is not to say that there were no back regions at all. The products that the members of the eco-network brought to the *rebost*, for instance, were all created in people’s homes or small production sites. I recall helping Alba and her business partner, Judit, prepare the apple juice and marmalade that they made under the name The Wild Ones. We meticulously prepared the labels and stuck them to the bottles of juice and jars of marmalade so that they would look like proper and well-produced products in the *rebost*. Similarly, I would often help Andreu bottle the beers that he brought to the eco-network. On another occasion, I went along with Álicia to the pasture where she and Edmon herded their cows. These household production sites were not as easily visible and accessible as, for instance, a weekly meeting of the eco-network. Yet in my experience there were no deliberate attempts at making these spaces seem secret or hidden.

Both in the Cooperative and eco-network, however, there were spaces that were not so easily distinguishable as either front or back region. The assembly in particular held an ambiguous position in this regard. That is, on the one hand this was indeed a performative realm in which the Cooperative and eco-networks were presented as alternative projects to the outside, yet on the other hand the assembly was also where the power relations between the members of the Cooperative that had developed in less public spaces were performed and brought to light in very specific ways. The assembly will therefore take center stage in the remainder of this chapter. I will explore how, within the context of the assembly, the distinction between front and back stages was at times fortified, yet at other times broken down for particular purposes. I will interpret the assembly as an arena where people debated how an alternative economy should look, and tried to mold it into a particular shape through well-rehearsed performances.

The Assembly

We have already seen the importance of the monthly assemblies in Chapter One in the sense that it was here where decisions were made regarding the use of resources

and the overall strategic direction that the Cooperative or eco-networks should take. Like in other alternative or autonomous spaces more broadly (Flesher Fominaya 2010, 2015; Juris 2008), pride was taken in the fact that a horizontal, consensus-based and collective decision-making process was practiced as opposed to more hierarchical, top-down and unilateral form of governance. The practice of assembly was therefore an important part of the presentation of the Cooperative and eco-network as alternative projects. The general assembly of the Cooperative, for instance, even appeared in a documentary about one of its members, who thought it would give a good image of what an alternative collective was all about.

I recall this instance as causing a fair amount of debate. Iker, one of the Cooperative's most enigmatic figures, was to appear in a documentary about social movements in Barcelona. He thought it would be a good idea to show himself participating in an assembly as this would be an evocative and representative image of what it meant to participate in an alternative economic project. Filming or recording the assembly, however, was an unresolved point of debate, and the general feeling was that the 'real' assembly could not be featured in the documentary. The debate was resolved when one of the participants proposed to do a "simulation" of the assembly. When the camera crew came into the room, the participants decided to, quite literally, perform part of the assembly in front of the camera.

I will get into the details of what an assembly looked like below. Here I will point out that, in addition to being spaces of governance, when adopting a dramaturgical perspective these assemblies also appear as spaces where the Cooperative and eco-networks were presented as "alternative". Following Goffman, we could say that it was in these assemblies that certain ideals and values – e.g., horizontality, solidarity, *autogestió* – were performed by the attending members. It is in this sense that we can consider assemblies as part of the front stage. Yet this was at the same time also a highly contested domain. That is, there were different views on how to properly do an assembly that revealed different views on what it meant to be alternative. Moreover, these ways of doing an assembly were given shape through deliberate performances. In this section, I will therefore analyze the various ways in which an assembly could be performed.

That assemblies could be very different depending on where they were held became particularly evident to me the first time I visited the general assembly of the Cooperative at its downtown offices. While by that time I had attended numerous assemblies organized by several eco-networks and the Northern Bioregion, this assembly immediately seemed to be of a different character. When I entered the downtown offices of the Cooperative that day, I followed the instructions of the person covering the reception desk and was met by what looked to be a dance-studio; a shiny

wooden floor that spanned the entirety of a large room whose size was multiplied by mirrors that adorned the left-hand side wall. While this space was normally kept empty, for this occasion several white tabletops on wooden supports had been set up in a rectangular U-formation facing towards a projection screen. This was the first time I had seen such a set-up and when comparing it to my previous experience with assemblies, it gave the impression of a more organized and more professional way of doing things for a number of reasons.

First, there appeared to be a much clearer and stricter division of roles at the Cooperative, with a number of specific tasks taken up by the participants. There was the chair who was tasked with projecting the order of the day onto the screen and reading the points. This task was generally taken up by a member of the Coordination Committee. Tasks that rotated were time-keeping, keeping track of whose turn it was to speak, and writing up the minutes. This was to ensure that no one's voice dominated the assembly, that people did not interrupt others, and, importantly, to make sure that there was some kind of written documentation about the way in which all decisions had been taken. These four roles were also present in most other assemblies I had been to, but the role of mediator was something that was more particular to the Cooperative. This person was in charge of mediating the debate, of trying to find common ground where often there seemed to be none, and of facilitating a consensus. This was an incredibly hard task, particularly as the relational conflicts in the Cooperative started to be more apparent.

At the Cooperative, this role was taken up by Afra, an eloquent and decisive woman with a longstanding pedigree in cooperative movements. She was a permanent feature of practically all the assemblies I attended, often standing up and gesticulating forcefully while mediating heated debates. Outside of her role as mediator, she was also part of a special committee that was affiliated yet at the same time external to the Cooperative's organizational structure. This committee was specifically set up to mediate in relational conflicts between individual members and committees. As such, Afra was intimately familiar with the relational dynamics of the back regions and it was in fact part of her job to move fluidly between front and back stages. The existence of this committee and the prominence of the figure of the mediator are further indicative of how my interlocutors in the Cooperative made clear separations between front and back regions.

Then there was the increased use of audiovisual aids. That is, throughout the assembly, the agenda and all kinds of supporting documents were being projected on the screen, with a person of the IT committee in charge of making sure all the connections were in order at all times.. Indeed, compared to other assemblies, there was a noticeably larger amount of laptops being used by the participants. It is important to mention that these laptops generally ran on a Linux based operating

system instead of Microsoft, and most of the members of the Cooperative had gotten their hard drives encrypted. These features illustrate how being part of an *anti-sistema* collective also meant closely reevaluating the types of commodities one consumed and how one used them. These laptops were hooked up to a sound system and therefore simultaneously functioned as receivers for members who could not physically attend, but who wanted to listen in and contribute to the assembly through the Cooperative's online communication platform of choice: Mumble. This is an open-source voice and text software that was also used by Occupy and related movements and was generally preferred over Skype due to its open-source nature (Díez García 2016, 54). While many assemblies I had previously attended were held out in the open, the usage of all these electronic tools was also the reason the general assemblies of the Cooperative were held inside, as they required access to power plugs.

The use of a projector and accompanying screen was also the primary reason these assemblies in particular were held in a U-formation, as this allowed everybody to direct their attention to what was happening on the screen. The fact that a rectangular formation was used is noteworthy, because until that point I had been told that assemblies were preferably held in a circle. One time when I was describing the assemblies of the Cooperative to members of the eco-network where I conducted my fieldwork, one of the members interrupted me and exclaimed: "For me, an assembly *has* to be in a circle." The circle, for this member in particular and for many others in the eco-network, signified a spatial organization of bodies that facilitated participation, and directedness and attentiveness towards all the participants, rather than towards one point in particular such as, in the case of the Cooperative, a screen.

We already see, then, that the proper way of doing an assembly was indeed a contested domain in which contrasting notions of what an alternative collective should be about were not only reflected, but also performed. It is useful to situate this within a larger value struggle that I have sketched in the previous chapter, between those who strove towards a certain degree of formalization of the Cooperative and those that wanted to maintain a degree of 'informality' in the organization. Indeed, the fact that the assemblies were held in this way was in no small part thanks to Jaume. In an interview, he recalled how things were before and told me how these past assemblies had been "chaotic", how everything was done last minute, how they used to work with publicly-accessible online minutes where everybody just put whatever they wanted, debates without conclusions, and incomprehensible minutes. For Jaume, this was not the way an organization should be run, alternative or otherwise, and he slowly worked towards formalizing the assemblies. For a period of time, the assemblies were organized in the way that Jaume had intended: with a clear division of roles, a fixed format for preparing the agenda, and facilitated through audiovisual aids. After Jaume left the

Cooperative, however, things started to change again and they did so in the following way.

How to Properly Perform an Assembly

At the first assembly after Jaume's departure, I walked into Can Xim and encountered a very different set-up for the assembly than usual. Gaps had been left in between the tables, the partition that divided the room in two had been removed in order to enlarge the room, and a separate corner with food and refreshments had been set up. At the start of the assembly, the new facilitator announced that "We opened up the space in case people need to step out and relax, or hug each other, or do whatever you want to do." This reorganization of the Cooperative reverberated into other spaces as well.

The assembly was always preceded by a pre-assembly meeting called Forum. This was a meeting that was held every month, one week prior to the permanent assembly where various representatives of the committees were given the chance to look at the points that would be addressed in the assembly. The intention was to identify where debates could possibly arise, clarify possible points of friction, and try to identify in advance where a consensus might be able to form, so that the assembly could be smoother, shorter, and less conflictive. Reverting to Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, we can see this pre-assembly meeting as a back region in which the eventual performance was prepared and rehearsed. After all, the back region is where, in Goffman's words, "costumes and other parts of personal front may be adjusted and scrutinized for flaws. Here the team can run through its performance checking for offending expressions when no audience member is present" (1959, 115).

However, like the general assembly, Forum could at the same time also be seen as a front region in the sense that different views on how to run an alternative economy were put on display in a performative way within this space. After Jaume's departure, we decided to sit in a circle and leave the computers outside of the room. Garbí then suggested we dim the lights, so that only natural light would enter through the small windows at the back of the room. Later I spoke to Valerie who remarked: "Say what you will about Jaume leaving, there is a different energy in the Cooperative now."

A similar dynamic was palpable in the Bioregions as well. In the Northern Bioregion in particular, an explicit concern among some of the members was to avoid reproducing the same structures and relational dynamics that according to them plagued the assemblies of the Cooperative. At the start of an assembly of the Northern Bioregion when there was talk of assigning roles just like in the general assemblies of the Cooperative, one member voiced his critique in the following way: "why are we even assigning roles? There's just a few of us here. . . . All these protocols are taking way too long. We're acting as if we have a huge amount of people in the *territori*, but we don't.

We don't need all this bureaucracy!" This critique was not only formulated in discourse, but also through the implementation of certain practices in the assembly. More often than not this involved the movement of bodies and/or manipulation of objects.

In one particular instance I recall that halfway through an assembly we were asked to stand up and walk around the room as one member recited a poem. Then we were told to find a partner, look them in the eye, and give them a hug. At the end of the exercise, we all held hands and did breathing exercises to help calm ourselves before the debate in the assembly would continue. At another occasion, a wooden stick adorned with flowers, the *pal de paraula*, was introduced to make sure that only those wielding the stick would speak and not be interrupted by any of the other participants. Through these and other practices, a more informal, relationally intimate, and, as some members would say, more "hippi" instantiation of the assembly was performed in contrast to what was perceived as the formal, cold, and bureaucratized nature of the assemblies in Can Xim.

If we translate this into more analytical categories, we could say that there were a number of "folk models" (Narotzky and Besnier 2014, S13) vying for dominance that prescribed how an alternative economic space should be organized. Shifts between these different models, however, did not happen organically. Individual members of the Cooperative would often, through quite explicit performative strategies, convince the other participants of the assembly that a certain course of action would be the right one. A successful performance, however, hinged on adequate preparatory work in back-regions of the assembly. In the interplay between front and back regions, then, is where individual performances intersected with power structures that were, moreover, highly gendered. I will return to the gendered power relations of the Cooperative later on in this chapter. First, however, I will analyze how the back regions were made to feature in the front regions and vice versa through performative conversions.

Neither Front nor Back: Locating the Assembly

As I turn now to the relational dynamics in the Cooperative, I will illustrate how the assembly could be a stage in which the boundary between front and back regions became porous. Goffman points out that the back region is generally kept separate from the front through stage control (1959, 116). I have illustrated this through the example of the location of the servers which was kept hidden from the outside world and even from members of the Cooperative. Yet the assembly was also a space of debate and confrontation. I found that in this space, the internal differences and power relations between members of the cooperative, rather than disappearing or remaining hidden in the way that Kadir describes in the context of the squatter movement in Amsterdam (2015, 68-70), were in fact made visible in performative ways.

Here Goffman's notion of the outside is instructive in clarifying why the distinction between front and back regions can at times break down. In addition to the front and back regions of social life, Goffman writes about a third region, "a residual region . . . neither front nor back" that he calls "the outside" (1959, 135). Goffman illustrates his understanding of 'the outside' through the example of a building. Inside a building, he asserts, there may be many rooms that function at one time as a front region, and at other times as a back region. The walls of the building, however, separate both the front and back from the outside. All those who are outside of the building can, according to Goffman, be called "outsiders" (1956, 135). This is, of course, an overly spatially-determined conception of the outside, and more recent perspectives in social theory have shown that the production of an "outside" and "outsiders" is a far more complex and politically laden process (Agamben 1998; Das and Poole 2004). Yet in this case it does enable us to better situate the assembly and understand the power relations that are at play in this arena.

If we take the case of the downtown offices of the Cooperative, inside Can Xim there were indeed rooms that were clearly designated as belonging either to the back or front regions. In the case of the former, we can think of the offices of the Economic Management Committee (EMC), the residential spaces on the top floor, and the storage space where the data center was kept. The more publicly-accessible spaces were the foyer, the rooftop terrace, or any room in which the welcoming session happened to be held. Other spaces, however, functioned at times as back regions and at other times as front regions. The room where the general assemblies of the Cooperative were held was one such space that was only truly accessible for all during the general assemblies. At other times, this room was either used for private meetings or could be rented through the co-working project run by the Welcoming Committee.

Moreover, the audience that was present at assemblies was a mix of those who may have heard of the Cooperative and were interested in finding out more – i.e., the 'outsiders' – and the 'insiders' who were already more familiar with the Cooperative. In actual practice, it was rare for true outsiders to be present at the Cooperative. Here I would like to emphasize that the *sòcies* were technically seen as 'insiders' in the sense that they were members of the Cooperative. They were therefore free to come to the assemblies of the organization and let their voices be heard. In practice, however, the *sòcies* rarely came to the assemblies. The lack of participation was due to the *sòcies* not having time because they had their own jobs and projects to tend to, but was often also due to a lack of interest. When they did come to the assemblies of the Cooperative, they often expressed that they felt lost due to highly technical and idiosyncratic language that was used in the Cooperative and rarely come back. So while considered to form part of the collective, there were at the same time numerous barriers in place that

made it hard for the *sòcies* to participate in the political structure of the Cooperative and factually excluded them from this structure.

Among the insiders, then, there were considerable differences: from those who only occasionally frequented the assemblies (the *sòcies*), to the *liberadas* who were almost always present. This last group in particular was intimately familiar in varying degrees with the back regions of the Cooperative. Indeed, the back regions is where members worked and sometimes even lived together, and I found that the relational dynamics that developed in these back stages were brought to light in very particular ways in the front stages of the Cooperative. During assemblies, then, members of the Cooperative not only performed for ‘outsiders’, but also performed their internal alliances and power relations to each other. I would like to illustrate this through the story of how a new member was incorporated into the Welcoming Committee.

Performing Power

Garbí stood outside the downtown office of the Cooperative, smoking a cigarette before the permanent assembly as usual. While his demeanor was generally fairly agitated and accelerated, he seemed more nervous than usual that day, pacing rapidly back and forth while taking drags of his cigarette in quick succession. When I asked him how things were and how the assembly would go today, he looked at me with a worried and wide-eyed expression and said: “Who knows?! With what happened last week in Forum when we talked about Nina, . . . anything could happen.” At the time the Welcoming Committee was looking for a new member to replace somebody who had left two months ago for personal reasons. Niko had gotten in touch with Nina, whom he knew through another friend of his, and discussed the possibility of her joining the committee. In principle this should not have been a problem, as the Welcoming Committee was already assigned a fixed amount of resources for the person who had left two months previously, and Nina’s entry should have simply been a re-allocation of already allocated resources within a committee. Yet apparently there had been some resistance to her incorporation into the Cooperative.

When Nina’s entry was debated in the Forum one week prior to the assembly, I had left that Forum meeting before it ended because I had planned an interview with a *sòcies*. Valerie, who was there as a representative of the Welcoming Committee, later told me that “It was horrible, I had to sit there for an hour taking all these criticisms from Iker . . . and because I didn’t expect it, I was caught off guard and wasn’t able to defend the point well.” Iker was an older, libertarian anarchist who had been in the cooperative for many years and who, as one interlocutor put it, had a lot of “persuasive power”. He was also the adversary of Niko and later also Valerie, who would often sit directly across from him during assemblies. When I asked her about this seating arrangement, Valerie

told me: “In the beginning I didn’t really think about it, but now I do it on purpose. And also so that I can watch him.”

Previous to his life in the Cooperative, Iker had been active in unions and in a variety of other projects that included a jeans manufacturing company and a band. With his bushy mutton-chops, long, gray hair tied up in a ponytail, and nearly always dressed in a black shirt adorned with anarchist symbols, he was a permanent fixture at the general assemblies, where he was both loved and hated for his long, eloquent, and politically-laden discourses. His rhetorical capacities, his long-standing pedigree in the cooperative and other social movements to which he frequently made reference, and the fact that his name was on the contract of one of the legal cooperatives the Cooperative utilized, meant that Iker was a figure with considerable leverage in the organization. However, this also caused him to clash and get into conflict with many other members.

Regarding Nina’s possible entry, Iker basically argued that welcoming sessions could be done from local nodes (*el Local*), that therefore it was not necessary to have more people enter the Welcoming Committee, and that, moreover, from *el Local* there had been no demand for new members to enter in the Welcoming Committee. This discourse that places the Local before the Global (i.e., the Global structure of the Cooperative in Barcelona) was a common discursive strategy to achieve certain goals and in this case was used to possibly block the entry of a new member in the Cooperative. In the Welcoming Committee meanwhile, because according to Niko there was always “an official version and the real version”, Iker’s argument was taken as a direct attack towards Niko, with whom he had a long-standing conflict and had been wanting to expel from the cooperative for a long time. The counter strategy the Welcoming Committee came up with was to downplay Nina’s connection to Niko, and to instead demonstrate all the work she was doing and had been doing for quite some time in her local node.

When it was time to discuss her entry in the permanent assembly, Niko had strategically already left the assembly meeting in order to let Valerie advocate for Nina to the remaining participants. Nina herself then started a long, performative monologue explaining how she had gotten to know the Cooperative, what she had done and was doing at the time in her local node, and detailing her previous experiences with other social movements. Iker, however, was nowhere to be found. Coincidence would have it that he had other priorities that day, and could not be present during the afternoon part of the assembly. What is more, the group of people he had gathered to support him did not have the argumentative or performative capacity to block Nina’s entry in the Welcoming Committee. In the end, she was therefore accepted as a member of the Cooperative.

So we see that something that should have been a mere technical matter (the re-allocation of already ceded resources) turned into a public performance of the power relations that had developed in the back regions of the Cooperative, and a performance of the arguably proper way of constructing an alternative economy (e.g., from the Local up instead of centrally managed from the Global). Moreover, Ana would later tell me that this incident was one of the factors that had motivated her decision to leave the Cooperative just a few months later. This performance of power reverberated in the back regions in the sense that it caused the relations between Iker and the Welcoming Committee to further deteriorate and even contributed to Nina's departure.

This power play involved finding alliances, coming up with strategies and counter-strategies, and what we could call, following Kadir, the performance of what she, writing about squatters, calls "squatter capital" (2015, 47-50). For Kadir this kind of capital comprises certain skills (e.g., knowing how to properly squat a house) and demonstrating one's political conviction "through confrontation and political action" (2015, 50). If we translate this to the context of my research, the performance of this kind of capital involved demonstrating a certain authenticity and commitment to the cause by, in this case, being physical present, showcasing one's labor, and, in particular, being able to successfully present oneself and a particular standpoint in the front stage.

This ability to speak in assemblies, however, came with a considerable learning curve. In an interview with Sara from the Economic Management Committee, she recalled that "the first year that I was here I didn't say anything in the assembly, absolutely nothing. It took me a year to finally start to speak up." Here we also arrive at the gendered dimension of these power relations and performances. That is, while Sara's experience of staying silent for the first year was common for all newcomers, to the Cooperative, women in particular found that they were often not heard and that, in general, men dominated the discussion. The interesting observation is that, while in Nina's case we saw that a performance in the front region had performative effects in the back region, here the motion was reversed. That is, reflections on the gendered power relations that were shared with each other in the back regions were not only made visible in the front stages, but were mobilized in performative ways in order to change the overall relational dynamics in the Cooperative. The following section will further explore how this process unfolded.

Grup de Gènere

Goffman writes that in the back regions "the impression fostered by the performance [in the front-region] is *knowingly* contradicted" [my emphasis] (1959, 114). My interlocutors certainly expressed that they felt as though they had to constantly deal with all kinds of contradictions, but these were not necessarily intentional contradictions in the

sense that Goffman would have meant. Lila Abu-Lughod has convincingly argued this Goffmanian insistence on an intentional discrepancy between front- and backstage behavior is contingent upon the conceptualization that actors are somehow alienated from the moral ideals of their respective society (2016 [1982], 237). Indeed, it is not the case that members of the Cooperative merely claimed to be a horizontally organized, progressive collective, while *knowingly* and *intentionally* contradicting these statements when no one was looking. In a previous chapter I have in fact shown how the maintenance of these hierarchies was part-and-parcel of the social organization of alternative work and labor in relation to broader life projects. Here I want to turn towards how my interlocutors made attempts to expose or make visible these contradictions between the front and back regions in order to performatively transform the social organization and relational structures of the Cooperative.

During the early stages of my fieldwork, Valerie, together with another member of the Welcoming Committee and a university student who had written her master's thesis about the Cooperative from a feminist perspective, started a *Grup de Gènere*. This group was meant as a space where women, men, and non-binary people affiliated to the Cooperative could come together to share experiences, analyze structures of gender oppression, and think of measures to change these dynamics within the Cooperative. During the first meeting, for example, Rita remarked that the bathrooms in Can Xim were not gender-neutral. When Garbí replied that this was because it was a squatted building and that they inherited the structure, Rita was quick to respond: "Look, I get that we're squatting this building, but any other leftist collective would have probably immediately made them gender-neutral." Soon after, the male and female signs on the bathroom doors had indeed been stickered over with a paper that read: "bathroom for all genders" in Catalan, Spanish, and English. In this way, this kind of work of reflection was brought to bear upon the front stages through performative conversions. In this instance, the work of the *Grup de Gènere* translated into attempts to convert the Cooperative into a more feminist space by way of changing some of the symbols that were used in Can Xim.

Regarding the assemblies, many participants in the *Grup* voiced their concern that it seemed that it was mostly men who did all the talking during assemblies. As we saw in the previous chapter, the group came to the conclusion there was a sphere of reproduction and production in the Cooperative. Reproductive tasks consisted of cleaning, cooking, working the reception desk, welcoming and guiding newcomers, and general caring tasks such as conflict mediation. Meanwhile, taking care of legal matters, maintaining social currencies, and, indeed, participating in assemblies were seen to be more productive tasks. It is in this sense that they described the assembly as a very "masculine space" due to the fact that this was a space where men seemed

to be able to express themselves with far less difficulty. Moreover, there was a sense that, as many participants in this group would call it, the “feminine voices” were being silenced. Valerie’s experience in particular helps us illuminate the gendered construction of the front regions of the Cooperative.

The first time I attended the general assembly of the Cooperative was also the first time that I met Valerie face-to-face. I had already been in touch with her via e-mail, and together with Niko she made sure that I could present my research proposal in the general assembly. While throughout this thesis I refer to her as Valerie, at that time she still presented herself as Oscar. That is to say, Valerie was a transgender person who started her transition during my fieldwork, starting to present herself as a woman and trying to live out her life as such. Aside from working for the Cooperative, Valerie also managed another cooperative affiliated to the Cooperative that functioned as an incubator space where artisanal producers could work and develop their own projects. She did all this in addition to raising two daughters together with her wife, who worked as a neuropsychologist. Her specific tasks for the Cooperative, meanwhile, involved being the coordinator of the Welcoming Committee, managing the Cooperative’s interest-free bank, and running its mobile phone service. Because she had taken up so many different tasks, she gradually became a key figure in the Cooperative.

The Cooperative, in turn, was a space where Valerie felt that she could safely present herself as a woman. When I asked her whether or not she thought that people treated her differently due to her transition, she replied: “No not really. Actually this is the place where I can do my transition without worrying about anything. . . . They take away everything else, but at least they let me do this.” That is, Valerie was under a lot of stress, subject to endless critique of her work, and experienced severe physical and emotional fatigue, like many others. I have already shown the vicissitudes of alternative work in the previous chapter and will return to this issue in the next chapter as well. Here, I want to emphasize that while working in the Cooperative was a stressful experience for Valerie, at least she felt that people understood her situation and did not treat her differently because of her transition. In the “outside world”, on the other hand, she was much more insecure of presenting herself as a woman for fear of how people would react. In this way, then, the Cooperative appears as a back region vis-à-vis the ‘outside’ in the sense that it was here that Valerie could step back from the societal pressure to conform to an impression projected upon her from the outside and could, to paraphrase Goffman, relax, let her guard down, drop her front, forgo speaking her lines, and step out of character, or, in this case, step into a new character (1959, 115).

Yet things were slightly different in the assemblies. Valerie once jokingly remarked to me that “if the entire world were *asamblearia*, there would be no extreme sports.” I would often sit next to Valerie during assemblies and while she generally had a calm and

friendly demeanor, I could clearly sense how she shifted around in her chair anxiously and started to breathe more heavily every time something in the assembly agitated her or when she had to defend a certain position. No wonder that after each assembly, she, and many other members for that matter, felt incredibly tired and sometimes needed days to recuperate. These assemblies could last several hours, with tempers at times running high and debates sometimes turning into shouting matches. Speaking and actively participating in these assemblies, as Valerie often did, was evidently not an easy task.

Regarding Valerie's demeanor during the assemblies, in our first meeting of the *Grup de Gènere*, the person in charge of mediating assembly debates told Valerie that it seemed that whenever Valerie spoke at the assembly she did so from a "masculine position" (*desde lo masculino*). Valerie took a moment to reflect and responded: "I think I have to, because if I would speak from a feminine place, nobody would listen to me." What she expressed here is that in this particular space, she felt that she had to perform and present herself more as a man than as a woman in order to be recognized as a legitimate voice in the assembly. In a similar vein, Jana expressed to us in the *Grup* that she was tired of letting her "*voz masculine*" be heard and wanted to cultivate her "*voz femenina*". I should note that while from an analytical standpoint the use of "masculine" or "feminine" in this way is problematic in that these terms imply that there are certain traits or forms of behavior that are inherently male or female, in this case these folk categories point to the fact that, for the participants in the *Grup de Gènere*, certain regions of the Cooperative were constructed through gendered power relations. Moreover, it appeared that these kind of reflections could only safely be made in these more intimate meetings that took place outside of the assemblies.

However, in a similar way as I described above in the case of the bathrooms that were made gender-neutral, the *Grup* did in fact try to bring these reflections and emotional labor to bear on the assembly in performative ways. That particular assembly I was unable to attend due to the fact that I had some of my own performing to do at a conference, but I was able to listen in through Mumble, the Cooperative's online communication platform. Despite the bad connection, I heard two members read aloud a letter they had written addressing everything they thought was problematic in terms of gender relations in the Cooperative. They proceeded to ask everybody to sit in a circle on the floor and do a so-called 'check-in', allowing space for people to express how they were feeling. There seemed to be a genuine acknowledgement of the problems raised by the *Grup* and people vowed to be more aware of the space they were taking up during the assemblies, be less aggressive and 'masculine' when speaking, and being attentive not to take away the opportunity for women to be active participants.

Later on however, when discussing a more organizational matter, the debate ignited anew and I heard several attendees shouting angrily at each other. Despite the efforts of the *Grup*, the assembly ended up being dominated by male voices. Upon my return, several members of the Cooperative told me that this had been one of the worst assemblies yet. One member in particular who also frequented the meetings of the gender group told me: “Don’t even ask. It was so awful, I needed a week to recover.” These performative conversions, i.e., the transformation of the social organization and relational interactions through performatively melding the front and back region, where not always successful. Indeed, Judith Butler reminds us that the performative is inherently instable and that so called “performative misfires” are part and parcel of performative processes (Butler 2010; Callon 2010).

In part this can be explained by the fact that the *Grup de Gènere* had to make its case for changing the gender relations in the Cooperative from a marginalized position. Their performances, regardless of how well prepared they may have been, ultimately fell on deaf ears. Yet it may have simply been bad timing. By the time the *Grup* had managed to assemble the troops in the back regions and started to change the specific shape of the organizational and relational structures of the Cooperative, the entire organization started to fall into a financial crisis that was compounded by relational conflicts and organizational distress. In the following chapter I will turn to the origins and consequences of these developments.

Conclusion: The Dramaturgy of Contradiction

In this chapter I have shown that alternative economy needed to look a certain way in the conceptions of the members of the Cooperative and eco-network. Being part of an alternative collective meant taking on certain forms of speaking, embodying and expressing certain values, and adopting particular ways of doing. For my interlocutors, it was important that instead of being competitive and greedy, one should be transparent and generous. Rather than creating and maintaining hierarchies, it was important to treat everyone as equals and listen attentively to a diverse range of voices in an open assembly. Rather than Skype and Microsoft, one should use Mumble and Linux. These were by no means settled affairs. As I have shown, the specific form that an organizational structure should have and the way that people ought to relate to each other were heavily debated in various spaces. This degree of contestation was most notable in the assembly, which I have interpreted as an arena where various forms of the economy were brought forward in performative ways so that they could be compared, evaluated, and debated.

In essence, these issues revolve around the question of how the economy takes on a particular shape. In dealing with this question, recent perspectives from economic

sociology have pointed towards the importance of imaginaries of the economy, particularly those bodies of knowledge which are formatted into expert legible models. Rather than merely describing a certain (imagined) state of affairs, these models are performative in the sense that they actively contribute to the ossification of the economy into a concrete form. As I write in the introduction, this is a perspective that informs my analysis of the construction of alternative economic formations.

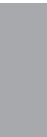
However, as I have argued in this chapter, this thesis on the performativity of certain knowledge constellations in relation to the economy necessarily skirts over a number of important things. As anthropological critiques have made clear, the transition from a model to a particular instantiation of that model is a messy process that is prone to misfires. We have seen this in the case of the unsuccessful efforts of the *Grup de Gènere* to tear down the gendered power relations in the Cooperative. Yet beyond the unstable nature of this process, what I have shown is that it is important to ask why certain models are more performative than others. What makes certain imaginations of the economy more appealing than others and what are the precise ways in which these models themselves are brought forward.

In addressing these questions, I have relied on Goffman's metaphor of the front and back regions of social life and his dramaturgical perspective on performance. What this allowed me to do is to analyze how specific performances were prepared in the back regions and carried out in the front regions, and what their performative effects were. Rather than assuming that the separation between front and back regions is a natural occurrence in the world, I have paid careful attention to how these stages and the separations between them were created. However, I have also shown how people tried to penetrate the boundaries that separated the front from the back and tried to break down this distinction. This was particularly the case in the assemblies, which, I argued, held a particularly ambiguous position in this regard. The assemblies were where the members of the Cooperative tried to convince each other of the best way to organize an alternative economy. This happened through carefully rehearsed performances that relied on a clear separation between front and back regions, but also through exposing the back regions of the Cooperative. I have referred to this process – of melding and fusing different regions in order to change the organizational and relational structures of the Cooperative – as performative conversions.

We saw this, for instance, when the Communication Committee opposed the entry of a new member in the Welcoming Committee during the pre-assembly meeting. In addition to being a power struggle between the members of these committees, I emphasized that it was about performing a certain understanding of an alternative economic model. In this case, Iker of the Communication Committee thought that it was imperative that things were managed at the Local level, instead of being run in a

top-down fashion from a governing center (i.e., *el Global*). Giving priority to local nodes was a view widely shared among the members of the Cooperative, and was in fact also shared by the members of the Welcoming Committee. They subsequently came up with a counterstrategy which involved an elaborate performance of Nina's active engagement in local nodes prior to her involvement in the Cooperative.

The seemingly inevitable confrontation between the two committees, however, never materialized as such because Iker was not physically present at the general assembly. In a sense, he missed the cue for his performance. However, as I described above, Nina did eventually leave the Cooperative. As she became more involved with the organization, she also became more familiar with the back regions and was overcome by a sense of disappointment and disenchantment when the Cooperative failed to live up to its front stage image. Indeed, the relational conflicts that gestated in the back regions and exploded during assemblies were often detrimental to the morale of the members of the Cooperative. However, it could also be the case that as people became more involved with the Cooperative and eco-network, they increasingly felt at home in these organizations. Recall Mar's delight at seeing the Cooperative's website and finding a group of like-minded and, as she said, "weird people". Nina lost her faith in the Cooperative, while Mar found a group of people she could trust to realize a transformation of society according to alternative values. While in this chapter I have dealt with specific performances and the way they helped mold the Cooperative and eco-networks into a particular shape, the next chapter will explore the experience of being involved in an alternative project over time by analyzing the affective registers that were mobilized by my interlocutors, paying particular attention to experiences of trust (*confiança*) and mistrust (*desconfiança*).





Chapter Four

The Economy of (Mis-)Trust

Introduction

In the previous chapters we have seen that being part of an alternative economic project involved producing value through practices that often fall outside of the purview of traditional economics. Yet re-assembling the economy was also about mobilizing certain “relational resources” (Grasseni 2013, 130) and recovering the “human” and “affective” dimensions of the economy. In particular, the alternative economic systems my interlocutors were creating were said to be based on mutual trust (*confiança*). This emphasis on trust needs to be seen in the context of a deep and historically embedded sense of mistrust in public institutions that we see across Southern Europe (Armingeon and Guthmann 2013; Polavieja 2013; Torcal 2014, 1547). According to recent surveys, this trend does not seem to be changing and there is a widely shared sense that governments do not adequately respond to citizen demands (Edelman 2020). To borrow an expression from the economist Parsha Dasgupta, it appears that trust is a very fragile commodity indeed in the Southern European political landscape (1988, 50). Small wonder then that the economic systems and relations my interlocutors were creating were envisioned to be based on values such proximity (*proximitat*), solidarity (*solidaritat*), and, indeed, trust (*confiança*). Talk of trust or *confiança* was ubiquitous to the point where explicit reference was sometimes made to a so-called economy of trust (*economia de confiança*). Drawing broadly from sociological perspectives on trust yet at the same time complicating these perspectives from an anthropological point of view, this chapter will show how discourses of trust and mistrust and (mis-)trust practices were mobilized in the creation of alternative economic networks at various scales.

This chapter is structured as follows: I will begin with an overview of the relevant sociological and anthropological literature on trust, and elaborate on my position vis-à-vis this literature. I will explicitly focus on sociological and anthropological literature rather than perspectives from economics, psychology, or even political sciences, as these latter fields tend to conceptualize trust as a cognitive strategy of individuals rather than, in the words of the sociologists David Lewis and Andrew Weigert, “an intersubjective or systemic reality” (1985, 967). Since in the case of the Cooperative and eco-networks we see not only the construction of trust between people, but also in societal abstractions such as a currency or an alternative employment system, I find perspectives that emphasize the intersubjectivity of trust more helpful than cognitive or rational choice perspectives which often carry an implicit or even explicit bias towards methodological individualism.

However, sociological perspectives can only take us so far. Sociologists have generally tried to isolate trust from other notions such as friendship, faith, and confidence. Yet anthropological accounts on trust show us that in practice it is often impossible to separate trust from these other affective registers. Trust is therefore

often considered to be mystifying, perplexing, and “highly elusive” (Möllering 2006, 1). In this chapter, rather than trying to artificially delineate trust (and mistrust) from a whole range of affective experiences, I will actually start from the ungraspable nature of trust. Instead of using (mis-)trust as a concept of analysis, I will analyze the often-painstaking labor (*feina*) that went into the production of the conditions that were seen as necessary for trust or mistrust to materialize. I will interpret this process of producing trust and mistrust as taking place within what I will call an economy of (mis-)trust. This involved the creation and circulation of narratives of trust and mistrust about the Cooperative and eco-networks (and individual members), but also the kind of practical activities that were thought to bring about the conditions that were seen as necessary for (mis-)trust to materialize. Throughout the chapter I will highlight various aspects of the creation of trust and mistrust.

First, through highlighting the perception of the ideal scale which members of the *ecoxarxa* and the Cooperative envisioned their systems to have, I will show that trust was talked about in terms of geographical proximity (*cara-cara*) and familiarity (i.e., getting to know one-another). Second, I will analyze both the work that was intended to bring about personal encounters and produce trust between people, as well as the work that was necessary to maintain the functioning of abstract social objects such as a social currency or the alternative employment system of the Cooperative. Third, I will show that this labor had varying degrees of visibility depending on the purpose of this *feina*. That is, producing trust between people is not the same as generating trust in an alternative economic system and the work that went into the former had a higher degree of visibility than the latter. Fourth and finally, I will show that the visibility of one’s work was mobilized in certain discourses of trust or mistrust that, in turn, served to generate shifts or consolidate certain aspects of the social organization of the Cooperative and eco-networks.

Between Anthropology and Sociology: The Economy of (Mis-)Trust

The sociologist Piotr Stzompka states: “there are some unique features of contemporary societies that give particular salience to the problematics of trust” (2000, 11). This is the backdrop that virtually all publications on trust write against: a watershed moment of transition is sketched – from face-to-face relations to impersonal relations, from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from tradition to modernity – in which old sureties melt into air and people do not know whom and what to trust (Hart 1988, 191; Lewis and Weigert 1985, 973; Luhmann 1988, 101-102; Stzompka 2000, 9). While we do not have to go along with these weighty assumptions about tradition and modernity, it appears that in a situation of perceived crisis, when social structures lose their aura of naturalness, the sociological question of why people trust or do not trust becomes salient (Bock

and Everett 2017, 17; Möllering 2006, 4). Rather than being “natural enemies” (Corsin-Jimenez 2011, 177), trust and crisis seem to enjoy a symbiotic relationship in the sense that it is in times of crises that talk on trust becomes more visible.

For the most part, sociologists have been concerned with analyzing the nature of trust, its functions, and trying to answer the question as to how trust is even possible (Cook 2001; Gambetta 1988; Luhmann 2017[1979]; Mistzal 1998; Möllering 2006; Stzompka 2000). In various guises, proximity and familiarity have been posited as prerequisites for the occurrence of trust relations. In an influential and widely read article from 1985, the sociologists David Lewis and Andrew Weigert discuss proximity and familiarity in terms of emotional and cognitive trust as two of the “sociological foundations of trust” (1985, 970). They write that emotional trust is the type of trust more commonly found among “primary group relations”, i.e., familial or face-to-face relations (proximity). Cognitive trust, on the other hand, is based on a cognitive process of deciding whom or what to trust based on certain information available to us. It is about the “degree of familiarity” we have with certain persons or systems (1985, 1970). The third foundation is “behavioral trust” which is the affirmation or enactment of trust through everyday practices (1985, 971). We find similar formulations in many other publications on trust, leading the anthropologist Michael Carey to identify a “very widespread notion that there is an umbilical relationship between the holy trinity of proximity, familiarity, and trust” (2017, 8).

Yet while there may be an intimate link between proximity, familiarity, and trust, sociologists are quick to remind us that knowing someone or having a certain amount of information about a person, system, or product, is not sufficient ground for trust to appear. Lewis and Weigert talk of the need for a “cognitive leap”, i.e., a collective cognitive process of (unconsciously) recognizing in others the ability to trust. The organizational scholar Guido Möllering writes that it is the “suspension of doubt” which “enables the leap of trust” (2001, 403). And the sociologist Niklas Luhmann refers to this process as “overdrawing”, which for him boils down to the fact that we “trust in trust”, simply meaning that we trust that other people also trust (2017 [1973], 76-77). Indeed, there is no guarantee that trust may actually materialize and, in the words of Lewis and Weigert, “its actual continuance in any particular social bond is always problematic” (1985, 1969). It is in this sense that they write that familiarity and proximity merely form the “platform from which the [cognitive] leap is made” (1985, 970).

While sociologists recognize the possibility for the failure of trust to materialize, there does seem to be an assumption that the occurrence of trust is somehow the norm or, at the very least, a desirable state of affairs (Robben 2018). This is part of the reason that mistrust has received relatively little theoretical attention, except as the photo-negative of trust (Carey 2017; Mühlfried 2018). However, in the case of Spain and the

Mediterranean more general, there is in fact a long history of mistrust, particularly in public institutions. Cristiana Giordano notes that in the face of the continuous failure of the state (and, we could add, the economy) to provide for the protection of rights and livelihoods, it is not surprising that in the Mediterranean “the only reliable form of trust is a personalized one” (2012, 23). These kinds of personalized trust relations are often described as patronage and clientelism, and are viewed as signs of backwardness and as highly problematic for the functioning of civil society. Yet I think Giordano is correct in pointing out that in Southern Europe, not believing in the state’s legitimacy and being mistrustful of “the system” is not “fatalism” or “organizational inefficiency”, but “simply a rational choice within the context of a permanent failing statehood” (Giordano 2012, 23; c.f. Grasseni 2014).

The question of rationality aside, it is true that within a context of institutional failure, trust can be mobilized as a propositional category among kin, family, friends, patrons, and other relationally proximate actors, and becomes something that needs to be laboriously worked upon. Looking to the Cooperative and eco-network, the lived experience of the construction of an alternative network was indeed embedded in an explicit discourse of *confiança* (trust). In the context of my research, trust was therefore what Bourdieu (1977) and subsequently Brubaker and Cooper call a “category of practice” (2000, 6). In the face of the absence of trust in public institutions and the economy, trust was seen in the Cooperative as something that needed to be recovered or built from the ground up. In the context of my research, this meant building trust not just in people, but also in systems such as the social currency and the alternative employment system of the Cooperative. However, this brings forth a problem when trying to use trust as an analytical concept.

Rather than offering sweeping generalizations about the nature of trust, the comparatively few anthropological works on trust have instead shown the diverse ways in which trust works and trust relations are employed in a variety of socio-cultural settings, thereby emphasizing its fuzzy and often ungraspable nature (Aguilar 1984; Grasseni 2013, 2014; Hart 1988; Jung 2014; Robben 2018; Shipton 2007). These accounts show that it is often impossible to distinguish trust from complementary notions such as friendship, goodwill, solidarity, and faith (Torsello 2008, 515). When trying to grasp what my interlocutors meant by the term *confiança* (or *desconfiança*), I similarly struggled to pin this down and isolate it from other affective notions. It is for this reason that I do not use trust and mistrust as analytical concepts in this chapter, as this would require artificially disentangling them from a range of notions such as friendship and solidarity, and suspicion and doubt (for an elaborated account on the relation between mistrust, suspicion, and doubt see Pekelmans 2018).

While I do enquire into the question of trust, the question I ask is therefore not if members of the Cooperative and eco-networks actually created trust or mistrust. Instead, I will focus on how discourses of (mis)trust were produced and mobilized for various purposes, and how these discourses then circulated and fed into certain practices that produced the experience of trust and/or mistrust. My heuristic tool here will therefore not be trust as such. Inspired by recent work on alternative provisioning networks in Italy (Grasseni 2013; de Musso 2017), I will instead focus on the often-painstaking work that went into the creation and maintenance of trust and/or mistrust. This was constantly reiterated by my informants through statements such as “we have so much work to do” (*tenim molta feina*) or “we’re doing so much work” (*fem molta feina*). I propose to view this work of trust-making as taking place within an economy of (mis) trust.

The term “economies of trust” has been used to capture the way certain socio-economic configurations and economic practice are transformed into economies based on solidarity, regard, and trust (Grasseni 2013, 29; Sage 2007, 153-155). My interlocutors would sometimes use this term in a similar way and explicitly talked about building an *economia de confiança*. Here I use ‘economy of (mis)trust’ not to capture the actual existence of trust or mistrust, or a shift in the nature of socio-economic practice, but rather as a heuristic tool to analyze the work that was directed towards creating the conditions for trust and/or mistrust to materialize. This involved, as I mentioned above, the creation of certain narratives of trust and mistrust, but also making visible or, conversely, hiding one’s work. In the following sections, I will show how through the work of (mis-)trust certain relational modalities and forms of the economy were either consolidated or broken down and re-assembled into different forms.

Imagining Trust: Proximity, Familiarity, and Scale

“Trust,” as Pep told me in an interview, “is the mantra of the *ecoxarxa*”. This type of statement would be repeated by practically all members of the eco-network and the Cooperative. Trust was seen as the basis of a complex exchange system that involved barter, monetary exchange and exchanges facilitated through a social currency, and also as the basis of the alternative economic system the members of the eco-networks and the Cooperative intended to construct as a whole. However, when I asked people what trust meant or what kind of trust they were talking about, the response often remained very general. “Trust is everything” or “without trust, this system wouldn’t work” were statements that, while repeated with great regularity, did not tell me much about the actual way trust worked in the context of an eco-network and the Cooperative. Indeed, *confiança* was often mentioned in the same breath as notions such as *suport mutu* and reciprocity. In the discourse of the Cooperative:

The fundamental change of the economic system will happen when relations based on mistrust ... turn into relations that are based on trust between persons. ... The goal is to pool collective resources for the benefit of people who interact and function based on spontaneous reciprocity [*reciprocitat espontània*], relations of affinity [*relacions d'afinitat*], mutual aid [*suport mutu*] and high levels of trust.

The first time I felt I started to understand what trust meant in practice in the *ecoxarxa*, was after I bought some products from the *rebot*, the storage place of the eco-network.

One day in Mas Jorda I had the sudden desire to make falafels for dinner. We had all the ingredients in the house except the most crucial one: chickpeas. I was ready to bike down to the local supermarket when Ínes told me: "Wait! Just grab some from the *rebot*." Apparently, there were still some chickpeas in the *rebot* of the *ecoxarxa*, which was temporarily situated in Mas Jorda. This proximity to the *rebot* meant that the inhabitants of Mas Jorda, me included, had unlimited and unmonitored access to its goods. I made my way down to the storage place, carefully weighed the chickpeas and put them in a bag. As I wrote down my account number and the amount of chickpeas I had grabbed, I could not help but think that I could also simply have taken four instead of one kilogram of chickpeas, and a variety of other products to boot, without telling anyone. The others would simply have to *trust* that I would not abuse my access to the *rebot*.

During the weekly meeting of the *ecoxarxa* on the following Friday, I told eco-network member Àlicia about my first purchase in social currency and added: "I think I know now what you mean by *confianza*." Àlicia, to my surprise, responded in a rather casual manner: "It wouldn't have mattered if you would have taken more. It's not like you would have ruined us," she said as she rolled her cigarette. She then added jokingly: "Besides, we know you and we know where you are." From this statement I would like to highlight the aspect of knowing, i.e., Àlicia expressing that she knew me and my whereabouts, as it is here where we can start to gain a better understanding of the content of trust in alternative economic networks. That is, although at that point I was still relatively new to the *ecoxarxa*, I was not a stranger either. Moreover, I resided with known, trusted members of the *ecoxarxa* in Mas Jorda, which, also in a geographical sense, was a well-known node in the eco-network. Trust, then, seemed to be linked to knowing someone personally and being able to interact with people in a certain geographic locality. That is, there was a clear connection here between the type of trust sought after by members of the *ecoxarxa* and ideas about the proper scale of alternative economies.

The ideal scale of operation of an eco-network was seen to be such that it would still be possible to personally know each and every member. When I asked Edmon in an interview whether or not he thought the *ecoxarxa* should grow, he replied: “When we’re talking about the economy of trust (*economía de confianza*), we can’t just go all out. That’s when things start to overload, people get involved who just want to mess things up. . . . It’s better to have smaller groups.” An “economy of trust”, apparently, had to be kept small lest strangers enter with the intention to tear everything apart. In a similar vein, while discussing the size of the eco-network, Pep told me in an interview: “At a certain point we would probably need to start looking into building an *ecoxarxa* 2, or an *ecoxarxa* in another neighborhood [in the capital of the *comarca*].” In a localized economy, trust could apparently only flourish if everyone knew each other and could physically get together.

It is interesting to notice that in the Cooperative, a similar way of talking about trust and scale could be found. That is, even though the Cooperative operated at a larger, regional scale, the Local eco-networks were still the units of reference when it came to the question at what scale trust relations could appear. This became evident to me after the first time I encountered the *liberadas*, who received a remuneration for their labor from the Cooperative. During a regional assembly in which representatives of various local nuclei gathered to discuss how they wanted to organize themselves at a regional level, I made contact with Lena. I told her I was interested in learning more about the Cooperative and she told me I should come to an office the Cooperative had in Girona where she and Jana were attending *sòcies*. The following Thursday I made my way over to Girona. As I entered the office I was greeted by Jana, who, clad in black attire adorned with anarchist symbols and her short hair painted a deep yet vibrant shade of red, gave the impression of being a dedicated *anti-sistema* activist indeed. We chatted for a bit and I told her that I had been to the previous Bioregional assembly and was curious to learn more about the so-called “decentralization” (*descentralizació*). During the assembly there was talk of decentralizing the Cooperative. As we saw in Chapter One, the Cooperative had grown rapidly in a short period of time and, without this necessarily being the intention, all the resources and knowledge had accumulated in the downtown offices of the Cooperative in Barcelona. The Cooperative was looking to reverse this trend and go back to the Local.

“Yes that’s right,” Jana said when I asked her if this was all true. She proceeded by first pointing to her head then rubbing her stomach while saying: “We want to go from here, to here.” She continued: “We realized we were communicating to our members only via e-mail, very coldly. . . . We’re trying to have some more face-to-face contact (*cara cara*).” She added that the reason they had started to attend *sòcies* in Girona was to get to know them better. “We don’t have a clue what most of the *sòcies* are actually

doing,” as she put it. Throughout the day, as I observed the *sòcies* interact with Jana and Lena, it became clear that the *sòcies*, on their end, also did not really know what the Cooperative was doing. There was evidently a mutual lack of familiarity and close encounters between the *liberadas* and the *sòcies*, and the Cooperative tried to solve this by bringing about face-to-face encounters between them. Once again, we see the importance of ‘getting to know one-another’ through ‘face-to-face’ contacts in the way trust is imagined in the context of the construction of alternative economic networks.

Generating these close encounters was not only done at offices like the one in Girona and Barcelona, but also at public assemblies. At each assembly, a small introduction round was made in which people introduced themselves and what they expected of the assembly. A common answer was that they were there to “get to know the Cooperative and each other” (*que ens coneguem*). I also caught myself at one point saying that I would like the *sòcies* to get to know each other. What this reveals about trust is that, much like we saw earlier in the *ecoxarxa*, an alternative economic network was seen to have scalar limits within which trust relations could arise.

Curiously enough, then, in both the *ecoxarxa* and the Cooperative, trust was talked about precisely in sociological terms of proximity (*cara-cara*) and familiarity (i.e., knowing people). Though not using the terms of sociologists, scholars doing work on alternative currencies have also pointed out the importance of both a certain degree of cultural affinity between members of an alternative currency scheme and the existence of face-to-face contact between these members for the proper functioning of these alternative currencies. The geographer and leading scholar on alternative currencies Peter North, for instance, found that both in Germany and New Zealand a geographically dense network (proximity) of like-minded people (familiarity) was a fundamental building block for resilient alternative currency schemes (North 2010, 40; North 2007, 148). We see similar patterns in the literature on Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), where shorter distances between consumers and producers (i.e., increased proximity) would lead to the consumer and producer knowing each other and ultimately also to the creation of trust (Goodman et al. 2012, 3-5; Sage 2007, 153-154)

Similar views were held in the eco-network and among the *liberadas*, where the appearance of sufficient trust for transactions to take place between exchange partners was seen to be highly reliant upon a degree of cultural familiarity and geographical proximity. Much of the work carried out by *liberadas* and members of the *ecoxarxa* was therefore also geared towards generating the conditions in which proximate, familiar encounters could be had. I reiterate here that I am not inquiring into whether or not there actually was trust or mistrust among my interlocutors and in the systems that they built. Rather, my focus is on what this work of (mis)trust actually did and how it shapes the way that alternative economic formations are assembled. In the following

section I will turn to this work of (mis)trust by exploring it through the concept of the economy of (mis)trust.

Desiring Proximity and Familiarity

Possibly the most-often heard phrases during my research were: “we have so much work to do” (*tenim molta feina*), and “we’re doing so much work” (*fem molta feina*). Often, these were voiced in a way that conveyed a sense of being entirely overworked. As we already saw in Chapter Two, the experience of physical and mental fatigue was part and parcel of the construction of alternative economic projects. Moreover, the tasks that the *liberadas* and members of the eco-network carried out spanned a broad spectrum of alternative work. In this section I would like to differentiate Cooperative and eco-network members’ work according to the scale at which this labor was intended to produce trust or mistrust. On the one hand, and as we have seen above, a number of tasks were meant to promote face-to-face encounters so that people could get to know and trust one another. On the other hand, much work was also invested into creating more abstract systems (such as the social currency used in the Cooperative and eco-networks) which were not immediately tangible.

In Chapter One I showed that the majority of the members of the eco-network came from Barcelona, were neo-rurals, and were committed to leading an alternative lifestyle. They were highly aware of this shared cultural background and it was something that entered into deliberations about the extent to which the eco-network should expand and open up to the ‘outside world’. Most members of the *ecoxarxa* indicated that they in fact had very few relations with people who were born and raised in the *comarca*. “They are very closed, very to themselves and conservative,” Sam asserted when I asked him if he interacted much with people from the area. He and many other members of the eco-network found it hard to establish lasting social relations with people who were born in the area.

This is not to say that the *xarxeires* did not maintain relations with people who had been living in the *comarca* for a much longer time. In fact, in learning how to live what was imagined as a more rural lifestyle, my interlocutors often looked for ways to educate themselves about local traditions. My housemates, for instance, were interested in learning how to keep and farm livestock. Coming from urban settings, however, they initially did not have a clue how to cultivate vegetables, or to keep chickens, sheep, and rabbits, let alone the best way to slaughter them. It was through self-education, but also through establishing relations and asking advice from people from the area that Ínes, Álex, and Vicenç learned how to live in the countryside. From the son of a local farmer, for instance, they learned how to slaughter chickens, and one of their neighbors gave them tips on how to most effectively plant their tomatoes and

which variety to use. Nevertheless, the ‘locals’ were rarely explicitly interested in living ‘alternatively’. It was in the eco-network where my interlocutors found like-minded people that were committed to realizing alternative livelihoods; people who may not be kin but with whom a kind of cultural commonality could be found which formed the basis for establishing an economic system based on face-to-face exchange relations.

Regarding geographical proximity, while the social currency of the eco-network was run through a virtual platform that also had a marketplace where offers and demands were listed, members of the *xarxa* insisted that exchange relations were much more likely to occur after a face-to-face encounter. The online marketplace was therefore in fact hardly ever used and only on rare occasions did people actually engage in a transaction after having found something on there. It was much more likely to satisfy a need through a previously-established personal connection or after physically meeting at the weekly meetings of the *ecoxarxa*. This was my own experience as well. I only really started earning *troks* after asking Andreu if I could come and see his brewery. It turned out that he had a lot of accumulated social money and needed someone to help him bottle beer and do chores around the house. Out of a mutual need – me wanting to earn *troks* and Andreu needing an outlet for his accumulated social currency – an exchange relation materialized between the two of us, but only after a personal, *proxemic* encounter where Andreu and I got to know or became *familiar* with each other and our mutual needs.

The members of the eco-network therefore directed their efforts at making these kinds of encounters happen more frequently. Here we can think of cleaning, opening and closing, and generally maintaining the *rebot* as the weekly meeting site and therefore also focal point of the eco-network. This is where people met, socialized, exchanged, and developed the type of thick social ties that according to sociological theory tend to foment interpersonal trust. The same goes for organizing assemblies and fairs, and welcoming new people to the *ecoxarxa*. All these tasks fostered proxemic, personal encounters between members and potential members of the eco-network.

These type of tasks were also more directly *visible*. Referring back to the previous chapter, we could say that this kind of work always took place in the front stages. That is, Alba, Pep, Edmon, and Álicia were nearly always physically present and unequivocally regarded as the persons of reference of the eco-network, and could often be seen stocking up the *rebot*, opening up and closing the building (they were the only ones who had keys). This is not to say that the payoff for this labor was always high, nor that it was always so straightforwardly visible. During the summer months of 2016, there was talk of opening up the *rebot* twice a week instead of just once. Pep volunteered himself to open and close on Wednesdays, hoping that this would lead to more foot traffic at the *rebot*, more face-to-face encounters, and therefore also more transactions in

social currency. However, on those long summer afternoons it was often just me and Pep sitting in the *rebot* with the occasional member walking in to pick up some things. In this case, then, even though he was physically present at the *rebot*, Pep's labor in fact remained unseen for most of the members of the *ecoxarxa*. In other words, there was no audience to witness his performance.

Turning to the Cooperative, we see some similarities but overall also a somewhat different picture. Contrary to many social movements and alternative economic projects and in this particular instance also the *ecoxarxes*, the Cooperative did not have to rely exclusively on voluntary labor alone. As we saw in chapter two, the organization in fact had considerable funds at its disposal which were used to remunerate a group of dedicated activists. During the time of my research there were eight committees that, in various ways, dedicated themselves to the creation of an alternative economic system. Focusing once again on the labor that was intended to create opportunities for people to establish personal connections, we can think of the Communal Spaces Committee which covered the reception desk at the downtown offices of the Cooperative, the Welcoming and Communication Committee which held welcoming sessions for new members and anyone who would be interested in the Cooperative, and the task of attending *sòcies* which we saw Lena and Jana carry out earlier. The most valued labor of this kind was perhaps the preparation of the permanent assembly which was carried out by the Coordination Committee. This is where members of the Cooperative met each other and took decisions, and, if any *sòcies* came, these assemblies were also opportunities for the *liberadas* to get to know the *sòcies* and vice versa.

Much like in the eco-network, this type of labor had a high degree of visibility. That is, there were certain key players who were nearly always physically present at the downtown offices of the Cooperative. Iker, an anarchist-libertarian and longstanding member of the Cooperative whom we have already met in a previous chapter, is perhaps the best example of such a person. He would virtually always be present at the downtown offices of the Cooperative and was a familiar face at all the assemblies. A longstanding pedigree in social movements and labor unions, some experience on legal matters, and outstanding public speaking skills made him a trusted figure in the Cooperative. He himself also had this perception: "Regarding certain [legal] matters, I have the trust of the Cooperative to do these things," as he told me. Clearly, this statement is also tied up with the kinds of power dynamics that we discussed in the previous chapter. Here, however, I want to emphasize that being trustworthy, much like at the level of the eco-network, apparently meant being physically present and being *seen* doing work. That is, when it came to tasks that were intended to bring about more personal, proxemic encounters, there was a kind of continuous process of making visible and performing of one's labor.

We can emphasize this point by offering an example of the opposite. That is, *not* being physically present could in fact breed distrust. I recall one morning when I was sitting at the reception desk of the Cooperative where I occasionally did a shift. Garbí, who was a member of the Communications Committee and also an inhabitant at the downtown offices, came down and we started chatting. He then suddenly asked me, “Hey, what does Niko actually do?” Niko was a member of the Welcoming Committee and one of my first contacts in the Cooperative. He also happened to have a longstanding conflict with Garbí. “He’s almost never here,” Garbí continued, obviously doubting whether or not Niko actually did anything besides the welcoming sessions. “He only comes on Friday to do his two-hour welcoming sessions and then leaves or what?” I did not want to take sides, but at the same time I did feel somewhat pressured to defend Niko, as Garbí knew that I maintained close ties to him. In the end I listed up all the tasks Niko was responsible for, implicitly reassuring Garbí that even though Niko was not always here, this did not mean that he was not doing what he was supposed to do. Indeed, looking back this was also a performance on my part. That is, with Niko absent I was the one that had to make his labor visible on his behalf and, in a certain sense, also perform his presence.

I will return to the theme of mistrust and suspicion later on in this chapter. For now I will conclude this section by reiterating that my interlocutors had a particular conception of trust as being bound up with proximity and familiarity and that they tried to facilitate face-to-face connections between various actors that were part of their networks. Faced with public institutions that were seen as untrustworthy and corrupt, it appeared to be wiser to trust in the people who were in one’s more immediate frame of view. However, my interlocutors also tried to foster trust in their own alternative institutions. This gives rise to the question of how trust is even produced in something that you cannot meet personally nor get to know in the same way you can know a person. In the next section I will discuss the production of trust in abstract systems and the particular way in which the labor that went into bringing about trust in these systems was organized and performed. Particular attention will be paid to the usage of the social currency by members of the *ecoxarxa* and the work that went into maintaining the alternative employment system of the Cooperative.

Producing Trust in Systems: Social Currency and the ‘Health of the System’

While transactions between members of the *ecoxarxa* nearly always involved a face-to-face encounter, it is important to remember that they were mediated through a virtual system; a digital platform that formed the backbone of the entire network. More often than not, there was a lag between the exchange and the actual transaction. Ínes would,

for instance, always collect a number of transactions before once or twice a month charging all those she had sold something to. “It’s funny,” she told me, “sometimes you think you have a lot of *troks*, and then all of a sudden everybody does their transactions and then you don’t have any left!” This was even more evident in the *reboost*, the storage place or pantry of the eco-network. Sellers could drop off multiple products at once and charge the account of the *reboost*. As people took products during the weekly encounters and left their account number, money would be added to this common account. So here is where the lag was most evident, as the purchases from the *reboost* were only processed once every few weeks. I bring up this issue of the lag between the exchange and actual transfer of monetary units from one account to another to emphasize the difference between the labor that goes into maintaining the type of trust involved when trusting an exchange partner, and trusting in an often not directly visible societal abstraction such as, in this case, an alternative currency system.

Most members of the *ecoxarxa* took for granted that the virtual system through which their monetary transactions were mediated worked. While complaints were often voiced about the user-unfriendliness of the interface or the amount of functions available on the platform, the actual functionality of the system was never in doubt. In Luhmannian terms we can call this type of trust in the virtual platform a sense of confidence (*Systemvertrauen*) rather than trust per se. Confidence, according to Luhmann, is akin to a type of unreflexive trust that many people have in a currency: “As a participant in the economy you necessarily must have confidence in money. Otherwise you would not accept it as part of everyday life,” as Luhmann states (1988: 98). The possible contingencies that accompany the use of money are bracketed or reduced by the trust placed in money. This is not a conscious decision everybody has to make at one stage in their life, but more akin to a habit; a taken-for-granted internalized structure (*doxa*) if you will. This lag between making an exchange and the money actually being added to or subtracted from the accounts of the individual *ecoxarxeires* thus pointed towards a certain taken-for-grantedness and surety that transactions would at some point always be processed.

But the system did, of course, have to work. First, in the case of the exchanges made at the *reboost*, in the sense that the transfers had to be made correctly by either Pep, Àlicia, or Alba who were entrusted with entering the transactions into the virtual system. This was a routine yet also very labor-intensive task that was done mostly behind closed doors. One Friday evening, when everybody had already left the *reboost*, Pep and Alba decided to enter all the transactions made during the previous period. This was a cumbersome process where Pep and I were tasked with reading out loud the exchanges and at times deciphering sometimes rather illegible handwriting of

the *ecoxarxeires*, while Alba entered them into the virtual system. Entering all the transactions took us nearly two hours.

I commented on the fact that it had taken us so long and, revealing some of my own assumptions about how to organize economic systems, asked: “Isn’t there a more efficient way to do this? Some kind of software?” “Probably,” Alba answered “but we wouldn’t really know how to do it.” Pep added: “We’ve been waiting for someone who knows about economics to help us.” These comments point to a perceived lack of skill when it comes to economic matters. Yet at the scale that the *ecoxarxa* functioned, this was still not really thought to be a problem. Alba said that while the work was indeed cumbersome, they were still ok for now: “We can still manage it.” In any case, the point I want to emphasize here is that while we have seen that many everyday tasks carried out by core members of the *ecoxarxa* were intended to promote face-to-face exchanges and to create opportunities for these proxemic encounters to occur, the back stages of the eco-network is where a less visible type of labor was carried out that was equally as important for the maintenance of the *ecoxarxa*.

This labor remained mostly unseen as long as no *perceivable* errors were made. In the case of a faulty entry in the system, however, certain nodes in the network would become more visible. Indeed, Sztompka writes that “more abstract social objects, when direct contact and appraisal is impossible” can be made more visible and familiar through certain arrangements that, through vicarious contacts, “open the world of institutions and organizations to closer scrutiny” (2000, 81). I remember after a Bioregional assembly in Ripolles I looked at my account and found out, to my surprise, that I had been charged 90 *troks* instead of nine *troks* for a meal I had during the assembly. I contacted Edmon, the administrator of my *ecoxarxa* and asked if he could fix this for me. He told me that a portal had to be established between our network and that of Ripolles, and that he would have to contact the administrator of that particular *ecoxarxa*. Some time passed before Edmon got back to me and it turned out Ripolles had just changed the name of their network and that making a portal between the two networks was not possible at that time. In the end I had to personally contact the administrator of the *ecoxarxa* Ripolles, who then told me to take the 81 *troks* he owed me off of his personal account. My point is that when an error occurred in the system, i.e., when I could no longer be confident that the system would simply function under its own devices, certain players/actors in the network and their labor had to be made visible.

Another moment in which the less tangible elements of the network were made visible was during the monthly assemblies and in the presentation of status reports of what Pep called the “health of the system”. I argue that these instants is where the work that went into maintaining the *ecoxarxa* was made visible or performed and

also evaluated. That is, once trust is established, it needs to be continually reaffirmed through repeated interactions; what Lewis and Weigert call behavioral trust or “the behavioral enactment of trust” through everyday actions (1985, 971). Stzompka similarly writes: “Trust rooted in reputations requires an equal effort of permanent confirmation” (2000, 77). In the case of interpersonal trust or trust between people, this is quite straightforward. Based on previous experiences and current performances, trust can be maintained and reaffirmed or, alternatively, broken or lost. It becomes a different matter though when talking about trust in societal abstractions that belong to a different order of reality, e.g., trusting a network or a currency.

In the absence of personal contact, trust could only be experienced indirectly. To give two contrary examples: Pep was a producer of an herb-based liquor called *Ratafia* that is quite distinctive of the region. The arrival of this sticky, brown liquid was eagerly awaited by all members and Pep consequently always had a steady outlet for his product. “I make about 300 liters a year,” he told me, “and I always manage to sell all of it.” On the other end of the spectrum we have Bernat. In his first year of joining the *ecoxarxa* he was amazed that he could trade and sell the vegetables from his garden with other people and was thus prompted to plant more the following year. Reality, however, fell short of his expectation. “I feel a bit deflated,” he told me as I cycled next to him on our way to the capital of the *comarca*. “I planted a lot, really a lot for the *ecoxarxa*,” he continued, “but now a lot of times I have to take all my zucchinis back home.” The difference here is the degree of certainty that both these men experienced when bringing a product to the eco-network. This is relevant because trust is, among other things, a socio-cognitive strategy to deal with the radical uncertainty and unknowability of social life. In this sense we can say that the degree to which producers felt that they could trust in the network to absorb their surplus production differed wildly from one person to another.

So on an individual level, trust in the *ecoxarxa* was experienced by proxy through the various experiences people had in the usage of the network. But there were also times when a public performance of the status of the *ecoxarxa* could produce a sense of trust in the network as a whole. During the monthly assembly in July, Edmon presented a status report of the *ecoxarxa*. To the admiration of the participants he announced: “Since November of last year, we’ve moved over 5000 *troks* a month”. He continued: “Our trade balance is at +3000, so we’ve exported more than we’ve imported.” These statements were met with cheers, a lot of smiles, and ironic comments such as: “We’re the capitalists of the *ecoxarxa*!” I see this as another arrangement through which a not-directly palpable network was not only made more proximate and familiar, but also made visible or performed.

Producing Trust in Systems II: The ‘Dark Part’ of the Cooperative and the Assembly

Turning now to the Cooperative, we have seen that a lot of *feina* was directed towards trying to create face-to-face encounters in the downtown offices of the Cooperative so that an economic system based on close and familiar trust relations could emerge. Moreover, within the cooperative it mattered to what extent this labor was visible or not, as this also could lead to trust or distrust. However, more than at the scale of the *ecoxarxa*, a lot of work also went into building systems at a different level, as was the case with the alternative employment system run by the members of the Cooperative. In earlier chapters I have already discussed the importance of this system for the Cooperative in terms of the revenue that it generated. Here I would like to emphasize that this system, much like the social currency we saw above, was not a tangible, physical, or visible object. It was, in fact, a more abstract social object that was akin to an institution.

The labor that went into maintaining this system was largely carried out by the Economic Management Committee (EMC). Their offices were located at the very back of the headquarters of the Cooperative, where you would always see a group of women sitting behind their computers, making phone calls or staring intently at their screens and typing away furiously at their keyboards. As we have explored in the previous chapter, these were truly the ‘back stages’ of the Cooperative that were not easily accessed. In the EMC we find an interesting combination of the simultaneous invisibility and visibility of labor.

It was never in doubt that the EMC did a lot of work. After all, similar to Iker, there were always people physically present at the office of the EMC and they could be seen doing their jobs. Countless hours were spent managing the various accounts of the *sòcies* making sure the *sòcies* paid their bills and received the money they invoiced through the Cooperative’s fiscal number. However, what they actually did in this office remained opaque. Recall Valerie’s statement about the “dark part” (*el lado oscuro*) of the Cooperative where the “dark arts” were practiced. It is also interesting to note that the EMC consisted mostly of women. As we have seen in previous chapters, women enjoyed a far lesser degree of visibility in the more public spaces of the Cooperative. As I explained in the last chapter, it was only in particular spaces, such as the meetings of the *Grup de Gènere*, that the gendered experience of work could be made visible. Curiously enough, then, the labor done by the EMC was at once highly visible but also for ever out of sight.

Yet much like we have seen in case of the social currency, it was when errors were made that certain parts of the alternative employment system became visible. Naira, a *sòcia* I interviewed, recounted an experience she had with the cooperative

when for legal reasons they had to give her a small labor contract. “I had to call them several times, talk to different people, and even make an appointment [at the downtown office].” Visibly frustrated, she added: “Their way of functioning gave me a sense of distrust (*desconfianza*).” Apparently, she received different types of information from different people and in the end she was not sure if they had informed her correctly about what was going to change. We see then that when an error occurred in the functioning of the alternative employment system, certain actors in the system had to be made visible and also had to *perform* their labor. However, depending on the way this performance was evaluated, this could also result in the creation of a situation of distrust. On an individual level – for example on the level of personal experiences by *sòcies* – trust or distrust in a societal abstraction was thus experienced indirectly through the performances of labor by members of the Cooperative.

Again, just like in the *ecoxarxa*, at the scale of the Cooperative there were also public performances of the labor that went into maintaining the alternative employment system. This was most evident at the trimestral evaluations where the budget was presented. In December of 2016, much to the delight of the participants at the assembly, the EMC projected an excel sheet onto the big screen display and explained what all the graphs, tables, and numbers meant. For many members of the Cooperative, this was the only time that they got an idea of the financial status of the organization and what the EMC actually did; that is, the internal workings of Cooperative were made more familiar to the *liberadas* themselves. The EMC informed the assembly that they had finally recuperated a deficit of over 100,000 euros that had been generated a few years ago through a case of severe mismanagement of the common resources of the Cooperative. Having recovered the deficit, the Cooperative was finally looking at once again generating a surplus. This news was met with cheers, and great praise was heaped on the EMC and the work they had done. Through the public performance and evaluation of labor that in the normal course of the day remained largely unseen, a sense of trust was then generated in the work of the EMC and the alternative employment system of the Cooperative as a whole.

However, much like in the case of the *socia* mentioned above, the performance of this labor could also lead to mistrust. A few months later in the permanent assembly in February, the EMC presented their budget predictions for the remainder of 2017. Much to the surprise of all participants, the Cooperative was suddenly looking at a deficit. This deficit came about because of legal reasons. The Cooperative had stopped accepting any new *sòcies* while at the same time a growing number of *sòcies* stopped using the services of the Cooperative. Moreover, the Cooperative did not lower its expenditure, which ultimately lead to a deficit. Contrary to what happened in December, the

assembly reacted with widespread outrage and disbelief, and many openly questioned and criticized the work of the EMC.

This is where the issue of mistrust rears its head. Above I have mostly explored the economy of (mis)trust through an analysis of the ways in which my interlocutors tried to create the conditions under which they thought trust could flourish, both at an interpersonal level as well as in systems. However, as I alluded to in the story of Garbí's questioning of Niko's work and the deception felt after the revelation of the deficit, there was considerable mistrust among the members of the Cooperative that became more evident as its budgetary crisis dragged on. However, rather than viewing mistrust as merely corrosive of social relations, I will examine how mistrust, much like trust, was mobilized as a propositional category in order to steer the Cooperative and eco-networks into particular directions.

The Economy of Mistrust

Above we have seen that there is no shortage of literature on trust. The anthropologist Matthew Carey, however, noted that this is not the case for mistrust, which is often simply seen as the obverse of trust. Where trust is said to be generative of social relations and the thing that holds society together, mistrust is often viewed as being "uniquely corrosive of human bonds – it is social acid" (2017, 2). Carey, instead, wants to explore how mistrust as a general human disposition can also be generative of social configurations. He speaks of mistrust rather than distrust, because distrust is usually based on previous experience, whereas mistrust refers to the "general unreliability of a person or a thing" (2017, 8). Ultimately, Carey sets out to demonstrate that mistrust can be at the basis of "social forms" which are "not merely the photographic negative of those produced by trust", but that these social forms can be "interesting and occasionally admirable constructs in their own right" (2017, 3). Carey is joined in his call to explore the generative qualities of mistrust by the contributors to an edited volume on mistrust who document the experience of mistrust in various contexts across the globe (Mühlfried 2018).

In the context of my research, particularly in the Cooperative, we certainly see this general ambience of mistrust towards outsiders and, importantly, towards *el sistema*. In a very general sense, then, a disposition of mistrust towards public institutions was generative of "interesting" and "admirable" social constructs in the sense that it partially fueled my interlocutors' motivations to create alternative economic networks. Moreover, it is interesting to note that this mistrusting attitude existed side-by-side with discourses of trust and a general openness towards the outside world that we have seen above. Valerie would always explain the existence of a kind of general sense of mistrust towards people who were new to the Cooperative in the following manner during the

welcoming sessions that she gave: “Because the Cooperative is also a social movement, the ‘activists’ of the Cooperative are naturally mistrustful towards outsiders.” We can see this also as the creation of a narrative of mistrust. As I have done in the case of trust, I propose to view the production of these narratives and the subsequent circulation of them in an economy of (mis)trust.

While the production of narratives of mistrust was definitely more common at the headquarters of the Cooperative and Bioregions, I do not want to imply that there was no mistrust among the members of the eco-network. It is certain, however, that I did not see a similar culture of suspicion within the eco-network. This could possibly be explained due to this being a smaller group of people with a higher degree of cultural affinity and the fact that the *ecoxarxa* was run based on voluntary labor. That is, we do not see the same type of quantification of the value of labor which could then be used as a source for contestation and criticism of each other’s work such as in the Cooperative.

In a different way, however, *ecoxarxes* were implicated in this economy of mistrust in the sense that certain narratives of trust and mistrust were also created here and travelled to and from the eco-networks. I myself was in fact also complicit in making these narratives circle from the Cooperative to the *ecoxarxa* and vice versa. That is, as one of the few people who travelled between the Local, Bioregional, and Global (i.e., the Cooperative headquarters), I would often give updates about developments in the Cooperative to members of the *ecoxarxa*. By communicating what happened in one setting to another setting, I was in fact also performing and evaluating the labor of the Cooperative and eco-networks.

I would like to emphasize here that in the *ecoxarxa*, “the Cooperative” or “the Global” was experienced as an abstract system and was often felt to be distant and opaque. In order to open up these system to closer scrutiny, some members of the Bioregions and eco-networks made their way down to the general assemblies in Barcelona to experience firsthand what went on in these spaces. Mar was a member of an *ecoxarxa* in a county near my fieldwork site, and was very active in the Northern Bioregion, taking a coordinating role in organizing these regional assemblies where representatives of various local networks would meet to discuss how to organize themselves at a regional level. While most certainly committed to an alternative lifestyle and a dedicated activist, she had become somewhat suspicious of the Cooperative after some *liberadas* appeared to be going behind the back of the Bioregional assembly in order to achieve their own goals. I later saw her at the permanent assembly of the Cooperative in Barcelona and after greeting her said: “Nice to see you here, I haven’t seen you at the *permanente* before.” She told me that after what happened at the Bioregional assembly, she did not really trust certain Cooperative members who communicated the decisions taken at the permanent assemblies to the *ecoxarxes*, and

decided to check for herself. Later she would communicate her sense of mistrust at the Bioregional assembly and in her *ecoxarxa*, thus circulating a narrative of mistrust that, in a kind of politics of scale, also served to give preference to the Local as opposed to the Global (i.e., headquarters of the Cooperative). Indeed, much like the performances that we saw in the previous chapter, the circulation of these narratives was a way to guide and steer the direction that an alternative economic formation should take. The final section of this chapter will be devoted to further exploring this process.

I have stated above that being trustworthy was related to being physically present and being seen doing work. However, an excess of presence could also breed mistrust. Earlier we saw that Iker was a fixture at the headquarters of the Cooperative. Yet there were several people who doubted that he actually did anything. “He thinks going to meetings and assemblies is work,” Valerie told me, later adding that she thought he did not actually do any real work except for holding long political speeches during assemblies. Jaume felt a similar way and in fact tried to implement a strategy that would show that Iker and other people like him did not actually do any work. This was part and parcel of the push towards formalization that I detailed in Chapter Two. I will elaborate here on this strategy that sought transparency, as this will exemplify how certain types of labor were made more visible, and how this, in turn, was resisted by the deliberate hiding of one’s labor.

To briefly recap: in trying to put some order in the Cooperative (*posar ordre*), Jaume had designed a revised version of a series of chronograms that he used in his previous job. This was a fairly simple sheet in which each individual committee member and committees as a whole had to list all the tasks they did and the hours they dedicated to that task. This was done in order to quantify the amount of work being done. The idea was then to present this to the entire Cooperative in the trimestral evaluation so that everybody knew what everyone else was doing, and that remunerations could be adjusted accordingly. Jaume later told me that this was also intended, in part, to show or expose who was actually doing work and who did not. Unfortunately for Jaume, things would turn out differently than he had imagined.

At the trimestral evaluation in March, each committee had indeed filled out the chronogram. However, when it was the turn of the Communications Committee to present, it turned out that both Garbí and Iker had put down that they did zero hours of work and had done so in an ostentatious manner. “I put down zero because I do a lot of very diverse things,” Iker said, emphasizing that “you can’t just quantify all the things I do.” This was met with signs of approval by many participants at the assembly, who also felt this chronogram was a capitalist mechanism of control that had no place in an alternative organization. It was, therefore, also a successful performance of being anti-system activists on the part of Iker and Garbí. But, contrary to what we saw above, it

was not successful because of the performance of work, but rather due to the deliberate hiding or keeping vague of their work. This whole episode in fact ended with things being flipped on Jaume, where he was the one who ended up looking bad and like a 'capitalist' who was not to be trusted.

I later talked to Jaume regarding this process which he referred to as a *persecució*. He told me that he had seen it before, but that now he was experiencing it firsthand. According to Jaume people went about this in the following way: "[During assemblies] they make a very quick comment and don't let you respond. . . . This generates *ruido*, they create confusion." From Jaume's point of view, this is what happened to him when Garbí and Iker interrupted him during the assembly while discussing the amount of hours they worked. For Jaume, the only way he thought he could respond was by raising his voice and becoming more aggressive, which had negative consequences for him. "The assembly remembers: 'But hey, this Jaume guy, he must be doing something wrong, he's always making trouble'." Jaume then went on to say that these stories get reinforced in hallways and informal channels, and then are put on display again during assemblies. In this way, Jaume with his chronograms, protocols, and talk of order and power, was painted as being far too capitalist and part of *el Sistema* for an alternative organization like the Cooperative. Ultimately, Jaume decided that it would be best to leave the organization entirely. He said did not feel as if they threw him out necessarily, but he noted wryly that all his work would be undone "within four *permanents*".

A similar thing happened to Niko. Much like Jaume, Niko also went through a process of vilifying (*demonitzar*) and was asked to leave the cooperative during an assembly at the end of June. This event had taken a long time to come to fruition. Niko had been in the Cooperative for a long time, and at one point in time was seen as an ally of Jaume and his desire to "*posar ordre*" in the Cooperative. Like Jaume before him, Niko was presented as a representative of 'the System' who by one member was even suspected of being a police officer looking to sabotage the Cooperative. A strong minded, honest, yet at times also a short-tempered and stubborn person from the South of Spain, Niko had certainly rubbed many people the wrong way during his time at the Cooperative. As he himself admitted: "I'm no saint". Particularly in his early days at the organization, he often butted heads with people who, according to him, were not doing their work properly. After a short period of self-imposed exile from the Cooperative, he returned with a calmer attitude. Now an avid practitioner of Qigong, he was looking to be more mindful and constructive in the way he approached his activism. However, through his past actions and the way they were perceived, he had burned many bridges with important figures in the Cooperative.

After Jaume left, Niko felt as though now it was his turn to be "*el malo* (the bad one)". He often told me that he had the feeling that "they" were "coming for him" but

that he was not afraid of “*los altos rangos* (the leaders)”. As Niko had anticipated, a letter signed by a number of former and current members of the Cooperative was read out loud to him during a meeting before the assembly in June. The opening words of the letter are telling: “we have lost our trust in you”. While certainly not the only or even most important factor, Niko’s lack of physical presence and unseen labor was a contributing factor in him losing the trust of certain people in the Cooperative. At the assembly, Niko’s departure was an emotional affair. The Welcoming Committee was trying to make a case that the protocols for expulsing someone from the Cooperative had not been followed. The tension steadily rose as both Niko and his opponents lost their cool. However, it became clear that Niko and his supporters did not have enough backup and weight to make his case, making it so that Niko had to indeed leave the Cooperative. Here I would like to emphasize that both in the case of both Niko and Jaume we see the production and circulation of narratives of mistrust which served to guide the cooperative towards what was imagined to be a more alternative organizational style without chronograms, control, and protocols.

Another way of interpreting this is through Mary Douglas’ (1993) concept of the “enclave”. Making a comparative framework for religious groups, Douglas uses the term enclave to describe groups that are seemingly removed from “larger society” (1996 [1970], xxii). While the Cooperative and eco-network were not religious groups, they do share a number of characteristics of enclaves. Douglas writes that the enclave “is in disagreement with the outside world”, looks to withdraw from society, is generally fiercely egalitarian, and concerned with protecting its borders (1996 [1970], xxi). However, while Douglas explains the egalitarianism of the religious enclave due to its fear of members leaving (1996 [1970], xxii), the egalitarian nature of the Cooperative and eco-networks springs forth from a history of horizontal decision making practices that I described in Chapter One. Moreover, while my interlocutors were concerned with people leaving the Cooperative and eco-networks, their principal fear was not defection, but rather keeping the influence of ‘the System’ outside. Jaume, Niko, and many others who had come before them were seen as smuggling in values from *el Sistema* and corrupting the enclave from within. Their expulsion meant both that a particular form of organizing the economy that was associated with ‘the System’ was kept at bay, but was also an act that served to consolidate the power relations within in the Cooperative.²⁴

This resistance against the chronograms and quantification mechanisms was palpable in the Bioregions as well. This became evident to me during one particularly eventful assembly in the Southern Bioregion. As part of the decentralization of the

24 See Bryant 2014 and Bryant and Hatay 2011 for a more extensive discussion of enclaves in relation to the politics of exclusion.

Cooperative, the idea was that each Bioregion would become more autonomous and manage its own cooperative legal forms. This, however, proved to be a slow process. One of the key participants in the Southern Bioregion, Giuseppe, started to become ever more disgruntled. We were sat on the floor in a circular formation in the backroom of an antique store, when Gisuseppe shared his thoughts with us about what he thought was going on.

“The EMC and Coordination committee don’t want us to create our own cooperative,” he exclaimed before launching into a long performative monologue about his experiences with the Cooperative. At one point in time, Giuseppe was assigned the position of *eix econòmic*, meaning he was in charge of creating a coherent vision and structure for the alternative economy. However, he only experienced “resistance from *el Global*”. He listed his complaints: that he did not have access to the information that he needed, that he was only rarely informed on time about the latest developments and often found out about things through other people, that there was “*gestió opaca* [obscure management]” and a “total lack of transparency”. He continued: “And I can prove all of this. I have over 5000 e-mails and all the threads saved. . . . That’s why they came after me.” His monologue was met with shock, disbelief, and disappointment. Some, like Lucy, said they were not as pessimistic and that “not everything was *malo*”. Yet there was a consensus that this was not the way forward.

Giuseppe continued by saying that there were *frenos* (brakes) from *el Global*, “not because they’re not ready [to decentralize], but because they don’t want to.” Júlia, who had been working on re-organizing the legal structure of the alternative employment system, chimed in: “From *el Global*, they’re blocking the path to our own *autogestió*.” Giuseppe proposed to take the reins into their own hands and start putting things into motion: “*que vaya adelante* . . . and let’s liberate ourselves from the Barcelonan chronogram.” The rest of the meeting was spent discussing the details of what the Southern Cooperative should look like. What was going to be the name? How many people needed to be on the board, and who was going to do so and under what conditions? And how much budget would be available? Giuseppe’s discourse therefore served to create a sense of mistrust in the capacity of *el Global* to deliver on the promises that had been made. Moreover, this was also a way of exposing the organizational and relational flaws of the Cooperative in order to set out a path towards a different kind of organization altogether.

Conclusion

A crucial part of creating alternative economic formations involves the mobilization of various affective registers. In their discourse, both the Cooperative and eco-networks emphasized the fact that they wanted to recover “affective human relations based on

proximity and trust". For my interlocutors, capitalism had erased these socially thick ties and replaced them with a system in which alienated individuals interacted coldly as strangers in a market situation. In this chapter I have also interpreted this desire to recover an *economia de confiança* within the context of a general disposition of mistrust towards public institutions in Southern Europe. As documented by social scientists, when there can be no trust or, in Luhmannian terms, confidence that institutions work in one's benefit, it is best to look towards those closest or, as in the case of the Cooperative and eco-network, to build one's own institutions and systems entirely.

When it comes to trust, sociologists seem to have left no stone unturned. There is a wealth of literature dealing with the function and nature of trust. In many accounts, trust is seen as the pre-condition for social functioning and as something that holds society together. From anthropological accounts, however, a more complex picture appears. The relatively few anthropological works that deal explicitly with trust show that trust is in many instances entangled with other affective forces such as friendship, solidarity, and love (Aguilar 1984; Grasseni 2013, 2014; Hart 1988; Jung 2014; Robben 2018; Shipton 2007). Rather than untangling trust from this affectively charged meshwork, anthropologists have highlighted the multifaceted nature of trust. Moreover, recent anthropological literature implores us to explore the qualities of mistrust beyond its theoretical status as "social acid" (Carey 2017, 2).

In this chapter I have drawn on both sociological as well as anthropological perspectives. However, rather than trying to pin down trust or, for that matter, mistrust conceptually, I have instead analyzed the work that went into creating the experience of trust and mistrust. As I have shown, my interlocutors, both in the Cooperative as well as the eco-networks, talked about trust in terms of proximity and familiarity. In other words, for trust to appear it was necessary to facilitate face-to-face encounters where thick social ties and trust relations could be cultivated. To this end my interlocutors managed certain spaces, such as the weekly meetings of the eco-network, where people who were involved in alternative economic projects could meet personally, socialize, and get to know each other.

Beyond fomenting interpersonal trust, I have described how my interlocutors went about producing trust in more abstract and less tangible entities such as the social currency and the Cooperative's alternative employment system. I argued that these systems were, to paraphrase Sztompka (2000, 81), opened up for closer scrutiny through problem solving and performative evaluations. In the case of the Cooperative, during my research there was a rapid shift in the perception of trustworthiness of the organization. At the end of 2016 (a couple of months after my fieldwork had begun), everything seemed to be going well. The cooperative had recovered a deficit and was going into 2017 with the prospect of expanding and further developing an alternative

economic system at the margins of capitalism. However, in early 2017, it was announced that the Cooperative was once again running a deficit, leading to disbelief, criticisms, and, indeed, mistrust in the work of the EMC.

As I have described above, for an organization that claimed that its systems were based on mutual trust, there was a significant degree of mistrust and suspicion among the members of the Cooperative. Rather than viewing these sentiments as merely corrosive, however, I have shown how certain narratives of mistrust were mobilized in the process of changing the specific organizational form that the Cooperative had. We saw this most clearly in the case of Jaume, who was portrayed as someone who was letting practices from *el Sistema* seep into the Cooperative, corrupting its radical spirit. The work of mistrust, then, served to disassemble a particular form of organization while simultaneously re-assembling it in a different manner.

Jaume's departure and the ensuing organizational shift coincided with the continued financial crisis of the Cooperative. Jaume's fear was that all the things he had changed would now be lost "within four *permanents*". The Cooperative would certainly continue to change after his departure. This was not just due to internal struggles and reorganizations, but was compounded by the presence of the state. Indeed, towards the end of my research, the Cooperative saw itself forced to reckon with the state in the form of a series of labor inspections. In the next chapter I will examine the question of the state in relation to alternative economic formations, and show how the state was involved in shaping and formatting the Cooperative and eco-networks in specific ways.



Chapter Five

Formalizing Alterity

Introduction

In the middle of a particularly heated assembly in the downtown offices of the Cooperative, I recall Marco exclaiming: “We’re creating a bureaucratic order to move away from the state!” This statement carries within itself a number of elements that will form the focus of this chapter. First, there is the acknowledgement that a specific and highly formalized order was being created by the members of the Cooperative. Contrary to the thesis that unregulated and ‘informal’ activities lack form, I have shown how the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks gave shape and (per) formed the economy in different ways. These alternative economic formations were intended to make people less dependent on “the System”, which, as is evident from Marco’s quote, not only referred to capitalism, but also the state. Indeed, the members of the Cooperative and eco-network tried to create “enclaves” (Douglas 1993) that were thought to be severed from all political institutions that fell under the wing of a globalized, state-sanctioned capitalism. However, despite their best efforts, the specter of this particular formal order was not so easily cast aside.

In the preceding chapters I have analyzed how competing visions regarding the proper form of the economy were brought forward by the members of the Cooperative and eco-network in what I referred to as a battle of forms that took place across various arenas. Yet the actors in this battle were not limited to members of the Cooperative and eco-network. While the members of the Cooperative and eco-network tried to avoid dealing with the state, they did inevitably trespass onto its domain where they were confronted by its regulatory force. This became particularly noticeable towards the end of my fieldwork in 2017 when the Cooperative came under the scrutiny by the Ministry of Labor. As a result, the members of the Cooperative saw themselves forced to make their organization comply with the legal requirements of the Catalan law for cooperatives. This forced formalization further compounded the already ongoing battle of forms taking place in the Cooperative and eco-network. In this chapter I will address how the processes of formalization that I have discussed throughout this dissertation intersected with formalization processes initiated by the state.

The state, however, does not feature centrally in the literature on alternative economic spaces at a conceptual level and is often relegated to the contextual backdrop (Jonas 2010, 16-17). In this chapter I will therefore bring the state into the analysis of alternative economies by drawing on insights from economic and political anthropology that address how ‘informal’ economic activities – i.e., those often but not always unremunerated livelihood-sustaining practices that are not recognized by the state – relate to a formal, legal order (Dove 2011; Gandolfo 2013; Guyer 2004; Hart 1968; Humphrey and Mandel 2000; Roitman 2005). From this perspective I will show that despite my interlocutors’ attempts to “move away” from the state, it remained a

powerful force that shaped the numerous ways in which my interlocutors formed the economy.

This chapter is structured as follows: I will begin with a theoretical section where I will argue for the importance of the state in the study of alternatives through a juxtaposition of literature on “alternative economic spaces” with the anthropology of the state. Moving to the ethnographic section of this chapter, I begin by highlighting the strategies used by the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks to both evade and denounce the state. This was done through a variety of tools, including the state’s own legal structures. Notwithstanding this rejection of the state, I will draw on Mitchell’s notion of state effect to show how the state was a powerful organizing force in the lives of my interlocutors. The state, however, did not just feature in the social imagination of the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks, it also made its presence felt through a series of inspections by the ministry of labor. The final section of this chapter will describe the consequences of these inspections and show how the Cooperative was forced to formalize its alternative employment system.

I will argue that we should not see this as a case of the formalization of ‘informal’ activities, the reproduction of the state, or the absorption of alternatives by the mainstream. It is true that, towards the end of my research, the imposition of a particular state-sanctioned organizational form became more and more palpable in the eco-network and particularly in the Cooperative. For many members of the Cooperative, this was experienced as a contradiction with regards to the organization’s original radical impulse, as is evident by Marco’s quote comparing the Cooperative to a “bureaucratic order”. Yet it also compelled the search for a different way of being ‘alternative’, while still minimally complying with the law. Rather than a one-way process of formalization, what we see is more akin to Gandolfo’s (2013, 289) description of different “forces of the economy” continually merging and diverging to produce certain social forms that are not always so easily assimilable.

Economic Alterity and the State

“Alternative economic spaces” are usually theorized in relation to other ‘mainstream’ economic orders such as the market. The state, however, appears to be a theoretical blind spot among scholars working on alternative economies (Jonas 2010, 17-18). In part this is the result of the lack of a theory of the state in the work of Gibson-Graham. While certain elements of the state do feature in their model of a diverse economy (e.g., state allocations and state enterprises), nowhere do we find an explicit conceptualization of the state, let alone an explanation of how the state is implicated in the emergence of diverse economic forms. This springs forth from their conviction that the state is, in fact, part of the problem. In *The End of Capitalism as We Knew It*, Gibson-Graham write:

For the most part, economic difference has only ever been framed in the familiar terms of market versus state (this is what gives us the ‘third way’ and the ‘social economy’ as the ‘alternatives’)” (2006a [1996], xiin). Gibson-Graham instead propose to use the language of the “diverse economy” to widen the idea of what an economy is and to “include all those practices excluded or marginalized by the theory and presumption of capitalist hegemony” (2006a [1996], xii). Their project is thus about making visible these unrecognized and undervalued activities through a language of economic difference, ultimately enabling the emergence of a “politics of economic innovation” and a post-capitalist politics beyond the “third way” or “social economy” alternatives that remain within the contours of the state versus market opposition (Gibson-Graham 2006a [1996], 2006b, 2008, 2013).

Following this perspective, human geographers have explored the potential of alternative economic spaces to function as coping mechanisms in times of increasing austerity and the accompanying structural changes of the welfare state (Jonas 2010; Samers 2005, 875; Zademach and Hillebrand 2013). Here the state appears mostly as contextual backdrop, or as a threat that needs to be avoided. As Jonas writes: “There is a distinct possibility that the current crisis [of 2008] creates a political vacuum for alternatives which will quickly be colonized by the state” (2010, 17). Much like Gibson-Graham, for Jonas the question becomes whether or not “alterity” allows us to break free from what he, following Lefebvre, identifies as a pendulum swinging between “neoliberalism and neo-statism” and whether a “new politics of space” can be opened up that would go beyond these two options (2010, 17).

People involved in creating alternative economic systems, for their part, often promote a similar discourse whereby they present these systems as safety networks in times of crisis or, as in the case of the Cooperative and eco-networks, as alternatives to the state and capital altogether. My interlocutors therefore seemed to view the state as what the anthropologist Danny Hoffman following Pierre Clastres describes as “a hierarchical mode of organizing power that appears as a tendency or impulse throughout history” (2011, 7). As we have seen in the previous chapters, my interlocutors kept this tendency at bay by carving out spaces of governance that were perceived as being outside of the domain of the state. In the previous chapter I have described this as the desire to create “enclaves” that were self-managed, egalitarian, consensus based, and required direct participation. Both scholars as well as practitioners of alternative economic formations, then, uphold a strict separation between the state and the economy. In these perspectives, the state therefore plays a similar role to the one it plays in certain conceptualizations of the informal economy, and therefore runs into similar analytical problems.

The anthropologist Janet Roitman argues that in African studies, concepts such as “informal economies”, “second economies”, “black” or “clientelist” markets were a way to bring society back into the frame of analysis in a context where the state had traditionally been the be-all and end-all of social analysis. Yet Roitman notes that all these economies “exist and are analyzed as reactions to the state or formal market ‘failures’” (1990, 679). That is, once formal institutions collapse, people supposedly “disengage” and seek out livelihoods in the informal sector (1990, 679-680). This is similar to how alternative economic spaces are seen as fallback systems in times of crisis. Roitman, however, argues that such a view does not take into account that informal economic activities rely on “various resources (not only material) that are controlled by the state” (1990, 682). In the case of my research, for instance, we see this in the fact that the Cooperative’s alternative employment system was reliant on the existence of the cooperative legal form sanctioned by the state.

Roitman is part of a broader tradition within political anthropology that contests the idea of the state as a self-contained entity that is somehow separate from society and looks rather at how ‘the state’ is made through the creation of state images and practices of state-craft (Bierschenk and de Sardan 2014; Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Trouillot 2001). Recent perspectives urge us to think of the state not as a “governing center”, but more like a “relational setting” where various actors “negotiate over ideas of legitimate power by drawing on existing state-images” (Thelen et al. 2014, 7). From this perspective, the state arises out of practices of boundary making by differentially embedded actors who, in so doing, can at once reaffirm and/or transform existing representations of the state (Thelen et al. 2017, 7-10). To translate this to the context of my research, my interlocutors were continually creating and locating boundaries that separated the structures that they were creating from *el Sistema*, which referred to amalgamation of the state and capitalism wherein capitalist market structures were seen as being backed and sanctioned by the state. In this chapter I will analyze this process of boundary making to shed light on the relation between alternative economic formations and the state. I will pay particular attention to how my interlocutors tried to ward off the state, and tried to minimize the risk of ‘the System’ leaking into their enclave.

However, encounters between the state and the alternative economic formations my interlocutors were creating were often unavoidable. This was particularly evident in the case of the social currency and the Cooperative’s alternative employment system. Here is where the members of the Cooperative and eco-network dealt most directly with the state and were subject to inspections by the Ministry of Labor. These inspections ultimately triggered a process of formalizing the Cooperative to make it more compliant with the Catalan law for Cooperatives. Whenever my interlocutors

did engage with the state, they were therefore confronted by, to borrow a phrase from Gandolfo (2013, 93), a “Weberian force of the economy” that strove to make things comply to a specific logic.

Yet we should not read this as the one-directional absorption, co-optation, or colonization of alternative economic spaces into the fold of the formal order of the state. Thinking in this way is to reproduce the hylomorphic fallacy that ‘informal’ or unregulated activities lack form and only take on a meaningful and recognizable shape once they are ‘formalized’ (Ingold 2014; Millar 2018; Bryant 2012). To be sure, the state was a powerful actor that the members of the Cooperative and eco-network, despite their best efforts, were forced to reckon with. To many members of the Cooperative, this state-induced formalization of their organization made it seem as though they were becoming a replica of ‘the system’, as is demonstrated by Marco’s quote at the start of this chapter comparing the Cooperative to a “bureaucratic order”. In other instances, however, the kind of formalization that was seen as part of the state was evoked in a more positive sense by certain members in the Cooperative and eco-network who wanted to impose a particular order in the organization, or sought a degree of legal coverage and the peace of mind this would give. Moreover, the forced re-organization of the Cooperative was at the same time also seen as a chance to re-assemble the Cooperative and eco-networks entirely. The intersection of different processes of formalization therefore yielded different outcomes that were not always so easily assimilable. To truly understand how the economy was given shape, it is therefore evident that we need to reckon with the state. The following sections will show that alternative economies are not just born out of a battle against capital, but also out of struggles against the state.

Living without the State

Throughout my research trajectory I was always interested in the relation between officially sanctioned governing bodies and alternative economic formations. The social currency used by my interlocutors was therefore of particular interest to me, as this was something that seemed to directly impinge upon the authority of the state and state-backed financial institutions. Ada Colau’s plan to set up a social currency in Barcelona, for instance, sparked a substantial amount of controversy, and the Spanish central bank deemed the plan “impossible” and “undesirable” (González 2016). Yet the response I got when inquiring into the legality of the social currency used by my interlocutors was always the same. As Joana put it: “Well, it [social currency] is not recognized by the state, so it’s not regulated either.” There are many ways in which a social currency can be established. Recently, we have seen a proliferation of currencies backed by local governments and state institutions (Hughes 2015; Kanters Forthcoming; Seyfang

and Longhurst 2013). However, the social currency used by my interlocutors was not backed by any regulatory authority, which was in fact part and parcel of the design of the currency.

As we saw in chapter two, my interlocutors wanted to exercise a degree of economic sovereignty over the way things were produced, valued and made to circulate within a more localized economic circuit that was seen to be outside of the reach of the state. This was often couched in explicitly political terms. For example, I recall one *xarxeire* telling me that the goal of all this was “to live without the state”. When I asked Pep whether the eco-network had any relations with the local authorities, he responded: “We don’t deal with the municipality, and we don’t want to either.” As such, the eco-network did not have any formal legal existence; it was not an association and nor was it a cooperative. Its social currency, moreover, was not linked to any kind of officially recognized financial institution. It was therefore a tool (*eina*) to stay outside the purview of formal political and financial institutions in the sense that it allowed economic activity to be carried out without being tracked by any governing body or state-backed financial institutions.

When the *xarxeires* did have to deal with the municipality, they did so by proxy. During my stay, the members of the eco-network moved the *rebot* from Mas Jorda to a more central location in the capital of the *comarca*. The new location, an old farmhouse called Can For located in the industrial part of town, was owned by the municipality. The *ecoxarxa* was able to stay there because they asked the local Nature Association, who had permission to use the building, if they were allowed to have their *rebot* and weekly gatherings at Can For. Without explicitly mentioning the name of the eco-network, the Nature Association subsequently asked the municipality if they could host an unidentified consumer group at the farmhouse. The municipality saw no reason why this could not be allowed, and the eco-network was able to hold their assemblies in a space owned by the local municipality. This was another way in which direct confrontation with any officially sanctioned governing body was avoided. At the same time, however, this case is indicative of how the infrastructure of an alternative economy still relied on the state and local governing bodies.

Due to these kinds of strategies and also their scale, the eco-network, as far as I was aware, was not under any direct regulatory pressure from local authorities or the Spanish state. This was, however, not the case for the individual members of the eco-network. In varying degrees, they sought to undermine the Spanish state by engaging in what is known as economic disobedience (*desobediencia económica*). The basic premise of this idea is to undermine the state’s fiscal base to denounce the expenditure of public funds for paying off what is seen to be self-created sovereign debt, investing in military infrastructure, and perpetuating social inequality (Derecho de Rebelión 2012).

A central tenet of economic disobedience is tax evasion, and my interlocutors indeed engaged in various tax evasion strategies. Not because they were opposed to the idea of tax as such or of contributing to a fiscal community, but rather because of the lack of trust in political institutions that we saw in the previous chapter.

After expressing his disgust and helplessness to change the current political situation at an institutional level, Andreu put it in this way: “But I can do something at the local level. I can try pay as little taxes as possible, not because I don’t believe in taxes - I would love for there to be better highways, public schooling, and public healthcare - but they’ve taken away everything.” Andreu had given up hope that the state could manage its tax base in a proper way, and preferred disengaging from this system altogether. In his words: “In the face of all this, what can we do? We can try to move around in an alternative economy and not partake in all of this.” The social currency was part of this logic as well, given that products bought in this manner were not subjected to VAT. Moreover, beyond tax evasion, economic disobedience was in also involved in contributing to autonomous projects such as the eco-network and the Cooperative.

Turning now to the Cooperative, we see a similar practice of evading the law and keeping the state at bay while simultaneously making use of the state’s infrastructure. This was particularly evident in the case of the Cooperative’s alternative employment system. Moreover, while the members of the eco-network as a collective were not subjected to the state’s regulatory practices, this was not the case in the Cooperative. While individual members engaged in tax evasion, in the Cooperative this took on a more widespread and organized form through its alternative employment system. In the following section, I will explore how this alternative employment system amounted to the creation of an alternative tax regime, and how this brought the members of the Cooperative into conflict with certain regulatory bodies of the state.

Taxing Like a State

As we have seen in previous chapters, the Cooperative’s alternative employment system enabled people to carry out some form of income-generating activity without having to be registered as a self-employed person with the state. While in a practical sense a *sòcia* was no different from a self-employed person, the fact of the matter was that a *sòcia*’s economic activity was not registered with the state and, according to official statistical metrics, did not produce any income. Normally, self-employment requires at least registering with the tax office (*Hacienda*) of the Ministry of Finance and Civil Service and subsequent registration in the so-called *Régimen Especial de Trabajadores Autónomos* at the Ministry of Employment and Social Security. Then, a monthly payment

of 278 euros a month is required, which largely consists of social security fees.²⁵ Once all these minimum requirements are met, an *autónomo* is allowed to legally engage in economic activities that provide her or him with an income over which taxes are then paid. Those making use of the Cooperative's services, however, did not pay these taxes and the Cooperative promoted this as a practice of economic disobedience. While some *sòcies* shared this political positions, others saw it simply as a practical tool to reduce their fixed costs.

Instead of contributing to the state's fiscal base, the *sòcies* paid trimestral fees to the Cooperative. In practice, these fees followed a logic analogous to that of taxes. That is the *sòcies* paid a mandatory minimum trimestral fee to the Cooperative fee of 75 monetary units. After a certain income threshold was reached, this amount would increase proportionate to one's earnings, in a similar manner to how a marginal tax system works. These fees were then subsequently used for a series of goals collectively agreed upon in the general assembly, which included the financial backing of a variety of projects (see Chapter One for an overview). Moreover, those tasked with realizing these goals – the *liberadas* – received a remuneration that was paid out of the fees received from the *sòcies*. Seen from this perspective, it is tempting to make an analogy between this model and the state's tax regime, whereby citizens pay taxes which are used, among other things, to fund public goods and the salaries of public officials.

However, before we take this analogy further, it is important to remember that the collectively agreed upon public goods of the Cooperative were intended to form a kind of counter-public or a commons. Elsewhere I have indeed described the Cooperative's model as what I call a Fiscal Commons (Bäumer Escobar 2020). That is, the tools created by the Cooperative's committee members – a social currency, a food distribution service, the alternative employment system itself – were intended to be beneficial for their users as a means to withdraw from a state of dependency on similar services already available in society. Additionally, there was an expectancy from the Cooperative that the *sòcies* would actively participate in the collective decision-making process. In earlier chapters, however, we already saw that in practice there were significant barriers to the *sòcies'* involvement in the Cooperative, and later on in this chapter we will see that the *sòcies* had misgivings about the way their fees were used, which echoed common complaints about how the state uses its taxes (lack of transparency, power abuse, etc.). Much like state-sanctioned tax regimes, this tax regime was thus embedded

25 Recent changes in the law have amended this system slightly. For those becoming self-employed for the first time there is a reduced fee – 52 euros – that is applicable during the first six months of being self-employed. After that the base fee of 278 euro's applies. For people under 30 years of age, a reduced fee can be maintained for up to thirty months, although the maximum reduction only applies for the first six months.

in moral frameworks and expectations that circumscribed the range of ‘proper usage’ of taxes (Björklund Larsen 2017, 2018; Guyer 1992; Makovicky and Smith 2020; Martin and Prasad 2014; Muñoz 2010).

From the start, this system therefore trod a thin line between legality and illegality. In other words, while the Cooperative’s alternative employment system was designed to enable people to withdraw from dealing with state-regulated labor regimes, this is also where the Cooperative inevitably encountered the state. The members of the Cooperative were deeply aware of this fact and engaged in various strategies in order to minimize detection by the state. It is to these practices that we now turn.

Looking like a Cooperative

“So what do you do when an inspector comes to you and starts asking questions?” Lena asked a *socia* who had come to one of the Cooperative’s offices in Girona. As I wrote in the previous chapter, the Cooperative had started renting a room in a building in Girona in order to get to know the users of the employment system on a face-to-face basis (*cara-cara*). There we were, sitting around a white table in a room on the ground floor, the merciless summer sun beating down on us through the blinds as Lena and Jana tirelessly attended to numerous *sòcies* throughout the day. I was quietly taking down notes and asking the occasional question, and Lena’s partner, Milo, who was designing a logo for a newly launched cryptocurrency managed by an organization affiliated to the Cooperative. When not attending to *sòcies*, Lena and Jana were either making phone calls or frantically typing away at the keyboards of their laptops, the backs of which were adorned with stickers displaying political and social messages. “I tell them I’m a volunteer for a cooperative,” the *socia* duly responded. Presenting oneself as a volunteer was the strategy that the Cooperative had used since the inception of the alternative employment system in order to avoid legal prosecution. In a legal sense this made the *sòcies* volunteers for a cooperative rather than be self-employed. This formula seemed simple enough, yet was much more complicated in practice and required a lot of careful and creative translation work between theory (the law) and the everyday practices of the Cooperative. That is, the Cooperative made use of officially registered cooperatives. The registered activity of these cooperatives had to be made to seem ‘normal’ in the eyes of the state. Or, as Valerie said, “what we do whenever we have to deal with the law is like a performance [*obra de teatro*] for the state”. This happened in a number of ways.

The Cooperative handled a number of currency flows. Firstly, the Cooperative generated social currency. As we have seen, this was not legal tender, was not registered by any legally recognized central authority, and did not appear in the official accountancy of the Cooperative towards the state. Similarly, the fees paid by the *sòcies* would, from

the perspective of the state, appear to be donations much like those received by any cooperative or enterprise from its members, and therefore this did not form a legal problem. However, the Cooperative also received all the money that came from the invoices made by *sòcies* using the Cooperative's fiscal number, which made things all the more complicated for the Cooperative.

This worked in the following way: If, say, an electrician had done some wiring in a school for which the school would want to pay him or her through an invoice, then the electrician would give the school a fiscal number and bank account number of the Cooperative. The money would then go directly into a bank account of the Cooperative. The electrician would then have to come and pick up the money at a later point, which the Cooperative would give to him or her in the form of a cash payment. The Value Added Tax (VAT) that each individual *sòcia* owed to the tax office (*Hacienda*) would be paid to the state by the Cooperative.²⁶ The volume of these monetary streams were a problem for the Cooperative, as in Spain there is an upper limit of 1.500.000 euros that a cooperative is allowed to manage. During my research the Cooperative was close to reaching this limit, and surpassing it would raise unwanted attention, stopping it from being just another cooperative in the list of the tax office.

The theory to avoiding raising suspicion and making things appear normal was simple: set up more legally registered cooperatives and move over the *sòcies* to these new *einias* (tools) so that the total amount of money was spread out more equally between various cooperatives. However, in practice this became a struggle for the Cooperative. To set up a cooperative it is necessary to constitute a board consisting of three legal figures: the president, the vice-president, and a secretary. In cases of legal action, these are then also the liable and responsible legal figures. So far nothing out of the ordinary. However, in the case of the Cooperative, the members of the board would ideally have to be insolvent and it is here that things became complicated for the Cooperative.

This type of personal insolvency was understood differently from the type of financial insolvency where a firm or a person is unable to pay their debts and declares bankruptcy or insolvency. That is, *insolvencia* as practiced in the Cooperative and in other activist circles, is related to the above-mentioned principle of economic disobedience (*desobediencia económica*). In this context, being insolvent meant not having any property or vehicle officially registered under one's name, not having a bank account, not having a pension, and not having an official income. Or, in other words, not legally owning anything. The idea is that if you do not own anything, the state is not able to enforce you to pay off any debts or fines you may receive (i.e., freeze your

26 In order to minimize the payment of VAT to the state, the EMC encouraged *sòcies* to declare their expenses with the Cooperative. The VAT of these expenses would then be subtracted from the VAT they owed to the state, resulting in an overall lower VAT.

bank account or take away any property) (MDE 2012, 18-19). For the Cooperative this meant that, technically speaking, if the state were to take up legal action against one of the cooperative legal forms, then the judiciary would be at a loss to impose its legal imperative through the seizing of assets, although the legal sanctions would still apply.

While in practice many people took up this type of economic disobedience in varying degrees, it is not hard to imagine that actually becoming entirely insolvent was a very risky undertaking and implied sacrificing certain things that many people were simply not ready to leave behind. As one member said during an assembly: “I can’t be insolvent because I have a family.” Meaning that he had financial responsibility towards others that he was not prepared to leave behind. As we saw in chapter two, the degree to which it was possible to lead an alternative life needed to be negotiated with existential concerns. Moreover, even though being insolvent was a form of protection against any financial punishment the state could impose, the legal punishment would still apply and was another burden to be carried by the members of the board. Meanwhile, where in the beginning years of the Cooperative there was no shortage of willing activists who would gladly join the board of one of the cooperatives, during my research period, things were somewhat different. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the Cooperative fell into a crisis towards the end of my research and we have seen how, in this context, narratives that discredited the Barcelonan center of power started to circulate in what I have called an economy of (mis)trust. In this generalized climate of uncertainty and mistrust, the Cooperative found it hard to find enough dedicated activists willing to put their livelihood on the line for the Cooperative. Seeing as this halted the creation of new cooperatives, the threshold of 1.500.000 euros grew ever closer and only added to the sense of uncertainty that haunted the Cooperative.

Looking like just another cooperative also happened in more direct encounters with the state. The Cooperative was often subjected to inspections by the Ministry of Labor. I will return to how this impacted the organization in more detail below. Here I will recount how certain members of the Cooperative prepared for meetings with inspectors when they were summoned. The Cooperative had a Juridical Committee consisting of two lawyers who would advise the members of the Cooperative how to interact with the state. During assemblies and meetings Klau would often begin with the following disclaimer: “I know that you always think we’re part of *el Sistema* because we’re kind of talking about how the law sees things, but we’re really only trying to help you.”. During a meeting between Klau and Jana to help her prepare for a meeting with an inspector, Jena rehearsed how she would explain the situation and that the Cooperative would from now on try to legalize their operation. Klau interrupted her and said: “Don’t ever ever ever mention the word legalize to an inspector! Because that implies that what you were doing before wasn’t legal.” Klau also told her to

act as ignorant as possible: “what you want is that they think: ‘oh this is just a *hippi* cooperative who don’t have a clue about how this works”. Through these carefully rehearsed performances and discursive strategies the members of the Cooperative tried to minimize state interference in their organization.

Despite the measures taken by the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks to keep the state away, the state still featured heavily in the imaginations of my interlocutors as an ever-present threat that could seep into the Cooperative at any given point. In the following section I will turn to these expressions and interpret them in terms of Mitchell’s notion of state effect.

State Effects: Evading and Embracing the State

I opened this chapter with the statement uttered by Marco at an assembly that took place shortly after a series of legal changes had been made to the alternative employment system: “We’re creating a bureaucratic order in order to move away from the state!” Since first entering the Cooperative a number of months prior to the assembly, Marco had gained an increasingly prominent role in the Economic Management Committee and had always been a staunch believer in the revolutionary potential of the Cooperative. However, he now expressed a sense of unease with the direction the Cooperative was taking, as he felt it was becoming overly bureaucratic. The verbal expression of such unease was common and as I have shown in the preceding chapters, members of the Cooperative often spoke of being in a “bureaucratic era” in which new rules, protocols, and formal mechanisms were felt to be implemented. For some people, this was experienced as an uncomfortable contradiction as many of them had initially been drawn to the Cooperative as a way to break away from “the system”. Another longstanding member of the Cooperative put it this way during the same assembly: “All this talk of structure, and restructuring - those are the words of the enemy! We need to start using our own words.” This dynamic, moreover, also extended into the Bioregions.

A common occurrence at Bioregional assemblies was to express a sense of lack of knowledge about what happened in the Barcelonan ‘center’. Before I started my research in Barcelona, I too partook in this sense of unknowing and many of the topics discussed at bioregional assemblies that were related to the Cooperative went entirely beyond my understanding. An image was portrayed where the Barcelonan nexus of the Cooperative was the political center of power that held all the resources, made decisions regarding the use of these resources, and facilitated *einās* (tools) that could be used by the various local nuclei dispersed throughout Catalonia. Members of the Bioregions often drew analogies to political institutions and spoke of Barcelona as being the political center of their movement where the ‘bureaucrats’ ran everything.

This model was heavily criticized for the overreliance it created on a center and the production of power imbalances between this center and the peripheral Bioregions. During my research period, a process of decentralizing (*descentralizació*) had therefore been set in motion. I have already discussed the details of this process in Chapter One and how it emanated from a shared sense of actually reproducing the very thing that people who joined the Cooperative wanted to do without. In practice this meant, among many other things, that the various Bioregions had also started to look for a way to organize themselves, without wanting to replicate the Barcelonan model that had caused so many contradictions.

In the North this led to a strong desire to start anew without political hierarchies. Roc, an influential person in the Northern Bioregion, put it this way: “We need to go from the pyramid to the donut.” That is, from a hierarchical organizational structure that was associated with the Cooperative in Barcelona – the pyramid – to a flatter, horizontal organization without a center of power – the donut. In a similar fashion to the Southern Bioregion’s desire to become more independent, this also required setting up all kinds of new rules that prescribed how things were to be done, leading one participant at a Bioregional assembly to evoke a similar analogy to Marco’s: “Do you realize what we’re doing here? It’s like we’re setting up a chamber of legislation!” If the goal of all this was “to live without the state”, as one member of the eco-network told me, then this seemed to be a Sisyphean task indeed.

Frequent references to the state, bureaucratic orders, and legislative chambers show that the state was a compelling force in the imagination of my interlocutors. This phenomenon is what Timothy Mitchell has tried to capture through his notion of the state effect. He argued that the everyday process through which states (or any other social formations) come into being – border checks, mundane encounters with bureaucratic institutions, etc. – also produces the sensation that there is something such as the state which is somehow distinct from society (2006). Seen from this perspective, there were certain practices that my interlocutors associated with the state: hierarchies, overcomplicated bureaucratic structures, and regulatory procedures. Among the members of the Cooperative, the presence of these arrangements produced the sensation that the state had penetrated the boundaries of their enclave.

We see this state effect not only among the *liberadas*; the *sòcies* also felt that the way they were treated in the Cooperative resembled previous experiences with state bureaucracies. This became most evident during their visits to the downtown office of the Cooperative. From the reception desk I often saw them sitting in the foyer, waiting to be attended to. It was not uncommon for this to take longer than expected and I would see the frustration appear on their faces after they were made to wait an hour or more. When talking to *sòcies* about this experience, comparisons and analogies to the

state always seemed ready at hand. “At first I came in there thinking it was like a state service,” Constanza told me as she recalled an instance when she had been made to wait a particularly long time. “So I got really upset and had a bit of a conflict,” she continued. Later, she added that she realized that she could not have the same expectations as she would ‘outside’ in *el Sistema*, as this was not a state service.

However, waiting to be attended to, and enduring complicated bureaucratic procedures, paperwork, and contradictory information were common occurrences the *sòcies* had to deal with and, in fact, brought about a state effect of sorts. Mariano, a *soci* originally from Argentina but now living in Barcelona for over 10 years, put it this way: “My experience with the Spanish state is deplorable, . . . but I have to say that my experience with the Cooperative is worse.” For him it was not necessarily because of the waiting and the complicated bureaucratic procedures, but because there was no accountability for those making the decisions. He said: “Of course there are personal interests at stake in Spanish politics, but at least there are some checks and balances.” In the Cooperative, meanwhile, he felt as though decisions were taken based solely on personal interest. Regarding a particular decision to raise the trimestral fees he commented: “They did this without taking everybody into account. They claimed to, but they didn’t think about me, for instance.” Here, in a way that perhaps bears resemblance to a disgruntled tax payer, Mariano apparently did not feel his interest were reflected by the people whose salary he was, in effect, paying for and who were making decisions about how to use the *sòcies*’ money.

But the state did not always feature negatively in the imagination of my interlocutors. Legal coverage was a concern for the *sòcies* who wanted to make sure that they were not going to be caught by the state. During an evaluation session, one *socia* repeatedly asked if she now had legal coverage and to what extent. As she said: “I need to have the feeling that I’m covered. I thought I was covered before, but then you guys told me I wasn’t.” It is important to remember that while the *sòcies* formed a highly heterogenous group, many were stuck in precarious positions and had joined out of pragmatic reasons (i.e., to minimize expenses). For this group in particular, the revolutionary ideals of the Cooperative were not as important as securing a livelihood and having the security of full legal coverage.

Processes of state-sanctioned formalization also became desirable in a very different sense. We already saw how in the Bioregions there was a desire to set up more legal cooperatives, instead of continuing to use the *einás* of the Cooperative. These ideas also reverberated in the local nuclei, albeit in a very different way. During one of my last visits to the *ecoxarxa*, I took part in a conversation with Andreu and Alba who were discussing the possibility of setting up a cooperative legal form as well. “We used to be *punkis* when we were 15,” Andreu told Alba as he tried to convince her to set up

the cooperative as legally as possible. Now that they were grown up, Andreu said that many people had other interests: “But now, many people don’t want that anymore. We’ve got children, families. We want some stability.” Here, then, we see that a formal legal order could also be desirable due to concerns about one’s livelihood.

What I have shown in this section is how the state was a powerful force that shaped my interlocutors’ experience of being involved in alternative economic projects. Yet the state also made its presence known in a different way. That is, the state was not just seen as threatening or desirable in the sense described above; the Cooperative did actually come under the legal scrutiny of the ministry of labor. This was due to the economic activity of the *sòcies*, which often took place in public spaces that were prone to inspection. For the Cooperative it was therefore imperative to regulate the activities of the *sòcies*. In the following section I will explore how this was done, and also show how this was where the Cooperative really started to feel the pressure of the state.

Fiscal Discipline and the Regulation of Labor

Every day from 10am to 2pm the downtown offices of the Cooperative were open to the public. An automatic glass sliding door gave way to a foyer and a curved, shiny reception desk that extended all the way to the hallway which led into the inner rooms of Can Xim. Adjacent to the reception desk were two office spaces, decked out with glass tables and a veritable torrent of drawers and cupboards that housed years’ worth of largely unorganized paperwork. As the main entrance of the Cooperative, I found the reception desk to be a good place to get a feel for what was going in Can Xim on. I would often sit next to whoever happened to be running a shift, helping out in whatever way I could.

One morning I was sitting at the front desk with Valerie when Marco came in saying he had an appointment with someone from the Economic Management Committee (EMC). This was in fact Marco’s first day at the Cooperative. With a very accelerated, energetic demeanor and sporting a long mullet that is so typical of the more politically engaged, left-leaning, countercultural Spanish youth, Marco seemed to fit right in at the Cooperative. Together with Cèlia, a much quieter person who preferred to remain in the background, he was taken on to help with the so called *impagats*. It turned out that, much like regular taxpayers, not all *sòcies* always paid their fees on time. Marco and Cèlia were therefore tasked with chasing after *sòcies* and asking them to fulfill their end of the bargain. This was a tiresome and tireless task that required checking up on individual accounts, trying to contact the *sòcies*, figuring out why they had not paid and then convincing them to pay their fees. In effect, what we see is then not just the collection of ‘taxes’ within the previously-described tax regime, but also attempts to impose a form of fiscal discipline.

These more direct measures went hand-in-hand with increased long-term monitoring of the *sòcies'* activity. Indeed, one of the main reasons why Lena and Jana were attending *sòcies* in Girona was precisely because, as Lena said, “we don’t have a damn clue what most of them are doing”. Meanwhile, at the main office of the Cooperative, the EMC had started so-called *sessions de seguiment* (monitoring) of the *sòcies*. These were periodic face-to-face sessions with a member of the EMC who would see how the *sòcies* were doing, attend any questions they might have, and let them know whether or not any changes needed to be made in the way they were managing their accounts. These sessions were greatly appreciated by the *sòcies* to help them make sense of the often complicated procedures they had to go through, and to make them familiar with the organizational culture of the Cooperative. As one *sòcia* told me about one of the members of the EMC: “Vera saved me! I came here and started to understand everything much better, I did all my paperwork with her. . . . She helped and welcomed me and I finally felt more at home.”

More than just being a courtesy towards the *sòcies*, these monitoring sessions were part of a set of regulatory practices intended to track the monetary flows of the Cooperative and the labor of the *sòcies*. This was necessary because of the need to make Cooperative’s activities appear ‘normal’ in the eyes of the state. In her welcoming sessions to potential *sòcies*, for instance, Valerie would always emphasize that the more that certain activities could be done “*en negro*”, in the “*economía submergida*”, or in the “*economía informal*”, the better. This was so for two reasons. First, if the *sòcies* engaged in informal activity, then they would not also not generate any traceable flows of money to the Cooperative. As Valerie said: “At the end of the day, the Cooperative is just another name in the list of cooperatives.” The monetary flows of the Cooperative therefore needed to be carefully monitored. Or, as she later said, “The money that comes in and goes out has to look normal, in a way that it all looks legit.”

The second reason was related to the degree of visibility of certain economic activities. Since the 2008 financial crisis there has been a considerable growth in the amount of cooperatives in Spain that, much like the Cooperative, offer the possibility of being self-employed without having to deal with the bureaucratic hassle and high economic costs. These are called *cooperativas de facturación* and the users of these services are sometimes referred to as *falsos autónomos*.²⁷ The major difference between these cooperatives and the Cooperative is that they rarely have an explicit political

27 *Falso autónomo* is also a term used for companies and firms that claim their workers are actually self-employed. These are largescale service companies such as Uber, Deliveroo, Homejoy, etc., that fall under the moniker of the ‘sharing economy’ and also agricultural companies that hire immigrants under these conditions. In these cases, exploitation is a much higher risk than in the case of *cooperativas de facturación*.

discourse and do not strive to create alternative systems “at the margins of capitalism”. These cooperatives have recently come under increasing scrutiny and their legality has been fiercely debated. The official stance of the Ministry of Labor is that being a *falso autonomo* is in fact fraud, and the amount of labor inspections that try and track down these cases has subsequently increased. This coincides with a larger crackdown on informal economic activity in Spain which is also backed by the EU. With regards to the Cooperative, two *sòcies* in fact did undergo an inspection and were fined.

This news reverberated throughout the Cooperative, Bioregions, and eco-networks and caused an enormous amount of debate about how to proceed. In the Southern Bioregion, there was a great desire to create a cooperative as a means to cut loose from the center. During one of the assemblies in the South, Júlia, who had been hired by the Cooperative as a lawyer specializing in labor issues, expressed how she felt that the cooperatives in Barcelona were “contaminated” and that it was necessary to generate new ones. In an interview with me she later pointed out that “everything needs to be done differently, in a way that is much more legal”. Both in the Bioregions as well as the Barcelonan nexus of the Cooperative, these inspections propelled a need to formalize the alternative employment system in the sense that it had to be made compliant with the law. This is, then, where the processes of formalization that I have discussed throughout the dissertation were compounded by formalization processes that were imposed by the state. In the following sections I will explore the details of this development.

Legalizing the Cooperative

The first of these inspections happened before I started my research and I was told this was a case of a craftsman selling goods at a fair who was fined by an inspector for not having the proper paperwork (i.e., not being registered as an *autónomo*). For the Cooperative these *firaires*, of which there were many, were a particularly risky group. Because of the nature of their work, the *firaires* had to sell their goods out in the open at fairs and markets, and were therefore more at risk of being inspected. The second case was a cooperative bakery that raised suspicion because, in addition to using the service of the Cooperative, the trio that owned the bakery was also receiving unemployment benefits from the state. This was found to be illegal, as the bakers were of course receiving an income (albeit an unregistered one) and thus had no right to any kind of unemployment benefits. Beyond the financial burden these inspections implied for the Cooperative (around 24.000 euros worth of fines), these cases also propelled a temporary closure and subsequent legalization of the alternative employment system .

In the aftermath of the inspections, due to the uncertainty regarding the legal status of the alternative employment system that this produced, I found out that the

Cooperative had in fact stopped taking on new *sòcies*. Only towards the end of my research was there talk of opening up the system again, the details of which were discussed in private meetings and assemblies. I recall one particularly important instance when a number of members of the Cooperative decided to have an emergency meeting to discuss how the new sign-up procedure for future *sòcies* would have to be set up. As usual, we started with some technical difficulties. This had become somewhat of a running gag in the Cooperative, where meetings and assemblies were practically always delayed due to unexpected issues with a laptop or some kind of malfunction in setting up a server on Mumble, an open-source platform the Cooperative used for remote communications. To the collective amusement and bewilderment of the attendees, we were finally able to start after we switched from Mumble to my personal skype account to call Júlia, who then called Ramon, who would talk through Júlia's phone into the microphone of her computer.

"All the *sòcies* need a contract," Júlia told us. With the state turning the screws on the above mentioned *cooperativas de facturación*, it appeared that the document possessed by every *sòcia* which stated that they were a volunteer for the Cooperative was now, as Júlia said, "worthless" and probably had been so from the start. Instead, each *sòcia* needed, at the least, to have a contract in which they were legally presented as workers or employees for the Cooperative. "These can be small contracts, like one hour a month," Júlia added, but there had to be a contract. All this did not sit well with Jana who exclaimed: "I don't know about this. . . . It seems that each time we're moving more towards the other side [*l'altra banda*]." The "other side" here referred to that which the Cooperative positioned itself against, i.e., the legally sanctioned economic structures referred to as "the System". In addition to the ideological contradiction of contracting *sòcies*, Julia also voiced her concern regarding the amount of work this would bring: "We can't possibly manage 500 contracts!" Unfortunately for Jana, this was now the reality of the Cooperative and all the *sòcies* would soon indeed be given contracts by the Cooperative as the new evaluation procedure was put in motion.

Evaluating *sòcies* was a familiar practice within the history of the Cooperative. "You wouldn't believe how it went before," Niko told me as he casually rolled a cigarette after having done the welcoming session on the rooftop terrace of the downtown office of the Cooperative. "The downstairs hallway was packed with people, sometimes we did thirty at a time," he told me as he recalled how *sòcies* used to be evaluated in the early years of the Cooperative. As he was prone to do, he painted a picture of how messy, unstructured and ad-hoc things processes used to be, in comparison to the current more "bureaucratic era" of the Cooperative with its procedures, protocols, chronograms, and other formal mechanisms. The evaluations were now done by two

members of the Cooperative who would evaluate each individual *sòcia* according to a strict format.

They were quite the odd couple I thought to myself, as I sat in room number 5 together with Pau and Vera during another long afternoon of evaluations of potential *sòcies*. The room, referred to as the “Zapatista” because of the large banner of the Zapatista movement that spanned the wall, was situated at the back of the Cooperative’s downtown office, past the reception desk, and through the corridor in the ‘dark side’ of the Cooperative. Having shaved the long hair and bushy beard he donned when I first met him, I was struck by Pau’s intent yet almost stoic gaze peering through his round rimmed glasses. He was perched behind a sticker-clad laptop and, like all members of the IT committee, always seemed to be typing away without pause, making indecipherable green lines of code appear against a black screen. Vera, meanwhile, had a much calmer more relaxed demeanor about her as she sat behind her own laptop – anomalously not sticker clad – flipping through a stack of documents. Now closing in on her forties, she had a fine arts background and had only recently joined the Cooperative and was one of the persons in charge of the above-mentioned monitoring (*seguiment*) of the *sòcies*. It was therefore not uncommon to see her slowly shuffling back and forth between the office of the Economic Management Committee and the more public spaces of Can Xim where she would attend *sòcies*.

Both of them were now tasked with evaluating potential *sòcies* and registering them in the digital platform used to manage the *sòcies*’ accounts. If we recall how Niko said that this used to be a very chaotic process with sometimes up to 30 *sòcies* being evaluated at a time and that hardly any information regarding their activity was registered, this all now did indeed seem much more streamlined. Pau first registered all the usual basic information such as name, address, telephone numbers, but also social security and insurance numbers. Then he went through a series of questions about what the specific activity was that each *sòcia* would want to use the Cooperative’s model for, whether it was a personal or collective project, and, most importantly, whether or not he or she worked in a public space and was planning on advertising their activity publicly. Due to the increased risk of inspections, it was now imperative for the Cooperative to know to what extent a *sòcia*’s activity was conducted out in the open or not. At a technical level, this was also a matter of financial importance, as *sòcies* would be given a flexible contract that would be set for the hours they actually were ‘exposed’. Curiously enough, then, the Cooperative still encouraged as much labor as possible to take place in the informal sector, but simultaneously tried to make the labor that was more publicly exposed legible, traceable, and controllable.

Here I would like to return to the concerns that Jana voiced about the Cooperative heading in the wrong direction. In Chapters Two and Three I have already detailed

how there were distinct visions of how an alternative economy should look, and that these were given shape in distinct ways. As I have argued, these were also processes of formalization, not in the sense of incorporating something into the legal order of the state, but in a more literal sense as the practice of shaping a particular form of the economy. It was difficult for the members of the Cooperative to marry this kind of formalization with the forced formalization required by the state. This became even more pronounced as the budgetary crisis of the Cooperative dragged on. In the midst of these financial problems and enforced formalization processes, an intense debate on how to reorganize the Cooperative itself ignited. Some could no longer cope with these changes and left the organization, while others saw this as an opportunity to “re-found” or, indeed, re-assemble the Cooperative. In the final part of this chapter I will turn to these developments.

Re-Assembling the Cooperative?

The above-described changes to the Cooperative’s employment system had taken months to come to fruition. In the meantime, the Cooperative kept running at a deficit due to the fact that the expenses stayed the same while the amount of revenue kept declining due to the Cooperative’s decision to not take on any new *sòcies*. This budgetary deficit was on everyone’s minds and had put everyone on edge. With the possibility looming large that soon there would not be enough money to pay everyone’s remuneration, the *liberadas* were quite literally fighting for their livelihood. To make matters worse, the Cooperative’s downtown office was having all sorts of problems. There had been leakages, a plague of cockroaches, the air-conditioning had broken down, the faucets in the downstairs bathroom had stopped working, and the municipality was threatening to cut the electricity to the building. “These are all signs!” Valerie said as we discussed what was happening in Can Xim. “It’s all falling apart! . . . It’s really all going down!” she exclaimed in a tone of irony mixed with sarcasm. These were tense times indeed for the Cooperative.

Three months after February’s assembly where the deficit was revealed, an *assemblea extraordinària* had been called to come up with a solution. This was after Jaume had left and there was hope that now the assemblies would not be dominated by underlying relational conflicts. However, tensions were still high. Before the assembly I was standing next to Isabel at the reception desk. Visibly nervous, she said: “I’m scared, I’m actually shaking.” The assembly began as usual. The tables and chairs were set up in the familiar U-Formation, directed towards the screen. The participants took their usual seating arrangements, with Valerie sitting directly across the adversary of her committee, Iker (and the rest of the communication committee). Jaume was no longer

there, and facilitation tasks had been taken over by Bau, the newest member of the Coordination Committee. The stage was set for another eventful assembly.

Before the assembly, a *Grup de Treball* had been formed and was given the task to present concrete solutions that would be debated in the assembly. The *Grup*'s message was clear: if things kept going the way they were going, in two months' time there would no longer be sufficient funds to pay all the remunerations, unless the money that the *sòcies* invoiced through the Cooperative would be used to pay the *liberadas*. Earlier in this chapter I wrote that the Cooperative, in addition to taking the *sòcies*' fees, also received everything the *sòcies* invoiced on behalf of the Cooperative. This was returned to the *sòcies* in cash payments, yet there was often a lag in these return payments. There was therefore an option to temporarily use this money, which belonged to the *sòcies*, to remunerate the *liberadas*. This had in fact happened in the past and was considered a shameful episode in the Cooperative's history. However, on this topic the *Grup* was also clear: "Don't touch the *sòcies*' money!"

The *Grup* told the assembly that it was necessary to make budget cuts by lowering everyone's remuneration. But the question was how this was to be done. Should it be equal for all, or should some people's remuneration be cut more than others? This sparked a complicated debate. Representing the Northern Bioregion, Estebe thought that reducing the remuneration seemed like a decision that came from the "endogamy of the city". It did not take into account the voices of the *camp* and, in particular, all the things he had sacrificed and "my own personal *fracàs*". In a similar manner as I have described in Chapter Three, Estebe proceeded to demonstrate his dedication to the cause in a performance of precarity.

From the Southern Bioregion, Ramon said that, "The problem is that in cutting down on costs and people, we're turning into capitalists." For Ramon and many others in the assembly, quantifying activities, calculating how much each person's work was worth, and thinking in terms of costs and benefits was not what being in an alternative economic project was all about. "We're doing capitalism *puro y duro*," he noted wryly. A staunch believer in the possibility of alternative currencies, he continued by saying that the problem seemed to be the euro: "So let's go to the root: I will stop receiving euros and continue to do things on a local level [without any pay]." Ramon's discourse resonated with the assembly, and many people spontaneously joined him in voluntarily giving up their remuneration. The continuing stress and workload was beginning to take its toll on the members of the Cooperative. As Arlet of the EMC said: "Healthwise, this isn't sustainable," before also saying that she would reduce the amount of hours she worked and, hence, her remuneration.

Cooler heads eventually seemed to prevail when one of the participants said: "Let's stay calm, evaluate, and instead of cutting people, maybe let's see if there are

other things that we can restructure first.” The budgetary crisis combined with the possibility of organizational changes in the wake of Jaume’s departure was also seen as an opportunity to, as one participant said, “re-found” the Cooperative. There was a consensus that somewhere along the line the Cooperative had deviated from its original purpose. Power had been centralized, backdoor politics had taken over the assembly, and the reality of an alternative economy seemed to be crumbling. Valerie illustrated this stagnation to me through her Theory of the Wart: “The Cooperative once was on its way to a horizon of social transformation. But somewhere along the way it got stuck and turned into a wart that kept growing and growing.” Valerie was skeptical of whether or not the Cooperative could be saved, and she eventually left the organization altogether. Others, however, saw this as a chance to resume the path towards the horizon of social transformation

This was evident as well in the evaluation process of the new *sòcies*. Beyond the more technical questions that we saw above, Vera and Pau also inquired into the ideological nature of aspiring projects. With the reforms the Cooperative had to make, a decision had been made to place stricter filters to assess who was eligible to be a *sòcia*. Previously there were some guidelines as to under what conditions someone could become a *sòcia*, but in practice these guidelines were very flexible and rarely adhered to. Now some of the requirements were, for instance, the use of social currency, prior membership at an eco-network, governance through an assembly in the case of collective projects, and the prohibition of being dependent on just one client in order to forego overly dependent and hierarchical economic relations. The regulation of labor, thus, went hand-in-hand with regulatory practices that were aimed towards making sure the *sòcies*’ organization of labor fell within the ideological parameters of the Cooperative. In other words, this was done to fortify the boundaries of the enclave and to minimize the risk of ‘leaks’ through which “the system” could seep into the alternative system of the Cooperative. In this way, formalizing the Cooperative, was therefore also seen as an opportunity to re-assemble the organization and create a more durable form of the economy.

While some of the effects of the legalization of the Cooperative were evident during my stay in Barcelona, much of these developments continued until long after I had ended my fieldwork. In saying that the members of the Cooperative took this as an opportunity to re-evaluate their organization, I am not arguing that this meant a return to Utopia. In fact, redrawing the boundaries of the enclave also meant deciding who was welcome and who should be thrown out. Indeed, despite the call to stop cutting people from the organization, the reality was that many people did end up leaving the Cooperative. Others, such as Niko, were thrown out in dramatic fashion, after being accused of violent behavior and sabotage. As we saw in the previous chapter, Niko was

seen as an ally of Jaume and a representative of the 'capitalist' order and the logic of 'the System'. Now fenced off from these corrupting influences, the alternative economy was emerging from its "bureaucratic era", free from chronograms, mechanisms of control, and quantification devices that were seen as characteristic of 'the System'. At the same time, however, this alternative economic formation was now being made to comply, at least in a minimal sense, with the requirements of the law. While we therefore do not see the straightforward formalization in the sense that the Cooperative was now just another cooperative, it is true that the battle of forms was heading towards a temporary close. The point is that while 'the economy' may be the product of a "frenzy of mimesis and contagion" (Gandolfo 2013, 90), there are moments where this frenzy calms down and certain forms of the economy ossify into tangible realities.

Conclusion

The state has not been a matter of analytical concern for scholars working on "alternative economic spaces". In this literature the state is in fact considered to be a problem in the sense that alternatives might be "colonized" by the state. From this perspective alternative economic spaces should ideally open up a way of thinking about the economy beyond the conceptual realm of the state and the market. Those involved in creating alternative economic formations uphold similar views. In the case of the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks, I have shown that they wanted to withdraw from 'the System', which referred to both the state and capital. However, despite their best efforts to, as Marco said, "move away from the state", the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks inevitably encountered the state. In this chapter I have argued that to explain the ways in which alternative economic formations take shape, we therefore need a theory of the state.

Here I have found it useful to draw on the anthropology of the state which has disputed the distinction between state, society, and the economy (Bierschenk and de Sardan 2014; Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Trouillot 2001). Rather than upholding a separation between reified 'informal' and 'formal' economies, this literature shows that this distinction breaks down in practice and that many so-called informal economic practices are in fact reliant on state institutions and infrastructure (and vice versa). Following this perspective, I have traced how my interlocutors created, located, and fortified the boundary between 'the System' and their alternative economy.

Withdrawing from the state and keeping it at bay were arduous tasks that involved carefully executed strategies and maneuvers. The state was seen as a "hierarchical mode of organizing power" that could rear its head at any moment and leak into the enclave my interlocutors were attempting to create (Hoffman 2011, 7). In other

instances, however, this “mode” was welcomed and embraced. Moreover, the state also appeared as a regulatory force whenever the Cooperative and eco-network directly impinged upon its authority. This took place at an individual level by members who engaged in practices of fiscal disobedience, but especially through the working of the Cooperative’s alternative employment system. I have shown how this system enabled people to be self-employed outside of any formalized legal institution, and how the Cooperative tried to make this construction seem “normal” in the eyes of the state. However, in practice this amounted to labor and tax fraud within the conceptions of the state, and the *sòcies* of the Cooperative were subjected to inspections by the Ministry of Labor. Ultimately, a number of *sòcies* were caught and the Cooperative was forced to deal with the consequences.

While the state was certainly already present in the workings of the Cooperative, in the aftermath of these inspections the state became a more prominent force in the battle of forms that I have described in the preceding chapters. After the inspections, the Cooperative’s alternative employment system needed to be legalized and made to conform with the legal requirements for cooperatives. This meant that the *sòcies* needed to be given contracts so that they would legally appear as workers for the Cooperative. Some members felt that the once-radical anti-capitalist Cooperative was going to transform into just another cooperative that followed the rules of ‘the System’. However, this was also seen as a moment to look back at the alternative economy that had been created and to re-assemble it into a different form that could better withstand the pressures of ‘the System’.

The increased presence of the state, then, did not mean that the battle of forms was suddenly over. We do not see the imposition of a particular form that stamped out alternative forms of the economy. Rather, the formalization required by the state opened up the possibility for a moment of reflection on the state of the alternative economy my interlocutors were creating. Where for Valerie the Cooperative had ossified into a “wart” that could no longer be saved, others looked to “re-found” the Cooperative, albeit in a slightly more legal manner. However, this also meant that the boundaries of the enclave had been redrawn, and thereafter had to be more carefully constructed and patrolled. The power structures in the Cooperative hardened, and the organization was ‘purified’ of supposedly corrupting elements and persons. It remains to be seen how durable this re-assembled economy will turn out to be. We can be certain, however, that the search for an alternative life worth living “without the state” will continue.



Conclusion

Conclusion

When George Orwell first arrived in Barcelona in 1936 to join the communist militia in their fight against the Nationalists, he found something “startling and overwhelming” in the Second Republic (2012 [1938], 6). The initial defeat of Franco’s forces in Catalonia ushered in what became known as the Social Revolution. In this process, large sectors of Catalan industry came under the control of the working class, while, at the same time, anarchist and libertarian organizational principles and values were implemented throughout society on a scale that had never been seen before in Spain. For Orwell, it was the first time that he had “been in a town where the working class was in the saddle” (2012 [1938], 6). To many people and contemporary observers at the time, it seemed as though an alternative to bourgeois, capitalist society was finally becoming a reality. In *Homage to Catalonia* Orwell describes his experience of being in such an environment in the following way: “Above all there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine” (2012 [1938], 7).

The Social Revolution did not last²⁸, but its legacy still lives on in contemporary Catalonia in the sense that the memory of 1936 is being mobilized by a number of actors who challenge the hegemony of capitalism by creating alternative economic models. In this dissertation I have offered an ethnographically-informed analysis of the everyday process through which this alternative economy was imagined and constructed, focusing on the lives of those involved in two distinct yet related alternative projects: the Cooperative and eco-networks. Those who participated in these projects dedicated themselves to constructing an economy that was said to lie outside the reach of the State and Capital. It was here, at the “margins of capitalism” (*al marge del capitalisme*), where people would be able to live fulfilling lives not as cogs in the capitalist machine, but as human beings indeed. Throughout this dissertation I have shown the toil and trouble of turning this Utopia into reality.

The promises and pitfalls of such alternative economic spaces have been and are being discussed in a number of field across the social sciences. Often, however, these discussions end up in definitional battles on the meaning of economic alterity and are built upon an analytical discourse centered around dichotomies such as alternative/

28 The Second Republic was held together by what was known as the Popular Front: an alliance between various left-wing political organizations and trade unions which was supported by the Soviet Union. The various fractions in the Popular Front, however, held very different views on how to organize society and how to fight the war, making this a very tricky alliance to maintain indeed. The tensions within the left continued to escalate as the war went on, while foreign powers such as Britain and France were reluctant to come to the Popular Front’s aid. Ultimately the Nationalists, united under Franco and supported by the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy, proved victorious. The Second Republic was promptly disbanded and the Social Revolution came to a close.

mainstream. In this dissertation I have made an ethnographic intervention in this debate and proposed that we move towards a more processual understanding of what an 'alternative economy' is. Here I have found it useful to draw on recent insights from the social sciences that argue that what we call 'the economy' does not exist as such, but emanates from a complex process of boundary making that brings forth the economy as a tangible reality in the world.

However, processual, plastic, and malleable the economy may be, this did not stop the people I encountered during my research from imagining and creating clearly-defined economic spheres and boundaries between what they viewed as incompatible domains of economic life. Indeed, the creation of an alternative economic sphere that was entirely distinct and separate from capitalism was of utmost importance to my interlocutors. So much so that this became a life-project for many. To be sure, this desire was often left unfulfilled and, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, would often result in failure, fatigue, and frustration. Yet rather than dismissing these desires, it is imperative that we acknowledge the significance of these life-projects and how they shape economic life. Alongside the work of deconstructing the economy which has become salient in the social sciences, I have argued that we need to pay attention to how certain forms of 'the economy' can also become compelling artefacts in their own right.

In this final chapter I will summarize the main contributions that I make with this dissertation. I will do so by, firstly, recapping some of the socio-cultural and historical context in which we need to situate the Cooperative and eco-networks, arguing against an explanatory framework that is solely based on the notion of crisis. Then I will move to a discussion of recent social scientific debates on the economy and draw out how my approach relates to some of the key issues in these debates. Finally, I will reflect on the broader significance of my research in relation to the question of the reconfiguration of livelihoods in contemporary Southern Europe.

Alternatives on the Canvas of History

In recent years, a number of ethnographic studies have appeared that examine the way that people make a living in Southern Europe. In these works, the focus is on how changes in the global economy affect people's living situations, and how, under these often dire circumstances, people secure their livelihoods through various kinds of work but also activities that we might not ordinarily think of as 'economic' (Knight 2016; Knight and Stewart 2016; Muriel 2017; Narotzky et al. 2013; Spyridakis 2013). Working along a similar line of thinking, scholars from human geography have argued that, in times of crisis, people tend to draw on alternative economic practices to make a living for themselves, their families, and future generations (Leyshon et al.

2003; Jonas 2010; Zademach and Hillebrand 2013). To a large extent, this dissertation follows the ground opened up by these works. Throughout the previous chapters I have shown how my interlocutors upheld a radical critique of hegemonic economic and political structures which they experienced as exploitative and alienating. Under these conditions, my interlocutors chose to engage in alternative economic practices that for them were based on and promoted values that they found lacking in “the System”. Unlike capitalism, this alternative economy was said to be grounded in equality, mutual aid (*suport mutu*), trust (*confiança*), transparency, self-management (*autogestió*), and solidarity (*solidaritat*). Within this alternative structure people would be able to pursue what Narotzky and Besnier call “a life worth living” (2014, S5).

However, while my work draws from and builds on these recent perspectives, it diverges from this body of work in crucial ways as well. Underlying much of the above-mentioned studies is an explanatory framework that is built upon a notion of crisis (Knight and Stewart 2016; Narotzky and Besnier 2014; Spyridakis 2013). That is, there is an assumption that economic and political crises bring about ruptures in the structure of everyday life and propel people to act in certain ways. In other words, in the face of a loss of livelihood and looming precarity, people are said to turn towards different kinds of coping strategies and draw on resources that we do not normally consider to be ‘economic’. This is also a common perspective in studies on alternative economies in human geography, where alternatives are seen to rise up in the failure of formal institutions such as the state or market.

There is certainly truth to the statement that people, when faced with economic duress and existential insecurity, will resort to other means in order to survive. Among my interlocutors, moreover, there were many people whose lives were deeply affected by the 2008 financial crisis and austerity politics. However, as I have shown in Chapter One, the members of the Cooperative and eco-network often carried with them a history of social activism that went back much further than the 2008 crisis and the subsequent implementation of austerity politics. Moreover, many members of the Cooperative and eco-networks did not become involved in alternative economic projects only out of necessity or precarity, but in fact willingly chose a particular style of life that aligned more with particular values that they found important.

In Chapter Two, for instance, I have shown that my interlocutors desired to make a living outside of the standard employment contract, rather than just being forced out of the waged labor relation due to the changing configuration between labor and capital. Recall the labor trajectory of Andreu, who went from being fired from his job at a distribution company to becoming a beer brewer. While initially he did this in a more conventional manner as an officially registered self-employed person (*autónomo*), he later became a *soci* of the Cooperative because he was tired of conforming to the

pressures of a more capitalist way of producing. Being a *soci* of the Cooperative allowed him to live his life according to a different rhythm and to invest his time, energy, and value into his more immediate community. As I have shown, however, Andreu was not well off in an economic sense and he often worried about how he was going to get by. While not everyone was willing to put themselves in these precarious situations, there were those, particularly at the Cooperative, who believed that a degree of discomfort was in fact a requirement for living an alternative life. As Roc stated: "It's important to just barely cover one's necessities, so that people will continue to work for the project [the Cooperative]."

In emphasizing these moral concerns that informed the life decisions of my interlocutors, I have aligned myself with recent studies in economic anthropology that have turned towards studying the morality of economic action (Millar 2018; Narotzky et al. 2013; Palomera and Vetta 2016; Simoni 2014). The work of the historian E.P. Thompson and his notion of the moral economy in particular seems to have made a comeback within economic anthropology (Thompson 1976, 1967). Rather than assuming that people act solely out of necessity, scarcity, or hunger, recent works in economic anthropology propose that we look at the norms, social obligations, and moral frameworks that inform social action. I have found this a useful perspective that avoids the reductionist pitfalls of a functionalist and survivalist paradigm wherein alternatives, to paraphrase Thompson, rise up spasmodically and suddenly on the canvas of history in times of crisis and disturbance (1971, 76).

The emergence of an alternative society on the historical canvas is also what Orwell felt he was witnessing in 1936. Walking through Barcelona at the time, he was fascinated by the revolutionary scenery: buildings "seized by the workers" and "draped with red flags", people calling each other "comrade" instead of "*señor*" or "*Don*", the collectivization of shops and private means of transportation, and the seeming disappearance of the "wealthy classes" (2012 [1938], 6). As we have seen, my interlocutors would often draw parallels between the period of 1936 and the present moment. We should take care, however, not to take this historical parallel at face value. The circumstances in the civil war era were, of course, entirely different to the more recent social and political landscape. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the people whom I encountered during my research were actively working towards bringing about changes in the organization of the economy and society. In so doing, they urge us to question and critically examine some of our taken-for-granted notions of the economy and what it means to live an alternative life.

Deconstructing the Economy

Mitchell states that it was only relatively recently, between the 1920s and 1950s, that “the economy” came to refer to “the structure or totality of relations of production, circulation, and consumption within a given geographical space” (2006, 183). In other words, it was in this period that the economy started to be seen as a distinct social sphere that encompassed certain activities, social relations, and ways of being in the world that we think of as economic. Moreover, this sphere came to be seen as something that was somehow separate from the state and upon which the state could intervene through various techniques of government. This is still a common way of referring to the economy in everyday speech and one that has plagued the literature on “alternative economic spaces” (Leysdon 2005; Schulz and Kruger 2018; Wright 2010; Rosol 2020; Zanoni et al. 2017). In the field of social geography in particular, the majority of scholars have tended to view alterity in terms of fixed taxonomic categories, prompting discussions on whether or not certain projects, initiatives, and ways of life are ‘really’ alternative or not (Jonas 2013, 41).

In this dissertation I have moved away from a discussion of alterity in favor of a more processual approach to alternative economic spaces. In this move, I have followed recent works in economic anthropology that have moved away from a dichotomous and essentialist representation of the economy and have instead started to see the economy as a heterogenous value field that is subject to perpetual change. That is, where older works in economic anthropology upheld a distinction between different supposedly incommensurable spheres of value, more recent perspectives propose that we pay attention to how “the economy” is a malleable field that is contingent upon diverse practices of valuation that cut across a plethora of value frameworks (Appadurai 1986; Elyachar 2005; Miller 2008; Munn 1992; Roitman 2005; Strathern 1988; Thomas 1991).

What these works achieve is the deconstruction or “demystification” (Robben 1989, 16) of the economy as the totality of relations of production that Mitchell describes. What we know as ‘the economy’ or as pertaining to a domain of life that we refer to as ‘economic’, is not some kind of pre-existing structure in the world waiting to be uncovered by the methods of social science. Rather, ‘the economy’ is something that takes on the appearance of a coherent sphere, structure, or domain of reality through an everyday process of assembling various elements, discourses, and practices into an intelligible form. Moreover, the social sciences, far from merely documenting and analyzing this process, in fact participate in this process through developing models and an analytical vocabulary that bring about powerful conceptualizations of the economy and fortify the boundaries of what we consider as economic (Callon 1998a; Mitchell 2008).

Following these insights, a number of studies have examined how certain expert bodies of knowledge, by economists, bankers, or other elite actors, are constitutive rather than merely descriptive of phenomena such as “national economy” or the “the global market” (Appel 2017, 2019; Callon 1998a; Holmes 2009; Mitchell 2008; Muniesa 2014). There seems to be an unspoken assumption, however, that “the economy” is something created by elite actors with privileged access to certain specific resources, networks, and forms of knowledge. Among the “forces that set markets in motion”, Caliskan and Callon (2010, 8), for instance, identify the following actors: “firms, trades unions, state services, banks, hedge funds, pension funds, individual consumers and consumer unions and NGOs . . . the public and private sector research centres that prepare new products and processes, the international monetary or financial institutions, the regulatory or standardization agencies . . . as well as experts, lawyers, economists, think-tanks and other spin doctors.”

However, as Narotzky (2012a) reminds us, the economy is not only made by elite actors. She instead calls for analyses that examine the “grassroot economics” of “ordinary people” and how “the economy” is not only built through expert models, but is constituted by the everyday practices of a multitude of actors operating at various scales. In this dissertation I have aligned myself with this perspective and have detailed the tireless discursive work and practices through which my interlocutors constructed economic models that were performed as alternatives to hegemonic economic models. An alternative economy, as I have shown in Chapters One and Two, was ideally based on the productive capacities of individuals and small collectives who exchanged these self-made goods and services on a localized scale with known and, especially, trusted exchange partners. Moreover, as I emphasized in Chapter Three, it was imperative that this economic formation was managed through a collective decision-making process in an open assembly, instead of through vertical, and hierarchal relations that were seen as characteristic of *el Sistema*.

However, there were in fact competing visions among my interlocutors about what an alternative economic system should look like. As I describe in Chapters Two and Three, there were those who believed that the Cooperative should be formalized in the sense that it was necessary to install regulatory mechanisms, protocols, and chronograms that could serve to map which tasks were carried out by the *liberadas*. On the other hand, however, there were those who believed this was an intrusion of the values of ‘the System’ and vehemently opposed this view. For this latter group, working at the Cooperative was a calling; a voluntarily taken-up vocation that could not be regulated and quantified according to ‘capitalist’ metrics. In Chapter Three I showed how these competing visions manifested themselves through what I call performative conversions between the front and back regions of the Cooperative. By

this I mean that the specific shape that an alternative economic formation took was dependent on successfully altering the specific makeup of front and back regions and transferring reflections and practices from one region into the other. This value struggle was particularly evident in the assembly, which I interpreted as an arena where the economy was given shape through performative praxis and various discursive strategies. In this way, rather than distilling categories such as alternative or mainstream, I have shown how the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks in fact shaped and formatted 'the economy'.

Reassembling the Economy

In recent social scientific perspectives on the economy the analytical focus has shifted from identifying various economic domains with their own distinct logics, to examining the process through which certain forms come to take on the appearance of being economic. For instance, rather than assuming that there is a "single origin point from which an overarching logic of capitalism is scaled up (or extended down)", Bear et al. instead propose to see how "its [capitalism's] social relations are generated out of divergent life projects" (2015). Similarly, Kathleen Millar, drawing on the work of the philosopher Christine Malabou, introduces the notion of the "plastic economy" in order to "rethink economy not as a 'real' structure in the world", but as an effect of a continuous interplay between "different forms of living" (2018, 149). As we have seen in the above, I too draw selectively on these perspectives to show how the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks gave shape to alternative economic formations.

However, what I have shown in this dissertation is that we need to remember that the forms that result from this process of re-assembling the economy can themselves become compelling social artefacts that provoke meaningful action in the world. In Chapter Three, for instance, I have shown that members of the eco-network and participants in the Bioregion believed that an assembly should always be held in a circle, rather than in a U-formation as was common practice during the assemblies of the Cooperative in Barcelona. The circular formation (and less dependency on electronic devices such as laptops) would ensure attentiveness to all the participants and allow for all voices to be heard equally. Here, in a quite literal sense, a specific form became an object of contention and debate that shaped the way my interlocutors organized themselves.

In Chapter Four I further developed these insights as I showed how the models created by the Cooperative could provoke feelings of both trust and mistrust and how this changed the way people acted towards each other and the Cooperative as a whole. I have interpreted the creation and circulation of these narratives of trust and mistrust as taking place in what I call an economy of (mis)trust. Using this as a heuristic device,

I showed how various guises of an alternative economy were made trustworthy and made to ossify into more durable forms. Or, alternatively, how certain models (and persons) were discredited and broken down in favor of others.

Here I would like to refer back in particular to Giuseppe's call to the members of the Southern Bioregion to liberate themselves from the "Barcelonan chronogram [*cronograma que viene de Barcelona*]". Much like the U-formation, the chronogram introduced by Jaume as a way of formalizing the Cooperative, here acted as a proxy for everything that was wrong in the Cooperative. These formalization efforts subsequently sparked a counter-reaction based on the creation of narratives of mistrust that coalesced into another form of the economy, one that was said to be more true to values such as transparency and horizontality. This is captured by Roc's call to shift from the "pyramid" model to the "donut"; i.e., from a hierarchical structure to a form of the economy that was more horizontally-based and, like a donut, had no center. In addition to asking *how* 'the economy' is continually made, then, I have argued that we also need to ask *what* 'the economy' does. Or, rather, what kind of performative effects an 'alternative economy' can have.

Yet in examining how the economy becomes a socially compelling force, are we, then, not simply returning to a reified understanding of the economy? Do we then not reinstate the notion of the economy as a distinct social sphere and, even more problematically, bestow upon it an agency that it cannot have? I would indeed agree that it is important to be wary of the risk of reification and abstraction. Moreover, societal abstractions such as the economy, society, and the state do indeed have "relational backstories" in the sense that they are made relationally by a diverse group of actors across different scales (Harman 2017). But the point I am making is that this is not a one-way street. Once brought into existence, these abstractions, in recursive fashion, actually shape and format people's practices and imaginaries. Inverting Callon²⁹, I argue that in addition to seeing how the economy is shaped and formatted through performative practices and discourses (1998a, 1), it is important to also recognize that such abstractions can become powerful forces that move people to act in meaningful ways in the world.

I have shown this most forcefully in Chapter Five where I discuss how the members of the Cooperative and eco-network reckoned with the state. Many of my interlocutors strived to, as one *xarxeire* put it, "live without the state" and tried to safeguard their alternative economic networks from the ever-encroaching forms, logics, and ways of doing that were seen as belonging to "the System". At other times, however, the legal

29 Here I do not mean in the same way that Miller (2002) turns Callon "the right way up". Miller critiques Callon's performativity thesis for assuming that it is possible to completely disentangle actors from social relations. Here I am referring rather to the limits of Callon's social constructivism.

order of the state was also welcomed as a way to guarantee legal coverage and the peace of mind that one was protected under the law. Yet the state made itself felt, not just as an abstract force that needed to be kept at bay or incorporated into an alternative economic system, but also in practice through inspections by the Ministry of Labor.

On the battlefield of forms that I described in Chapters Three and Four, another actor therefore made its appearance. That is, as the repercussions of the labor inspections became more evident, the Cooperative's model needed to undergo a process of formalization in the sense that it needed to be made to comply with the law. For some, this became too great a contradiction to bear, leading to severe doubts about the future of the Cooperative. Others, however, saw this as a moment in which to reinvent the Cooperative altogether. The presence of what were experienced as distinct forms of the economy compelled people to act in certain ways and constituted a horizon of desire that, for my interlocutors, either held the promise of a better world or the emergence of a capitalist dystopia.

An Alternative Life Worth Living?

'The economy' as such does not exist as a structure or sphere in the world waiting to be uncovered by science, yet it is nonetheless an intelligible and compelling socio-material force and has become so through a complex historical process of knowledge production and social ossification. Moreover, there is not just one 'economy' writ large, but there are in fact diverse ways in which economic formations can be put together. These can be and, in the case of my interlocutors, were constructed as separate spheres of the economy that stood in opposition to one another. In this dissertation I have documented the laborious process of creating these forms and maintaining a distinction between what were seen as opposing economic systems, and how these forms themselves effectuated specific actions in the world. It is important, however, to reiterate that while I have paid attention to the work that went into creating economies and have analyzed the performative effects that accompanied this process, this does not mean that these economies were somehow already given or pre-existing.

Moreover, while my interlocutors were motivated by the desire to create a domain or enclave of economic life that was free from the supposed evils of capitalism and the state, in practice these domains were rarely ever perfectly bounded, and often leaked and spilled over into each other. This became evident, for instance, in Chapter Three when I discussed the gendered power relations that were present in the Cooperative. That is, while in theory there were "no bosses" in the Cooperative, in practice there were informal hierarchies and power relations that were tied up with the specific way the Cooperative was organized. The members of the Cooperative were, as we have

seen, highly aware of the existence of these power relations and experienced this as an encroachment of ‘the System’. In Chapter Two, moreover, I have shown how, in pursuing an alternative way of living, my interlocutors had to balance various livelihood concerns. Their experience of an alternative life continually oscillated between feelings of autonomy and freedom on the one hand, and experiences of precarity and insecurity on the other.

Indeed, my interlocutors often experienced internal contradictions and existential crises and felt as though they had to constantly ward off the logic of *el Sistema*. Others, however, maintained that certain practices and values thought to be characteristic of ‘the System’, such as efficiency and chronograms, could be used instrumentally in the creation of an alternative economic sphere. Yet, despite their best efforts, sometimes too much of *el Sistema* seeped through the openings that people made. I have read this continuous opening and closing of the economy in terms of a value struggle. In Chapter Four, for instance, I have shown how those who were seen as being too *capitalista* were demonized and accused of smuggling in the values of ‘the System’ into the Cooperative. More often than not, these people were thrown out of the Cooperative. And in Chapter Five I have shown how, as the Cooperative came under increasing scrutiny of the Ministry of Labor, the entire organization fell into an organizational, financial, and existential crisis where many members felt as though ‘the System’ was bearing down on the Cooperative from all sides.

What does this tell us about the significance, possibility, and potentiality of an alternative life? Over the past decades, the configuration between state, society, and economy in Southern Europe has changed dramatically and the convulsions of the economy have had devastating effects for the lives of millions of people. Amidst structural adjustments and austerity regimes, however, we have also seen the increased actualization of sets of human relations that look to realize an alternative way of organizing society and life. Yet, as I have shown, this was an incredibly arduous process and the ways my interlocutors organized their alternative economic systems and the relations among themselves were certainly not free of exploitation, precarity, and insecurity.

To return to Orwell once more, when he came back to Barcelona after being at the front, his initial optimism about the revolution had faded. The distinctions between the rich and the poor, which before had seemingly evaporated, were returning, and the police had replaced the worker patrols on the streets. Meanwhile, “the ‘revolutionary’ forms of speech were dropping out of use” and people returned to calling each other *Usted* instead of *tú* or *camarada* (2012 [1938], 70). For Orwell, the revolution, at least in Barcelona, had never fully consolidated. I often found a similar sentiment of disenchantment among many of my interlocutors who, particularly as the crisis

Conclusion

continued to unfold in the Cooperative, had their faith in the promise of a better world severely shaken and feared the absolute domination of ‘the System’.

A similar skeptical sentiment is notable among certain social scientists. Narotzky, for instance, argues that ultimately “[alternative] projects have to reproduce in a context where capitalism is hegemonic” and that “there is no alternative economic ‘outside’, because, in Moebius-like [sic] fashion, the outside – the other – is our innermost core, the most necessary part of our system” (2012b, 247 -248; c.f. Narotzky 2010). From this point of view, an ‘alternative economy’ is nothing but a chimera and those thinking they are producing alternatives are in fact doomed to reproduce existing power structures. In this dissertation I recognize and have shown that projects like the eco-networks and Cooperative can perpetuate known and new forms of power, exploitation, and precarity in various ways.

But a Moebius strip can be cut. Its seamless surface can be broken down into different elements and reassembled into new forms. My interlocutors often remained optimistic and took the lessons they learned with them as they continued the pursuit of an alternative life worth living in different projects, cooperatives, and social movements. Moreover, this ongoing creation of alternative spaces continues to occur at multiple levels, and more research is necessary in order to dissect the ways in which various actors converge and diverge across scales in the reconfiguration of the economy in ways that we might not have thought of before. Here we should, in the spirit of Gibson-Graham (2006a [1996]), remember that capitalism does not go all the way down. Amidst the reordering of the boundaries between economy, state, and society in contemporary Southern Europe, the stories and lives of the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks should remind us to keep open the possibility of an alternative way of life where human beings can indeed, as Orwell said, “behave as human beings” rather than cogs in *el Sistema*.

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Annex I: Observational Survey Gender Roles Assembly

This observational form was created by the Committee of Feminist Economies of the Xarxa d'Economia Solidària (XES). It was created with the intention to be able to document the way assemblies were structured from a feminist perspective, paying specific attention to who participated and in which ways.

Comissió Economies Feministes

Xarxa d'Economia Solidària de Catalunya

OBSERVACIÓ DES DEL GÈNERE

Reunió que s'observa: _____ Data: _____

Hora: _____

	<i>Dones</i>	<i>Homes</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. Quantitatiu: - Assistents < 30 anys > 30 anys - Nº Intervencions - Repartiment tasques - Proposta ordre dia - Prendre acta - Facilitació - Moderació - Cura espai (aigües, bolis...) - Assumeix execució acords - Altres			
2. Tipus d'intervencions: - Llenguatge utilitzat (masculí, femení genèric ...) - Tipus intervencions (podem quantificar i també anotar exemples):			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informativa • Propositiva • Presa decisió • Mediadora • Repetitiva/Insistent • Autoritària • Èmfasi en l'acord • Èmfasi en el desacord • Expressió sentiments • Renúncia al torn de paraula <p>3. Actituds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrupcions • Acaparar torn de paraula • Pixades fora de test • Polemitzar • Reconèixer l'altre • Escolta activa • Salts torns de paraula • Renúncia al torn de paraula 			
<p>4. Continguts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Els diagnòstics sobre la realitat tractada tenen en compte específicament la perspectiva de gènere - Les iniciatives que es plantegen fomenten la igualtat de gènere 			

Annex II: Summary of Dissertation

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the creation of alternative economic projects in Catalonia that are presented as alternatives to capitalism and the state. It is based on 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork with two distinct yet related projects: an eco-network in a rural area in the North of Catalonia, and an organization based in Barcelona that I refer to as ‘the Cooperative’. The members of both the eco-network and Cooperative strived to create an alternative economic system at the “margins of capitalism” (*al marge del capitalisme*). To this end they mobilized various *einats* (tools) such as a social currency and an alternative employment system that were designed to make people less dependent on hegemonic political and economic institutions that were referred to as ‘the System’ (*el sistema*). In so doing, my interlocutors not only rethought the economy, but worked towards assembling the economy in a different way in practice. Through an ethnographic exploration of the Cooperative and the eco-network, this dissertation contributes to “rethinking the economy” (Mitchell 2008; Narotzky and Besnier 2014) and sheds light on the shifting relation between the state, society, and the economy in contemporary Southern – Europe.

In the Introduction I discuss the theoretical contribution this dissertation makes both to the study of alternative economic spaces as well as the study of economic transformations more broadly. Studies from human geography on what are known as “alternative economic spaces” (Leyshon et al. 2003) have tended to focus on the question of “alterity”, i.e. to what extent we can consider these spaces as true alternatives to hegemonic economic structures. This debate has tended to polarize into those who emphasize the radical potential of alternative economic spaces versus those who argue that these spaces still operate within a context of the reproduction of capitalism. The problem is that this literature is built upon a reified understanding of ‘the economy’ and has a tendency to resort to dichotomic frameworks such as alternative / mainstream and informal / formal. I argue that this has resulted in an analytical impasse where we are unable to understand the social organization of people, collectives, and projects that are presented as alternative.

Instead, I draw on anthropological perspectives on value and performativity to come to a more processual understanding of alternative economic formations. Where earlier works in economic anthropology upheld a rigid distinction between supposedly incompatible regimes of value (such as gift economy as opposed to commodity economy), more recent perspectives urge us to view the economy not as a pre-existent sphere, but as the result of a complex process of assembly that make things take on an ‘economic’ character. Scholars in both economic sociology and economic anthropology have drawn on these insights to see how ‘the economy’ results out of the performative practices of economists, central bankers, politicians, and corporate stakeholders.

However, as Narotzky (2012) rightly argues, assembling the economy is not only done by elite actors, but also by “ordinary people” who look to put into practice their own views of what ‘the economy’ is. My interlocutors indeed looked to deconstruct taken for granted ideas about the economy and create alternative economic systems instead. To analyze this process of (re-)assembling the economy, I draw on Kathleen Millar’s (2018) concept of “forms of living” to show how my interlocutors actively gave shape to an alternative form of life, work, and ‘the economy’. In so doing, I trace how alternative economic formations are given shape over time through discourse and practice and offer a more processual understanding of the constitution of “alternative economic spaces”.

However, in addition to deconstructing or disassembling the economy, I argue that we need to take into account that the forms that result from the process of re-assembling the economy can themselves become compelling social artefacts that provoke meaningful action in the world. This does not mean a return to reified understandings of the economy. Societal abstractions such as the economy, society, and the state are of course made relationally by a diverse group of actors across different scales. What I argue is that this is not a one-way street. Once brought into existence, these abstractions, in recursive fashion, actually shape and format people’s practices and imaginaries. In addition to seeing how the economy is shaped and formatted through performative practices and discourses, it is important to also recognize that such abstractions can become powerful forces that move people to act in meaningful ways in the world.

In the remainder of the introduction I discuss the methods I used and my positionality as a researcher. Studies on “alternative economic spaces” often ignore important questions such: who are the people involved in alternative economic projects? Where do they come from and how do they obtain the resources for being able to do what they do? What are their motivations and what is the significance of pursuing an alternative way of life? In this research I have therefore drawn on the anthropological toolkit to address the lived experience of creating alternative economic formations. In particular, I have conducted fourteen months of participant observation across two field sites. Four months were spent with an eco-network in the rural North of Catalonia, and a further ten months were spent in Barcelona with the Cooperative. In addition, I have conducted 55 semi-structured interviews guided by topic lists, conducted visual documentation, and drawn on elicitation methods where I shared visual materials with my interlocutors in order to collectively reflect on their practices and discourses.

In terms of my positionality as researcher: many scholars of “alternative economic spaces” see their scholarly work as intertwined with their activists work. I have not taken this position and do not view my research as an activists practice necessarily. Yet

neither do I feign some kind of ‘objectivity’ in my analysis. Rather, I follow people like Nazima Kadir, Yuson Jung, and David Goodman who see their work as a critical tool that can be used for further reflection that can ultimately be useful in order to address or even overcome some of the contradictory dynamics and problems that those working to build alternatives struggle with on a daily basis (Goodman et al. 2012; Jonas et al. 2010; Kadir 2016; Yung et al. 2014). I show how maintaining this position required careful and constant negotiation and navigation of the views and expectations different people in the field had of me.

In Chapters One through Five I present my ethnographic findings. Chapter One describes the context and research setting. The members of the Cooperative and eco-network dedicated themselves to creating alternative economic systems that were non-hierarchically organized, enabled people to take ownership of the economy, allowed people to maintain the rewards of their work, and would potentially recover the “human” and “ethical” dimensions of economic life as opposed to the cold and calculative logic of capitalist markets. I show how my interlocutors mobilized practices and terms - such as self-management, direct participation, mutual aid – that originate from a history of left wing movements from the civil war era and were preserved throughout the Francoist dictatorship in various countercultural spaces. By highlighting the historical roots of contemporary alternative economic formations, I also argue against the narrative of crisis. That is, the concept of crisis has become a common analytical framework to explain the appearance of alternative economic practices and other forms of provisioning that we would not normally consider as ‘economic’. Drawing on the social historian E.P. Thompson, I have emphasized, however, that people are not singularly motivated by economic scarcity. In this chapter I therefore argue that that while we need to recognize the importance of events such as the 2008 financial crisis, we need to take into account that certain phenomena that become visible in times of crisis often have a much longer historical trajectory and are motivated by specific moral frameworks.

In Chapter Two I tackle the question of what an alternative life looks like. A number of scholars have shown that the relation between labor and capital has shifted to a point where we now see an increasing amount of people in precarious labor conditions that lack the financial security and state backed welfare systems that the working class in Europe had after the second world war. This literature often operates under the assumption that people aspire a stable, comfortable, and salaried life. However, I show that my interlocutors often explicitly rejected *el món assalariat* (the salaried life) and sought to minimize their dependence on waged labor. Instead they created alternative income generating activities that did not necessarily bring them financial prosperity, but gave them a sense of fulfillment and ownership over their existence. Not

everyone was able to pursue an alternative life in the same degree, however, and I show that the experience of alternative life and work often oscillated between a sense of empowerment on the one hand and fatigue, frustration, and exploitation on the other.

In Chapter Two I also describe how there were in fact competing visions on what constituted alternative work. Some believed it was a life project, a calling that could not be regulated through quantifying mechanisms and should not be subjected to hierarchical organizational structures. Others, however, maintained that work, regardless of whether it was done in alternative economic spaces or in 'the System', needed to be formalized and regulated. In Chapter Three I further engage with the problem of competing visions of the 'alternative economy' and show why certain models had more staying powers than others. The literature on the performativity of the economy has shown how certain expert models are constitutive rather than descriptive of economic life. Yet this literature cannot account for why certain models are more successful than others. Drawing on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective on performance and his metaphor of the front and back regions of social life, I show how my interlocutors brought forward different forms of the economy through performative conversions between the front and back stages of the Cooperative and eco-network. In particular, I pay attention to the assembly as an arena where a battle of forms took place in the sense that it was here that competing visions on alternative economic formations were brought forward through carefully rehearsed performances. How an alternative economy was given shape, then, was dependent on these performative conversions between front and back stages.

Chapter Three is also where I discuss the (gendered) power relations in the Cooperative and eco-network and explore some of the relational conflicts that developed over time within these projects. In Chapter Four I further focus on the experience of being in alternative economic project over time by examining relations of trust and mistrust in the Cooperative and eco-network. In a context of deep seeded mistrust towards political and economic institutions, the members of the Cooperative and eco-networks worked towards creating economic relations that were said to be built on a foundation of mutual trust. Drawing on sociological and anthropological insights on trust and mistrust, I pay attention to how my interlocutors created the conditions that they saw as necessary for the materialization of (mis)trust to occur. I analyze this work of (mis)trust as taking place within what I call an economy of (mis) trust. In this way I show that various (mis)trust practices, such as the creation and circulation of certain narratives that either instilled trust or mistrust, helped particular forms of the economy ossify into more durable states, or, alternatively, served to break down certain organizational forms in favor of others.

Chapter Five is the final ethnographic chapter and is devoted to an analysis of the relation between the state and alternative economic formations. The literature on alternative economic spaces does not have a theory of the state, and often treats it as a problem to be avoided or as simply as part of the contextual backdrop. In this chapter, however, I show how alternative economic spaces are also born out of struggles against and about the state. Drawing on the anthropology of the state, I show that the state was an important actor in the battle of forms that I described in Chapters Three and Four. That is to say that the regulatory force and practices of the state featured in important ways in the formation of the Cooperative and eco-network. In particular, I show how a series of inspections by the Ministry of Labor forced the Cooperative to make parts of their organization comply with the law. However, rather than seeing this as the straightforward formalization of 'informal' activities or the incorporation of alternatives into the mainstream, I show how this moment of formalization also propelled my interlocutors to reflect on the economy they had created and subsequently urged them to re-assemble it in different ways. This was not the simple rediscovery of an alternative Utopia, but was a process accompanied by exclusionary practices and the consolidation of certain power relations within the Cooperative.

In the Conclusion I reflect on my findings and highlight what the theoretical contribution of this dissertation is. I start by emphasizing the findings of Chapters One and Two that show that we should not see alternative economies only as reactions to economic and political crises, but pay attention to the historical trajectories these projects have and how participants in alternative economic projects are motivated by more than just material precarity. The remainder of the Conclusion reiterates the importance of a processual understanding of the way alternative economic formations come into being. I argue that rather than engaging in a taxonomic study of alterity, it is important to analyze how categories such as alternative come about through practice and discourse and how people mobilize them in their daily lives. In this way, I come to an understanding of alternative economic formations that is attentive to how certain emergent or existing ways of doing are assembled and molded into intelligible, and tangible economic forms over time. At the same time, however, I argue that we need to recognize that while 'the economy' may be the result of a perpetual process of becoming, there are moments where certain forms of the economy ossify into a tangible reality. I argue that these economic formations are powerful and evocative forces that, in recursive fashion, inform the specific ways in which the economy is given shape.

Annex III: Samenvatting Dissertatie

Deze dissertatie is een etnografische studie van de totstandkoming van alternatieve economische projecten in Catalonië die gepresenteerd worden als alternatieven ten opzichte van het kapitalistische systeem en de staat. Deze studie is gebaseerd op 14 maanden veldwerk uitgevoerd bij twee gerelateerde projecten die wel elk hun eigen dynamiek kenden: een eco-netwerk in een ruraal gebied in Noord Catalonië en een organisatie gebaseerd in Barcelona die ik hier “de Coöperatie” noem. De leden van zowel het eco-netwerk als de Coöperatie wilden een alternatief economisch systeem creëren dat zich aan de marges van het kapitalisme (*al marge del capitalismo*) bevond. Hiervoor gebruikten zij verschillende mechanismes (*einias*), zoals een sociale munteenheid en een alternatief arbeidssysteem. Door het gebruik van deze *einias*, zouden mensen minder afhankelijk worden van hegemonische politieke en economische instituties, ook wel bekend onder mijn informanten als ‘het Systeem’ (*el Sistema*). Op deze manier herdachten mijn informanten niet alleen de economie op een conceptueel niveau, maar zetten zij haar ook op een andere manier weer in elkaar in de praktijk. Door een etnografische analyse van de Coöperatie en het eco-netwerk draagt deze dissertatie bij aan het herdenken van de economie (“rethinking the economy”) (Mitchell 2008; Narotzky en Besnier 2014) en werpt het een licht op de veranderende relaties tussen de staat, samenleving, en de economie in hedendaags Zuid-Europa.

In de inleiding bespreek ik de theoretische bijdrage die ik lever met deze dissertatie aan de studie van zowel alternatieve economische formaties, als ook de studie van economische transformaties in het algemeen. Onderzoek vanuit sociale geografie naar zogenaamde “alternative economic spaces” (Leyshon et al. 2003) richt zich vaak op de vraag in hoeverre we iets als alternatief kunnen beschouwen ten opzichte van hegemonische economische structuren zoals de markt. Dit debat neigt echter tot polarisatie in de zin dat er een tweedeling ontstaan is tussen diegenen die het radicale karakter van alternatieve economische projecten benadrukken enerzijds, en anderzijds diegenen die beargumenteren dat alternatieven altijd opereren binnen de context van de reproductie van het kapitalistische systeem. Hierbij is het probleem dat deze literatuur gestoeld is op een gereïficeerd begrip van ‘de economie’ en veelal berust op dichotomieën zoals alternatief / mainstream en informeel / formeel. Dit heeft geleid tot een analytisch doodlopend pad dat ons niet helpt om tot een beter begrip te komen van de sociale organisatie van mensen, collectieven, en projecten die als alternatief worden gepresenteerd.

In deze dissertatie put ik daarom uit antropologische perspectieven over waarde en performativiteit om tot een meer processueel begrip te komen van alternatieve economische formaties. Waar vroege antropologische werken nog een strakke scheiding tussen waarde regimes (*regimes of value*) in stand hielden, beargumenteren recentere

werken dat de economie geen apart domein op zich is, maar het resultaat is van een complex doch alledaags proces van 'economiseren' dat bepaalde structuren een 'economisch' karakter geeft. In zowel de economische sociologie als economische antropologie hebben wetenschappers uit dit inzicht geput om te analyseren hoe 'de economie' gevormd wordt door de praktijken van economen, bankiers, politici, en corporate stakeholders. Echter, zoals Narotzky (2012) met recht betoogt, wordt de economie niet alleen door elite actoren gevormd, maar ook door "ordinary people" die hun eigen conceptualisering hebben over wat 'de economie' is. De leden van de Coöperatie en eco-network probeerden inderdaad bepaalde gangbare ideeën over de economie te deconstrueren en in plaats daarvan hun eigen alternatieve economische systemen op te richten. Om dit proces te analyseren, maak ik gebruik van Kathleen Millar's concept "forms of living" om te laten zien hoe mijn informanten actief vormgaven aan een alternatieve levenswijze, arbeidsvormen, en 'de economie'. Op deze manier bekijk ik hoe alternatieve economische formaties vorm worden gegeven middels bepaalde praktijken en discoursen en kom ik tot een meer procesgerichte analyse van de totstandkoming van alternatieve economieën.

Het ontleden en deconstrueren van de economie is echter slechts één stap die we moeten maken om tot een volledig begrip te komen van hoe alternatieve economische formaties tot stand komen. Ik beargumenteer dat we daarnaast ook in acht moeten nemen dat de vormen die het resulteren uit het herconfigureren van de economie op hun beurt zelf ook krachtige sociale formaties worden die mensen aansporen om op een bepaalde manier te handelen in de wereld. Dit betekent echter niet dat we teruggaan naar een gereïficeerd begrip van de economie. Sociale abstracties zoals de economie, samenleving, en de staat zijn uiteraard het gevolg van menselijke interacties en handelingen over tijd. Wat ik betoog is dat dit geen eenrichtingsverkeer is. Wanneer bepaalde abstracties eenmaal in het leven zijn geroepen, geven deze op hun beurt weer vorm aan menselijke praktijken en verbeeldingen. Naast dat we analyseren hoe de economie vorm wordt gegeven door performatieve praktijken en relazen, beargumenteer ik dat het belangrijk is om te kijken hoe deze abstracties mensen op bepaalde manieren laten handelen.

Het overige gedeelte van de introductie is gewijd aan een bespreking van de methodes die ik gebruik en een verkenning van mijn positie als onderzoeker. Studies naar "alternative economic spaces" negeren vaak belangrijke vragen zoals: wie zijn de mensen die in alternatieve projecten zitten? Waar komen zij vandaan en hoe komen ze aan de middelen die ze nodig hebben om op deze manier te leven en te werken? Wat motiveert hen en wat is het belang van het naleven van een alternatieve levenswijze? In dit onderzoek heb ik daarom gebruik gemaakt van antropologische methodologie om de geleefde ervaring van het creëren van alternatieve economische formaties

te kunnen duiden. Daarvoor heb ik veertien maanden participerende observatie in twee locaties gedaan: Eerst vier maanden met een eco-netwerk in een ruraal gebied in Noord-Catalonië, en daarna tien maanden in Barcelona bij de Coöperatie. Naast participerende observatie, heb ik 55 semigestructureerde interviews gehouden met behulp van topic lijsten en heb ik gebruik gemaakt van elicitation methodes waarbij ik visueel materiaal deelde met mijn informanten om collectief te reflecteren over hun praktijken en discoursen.

Wat betreft mijn positie als onderzoeker: veel onderzoekers in dit veld bepleiten ook het belang van “alternative economic spaces” en zien hun onderzoek als verweven met hun activistische praktijk. Ik zie mijn onderzoek niet als activisme, maar beweer daarentegen ook niet dat mijn analyse daardoor ‘objectiever’ zou zijn. Ik schaar mij eerder bij mensen zoals Nazima Kadir, Yuson Jung en David Goodman, die hun werk zien als een kritisch instrument dat gebruikt kan worden om te reflecteren op bepaalde manieren van doen in alternatieve collectieven en behulpzaam kan zijn in het duiden van bepaalde tegenstrijdige dynamieken en problemen die aanwezig zijn in dit soort projecten. Ik laat verder zien dat het innemen van deze positie een constant proces van communicatie en navigatie vergde tussen mij en de mensen met wie ik onderzoek heb gedaan.

In Hoofdstuk Eén tot en met Vijf presenteer ik mijn etnografische bevindingen. Hoofdstuk Eén beschrijft de context en onderzoeksetting. De leden van de Coöperatie en eco-netwerk poogden alternatieve economische systemen tot stand te laten komen die op een niet-hiërarchische wijze georganiseerd waren, mensen hielpen om een mate van eigenaarschap over de economie uit te oefenen, en gebaseerd waren op “menselijke” en “ethische” waarden in tegenstelling tot de zogenaamd koude en berekenende logica van het kapitalistische systeem. Ik laat zien hoe mijn informanten termen en praktijken mobiliseerden – zoals *autogestió*, *assemblea*, *suport muto* – die voortkwamen uit een geschiedenis van linkse bewegingen uit de tijd van de Spaanse burgeroorlog (1936-1939) en bewaard bleven tijdens de dictatuur in verschillende counter-culturele plekken. Door deze historische continuïteit te laten zien, positioneer ik mijzelf ook tegen de zienswijze dat alternatieven slechts reacties zijn op de crisis van 2008. Steunend op het werk van E.P. Thompson, beargumenteer ik dat menselijk handelen niet louter gemotiveerd wordt door economische schaarste. Ik laat zien dat alhoewel de crisis van 2008 wel degelijk van groot belang was, we ook rekening moeten houden met het feit dat bepaalde fenomenen vaak diepere historische wortels hebben en zijn ingegeven door specifieke morele raamwerken.

In Hoofdstuk Twee laat ik ook zien dat er verschillende visies zijn over wat als alternatief werk geldt. Sommigen waren van mening dat werken in de Coöperatie en eco-netwerk een levensproject was, een roeping die niet zomaar door kwantificerende

mechanismes kon worden gereguleerd en niet onderhevig zou moeten zijn aan hiërarchische organisatorische structuren. Anderen waren juist van mening dat iedere vorm van werk, alternatief of anderszids, geformaliseerd en gereguleerd moest worden. In Hoofdstuk Drie ga ik verder in op het vraagstuk omtrent verschillende visies over alternatieve economieën. In dit hoofdstuk laat ik zien waarom bepaalde modellen meer overredingskracht hadden dan anderen. De literatuur over de performativiteit van de economie heeft laten zien hoe bepaalde economische modellen van experts de economie niet alleen beschrijven, maar haar actief vormgeven. Wat dit perspectief echter buiten beeld laat, is waarom bepaalde modellen succesvoller zijn dan andere. Om te laten zien hoe mijn informanten verschillende vormen van de economie tot stand brachten, put ik uit Erving Goffman's dramaturgische metafoor van de "front and back stages of social life". In het bijzonder schenk ik aandacht aan de *assemblea* als een arena waar een vormengevecht plaatsvond, in de zin dat het hier was dat verschillende visies over de alternatieve economie naar voren werden gebracht middels voorzichtig voorbereide optredens. Wat ik daarmee laat zien is hoe de specifieke vorm die alternatieve economische formaties aannamen afhankelijk was van *performative conversions* tussen de front en backstages.

In Hoofdstuk Drie bespreek ik tevens de machtsrelaties in de Coöperatie en eco-netwerk, waarbij ik me focus op de genderrelaties en persoonlijke conflicten die zich met de tijd ontwikkelden in deze projecten. In Hoofdstuk Vier focus ik op de ervaring van in een alternatief economisch project zitten door te kijken naar vertrouwens- en wantrouwrelaties in de Coöperatie en eco-netwerk. In een context van wantrouwen tegenover politieke en economische instituties in Spanje probeerden de leden van de Coöperatie en eco-netwerk economische relaties te construeren die gestoeld waren op onderling vertrouwen. Ik maak gebruik van zowel sociologische als antropologische inzichten over vertrouwen en wantrouwen om te analyseren hoe mijn informanten de condities creëerden waarvan zij dachten dat deze noodzakelijk waren voor de totstandkoming van vertrouwen (en wantrouwen). Ik analyseer deze praktijken en discoursen door de lens van het concept *economy of mistrust*. Op deze manier laat ik zien dat het creëren en laten circuleren van bepaalde verhalen zowel vertrouwen als wantrouwen konden wekken. Uiteindelijk werd hiermee bereikt dat bepaalde vormen van de economie een duurzamere gestalte aannamen of juist af werden gebroken en weer op andere manieren in elkaar werden gezet.

Hoofdstuk Vijf is het laatste etnografische hoofdstuk en is gewijd aan een analyse van de relatie tussen de staat en alternatieve economische formaties. De literatuur over "alternative economic spaces" opereert vaak zonder een theorie van de staat en behandelt de staat als onderdeel van de achtergrondcontext. In dit hoofdstuk laat ik echter zien dat alternatieve economische projecten juist ook voortkomen in relatie

tot de staat. Hierbij maak ik gebruik van de antropologie van de staat om te laten zien hoe zij een belangrijke actor was in het vormengevecht dat ik schets in Hoofdstukken Drie en Vier. Dat wil zeggen dat de vorm die de Coöperatie en eco-netwerk konden aannemen onderhevig was aan de regulerende macht en praktijken van de staat. Ik besteed met name aandacht aan hoe een reeks inspecties van het Spaanse Ministerie van Arbeid de Coöperatie in feite dwongen om haar organisatie conform de wet te herstructureren. Desalniettemin beargumenteer ik dat we dit niet moeten beschouwen als de formalisering van informele activiteiten of de incorporatie van alternatieven in de mainstream. Ik laat in plaats daarvan zien hoe dit moment van gedwongen formalisering mijn informanten ook liet reflecteren over de economie die ze tot stand hadden gebracht en hen liet overwegen hoe deze op een andere manier konden configureren. Dit was niet een kwestie van het simpelweg herontdekken van Utopia, maar was een proces dat gepaard ging met uitsluiting en de consolidering van bepaalde machtsrelaties in de Coöperatie.

In de Conclusie reflecteer ik op mijn bevindingen en kaart ik de theoretische contributie van deze dissertatie aan. Ik begin door te benadrukken dat we alternatieven niet enkel als reacties moeten zien op economische en politieke crises, maar aandacht moeten schenken aan de historische achtergrond van deze projecten en moeten erkennen dat participanten in deze projecten vaak gemotiveerd worden door meer dan alleen materiële schaarste. De rest van de Conclusie laat het belang zijn van een procesgericht begrip van de totstandkoming van alternatieve economische formaties. Ik bepleit dat we moeten analyseren hoe bepaalde categorieën (alternatief, mainstream, etc.) gevormd worden door alledaagse praktijken en discoursen en hoe deze categorieën worden gemobiliseerd in het dagelijks leven. Op deze manier heb ik laten zien hoe alternatieve economische formaties in elkaar worden gezet en concrete vormen aannemen. Tegelijkertijd beargumenteer ik dat alhoewel de economie het resultaat is van een oneindig proces van wording, er momenten zijn waarop bepaalde economische vormen verhard en tastbaar worden. Ik beargumenteer dat deze vormen invloedrijke en tot de verbeelding sprekende krachten zijn die op hun beurt weer meespelen in een economisch vormengevecht.

Anexo IV: Resumen de la disertación

Esta disertación es un estudio etnográfico de la creación de proyectos económicos alternativos en Cataluña que se presentan como alternativas al capitalismo. Se basa en 14 meses de trabajo de campo etnográfico con dos proyectos distintos pero relacionados: una eco-red (*ecoxarxa*) en una zona rural en el norte de Cataluña, y una organización con sede en Barcelona a la que me refiero como “la Cooperativa”. Los miembros de la eco-red y de la Cooperativa se esforzaron por crear un sistema económico alternativo al “márgen del capitalismo” (*al marge del capitalisme*). Con este fin, movilizaron varias *einan* (herramientas), como una moneda social y un sistema de empleo alternativo, que fueron diseñados para hacer que las personas sean menos dependientes de las instituciones políticas y económicas hegemónicas que se denominaron “el Sistema”. Al hacerlo, mis interlocutores no solo repensaron la economía, sino que trabajaron para ensamblar la economía de una manera diferente en la práctica. A través de una exploración etnográfica de la Cooperativa y la eco-red, esta disertación contribuye a “repensar la economía” (Mitchell 2008; Narotzky y Besnier 2014) y arroja luz sobre la relación cambiante entre el estado, la sociedad y la economía en el sur contemporáneo Europa del Sur.

En la Introducción, analizo la contribución teórica que esta disertación hace tanto al estudio de espacios económicos alternativos como al estudio de las transformaciones económicas de manera más amplia. Los estudios de la geografía humana sobre lo que se conoce como “espacios económicos alternativos” (Leyshon et al. 2003) han tendido a centrarse en la cuestión de la “alteridad”, es decir, hasta qué punto podemos considerar estos espacios como verdaderas alternativas a las estructuras económicas hegemónicas. Este debate ha tendido a polarizarse en aquellos que enfatizan el potencial radical de los espacios económicos alternativos frente a aquellos que sostienen que estos espacios aún operan dentro de un contexto de reproducción del capitalismo. El problema es que esta literatura se basa en una comprensión reificada de “la economía” y tiene una tendencia a recurrir a marcos dicotómicos como el alternativo / convencional y el informal / formal. Sostengo que esto ha resultado en un estancamiento analítico en el que no podemos entender la organización social de las personas, los colectivos y los proyectos que se presentan como alternativa.

En este trabajo, por el contrario, me baso en perspectivas antropológicas sobre el valor y la performatividad para llegar a una comprensión más procesual de las formaciones económicas alternativas. Donde los trabajos anteriores en antropología económica mantuvieron una distinción rígida entre regímenes de valor supuestamente incompatibles (como la economía del regalo en oposición a la economía de mercado), las perspectivas más recientes nos instan a ver la economía no como una esfera preexistente, sino como resultado de un complejo proceso de montaje que hace que

las cosas adquieran un carácter “económico”. Los académicos tanto en sociología económica como en antropología económica han recurrido a estas ideas para ver cómo “la economía” resulta de las prácticas performativas de economistas, banqueros centrales, y políticos. Sin embargo, como argumenta acertadamente Narotzky (2012), el ensamblaje de la economía no solo es realizado por actores de élite, sino también por “personas comunes” que buscan poner en práctica sus propios puntos de vista sobre lo que es “la economía”. Mis interlocutores buscaron deconstruir ideas dadas por sentado sobre la economía y crear sistemas económicos alternativos. Para analizar este proceso de (re-) ensamblar la economía, recurro al concepto de ‘formas de vida’ de Kathleen Millar (2018) para mostrar cómo mis interlocutores desarrollaron activamente una forma alternativa de vida, trabajo y ‘la economía’. Al hacerlo, trazo cómo se configuran las formaciones económicas alternativas a lo largo del tiempo a través de discursos y prácticas performativas, y ofrezco una comprensión más procesual de la constitución de “espacios económicos alternativos”.

Sin embargo, además de deconstruir o desarmar la economía, sostengo que debemos tener en cuenta que las formas que resultan del proceso de reensamblaje de la economía pueden convertirse en artefactos sociales convincentes que provocan acciones significativas en el mundo. Esto no significa un retorno a la comprensión reificada de la economía. Las abstracciones sociales, como la economía, la sociedad y el estado, por supuesto, son hechas relacionamente por un grupo diverso de actores a diferentes escalas. Lo que argumento es que esta no es una calle de sentido único. Una vez traídas a la existencia, estas abstracciones, de manera recursiva, en realidad dan forma y formatean las prácticas e imaginarios de las personas. Además de ver cómo se moldea la economía a través de prácticas y discursos performativos, es importante también reconocer que tales abstracciones pueden convertirse en fuerzas poderosas que mueven a las personas a actuar de manera significativa en el mundo.

En el resto de la introducción, describo los métodos que utilicé y analizo mi posición como investigador. Los estudios sobre “espacios económicos alternativos” a menudo ignoran preguntas importantes como: ¿quiénes son las personas involucradas en proyectos económicos alternativos? ¿De dónde vienen y cómo obtienen los recursos para poder hacer lo que hacen? ¿Cuáles son sus motivaciones y cuál es el significado de buscar una forma de vida alternativa? Por lo tanto, en esta investigación me he basado en el conjunto de herramientas antropológicas para abordar la experiencia vivida de crear formaciones económicas alternativas. En particular, he realizado catorce meses de observación participante en dos sitios de campo. Estuve cuatro meses con una eco-red en el norte rural de Cataluña, y otros diez meses más en Barcelona con la Cooperativa. Además, realicé 55 entrevistas semiestructuradas, realicé documentación visual y

compartía materiales visuales con mis interlocutores para reflexionar colectivamente sobre sus prácticas y discursos.

En términos de mi posición como investigador: muchos estudiosos de los “espacios económicos alternativos” ven su trabajo académico entrelazado con el trabajo de sus activistas. No he tomado esta posición y no veo mi investigación como una práctica activista necesariamente. Sin embargo, tampoco pretendo algún tipo de “objetividad” en mi análisis. Por el contrario, sigo a personas como Nazima Kadir, Yuson Jung y David Goodman que ven su trabajo como una herramienta crítica que se puede utilizar para una mayor reflexión que, en última instancia, puede ser útil para abordar o incluso superar algunas de las dinámicas y problemas contradictorios que aquellos que trabajan para construir alternativas encuentran diariamente (Goodman et al. 2012; Jonas et al. 2010; Kadir 2016; Yung et al. 2014). Muestro cómo mantener esta posición requería una negociación cuidadosa y constante y una navegación de los puntos de vista y expectativas que las diferentes personas en el campo tenían de mí.

En los capítulos uno al cinco presento mis hallazgos etnográficos. El Capítulo Uno describe el contexto y la configuración de la investigación. Los miembros de la Cooperativa y la eco-red se dedicaron a crear sistemas económicos alternativos que estaban organizados de manera no jerárquica, permitieron tomar posesión de la economía, permitieron a las personas mantener las recompensas de su trabajo y potencialmente recuperarían las dimensiones “éticas” y “humanas” de la vida económica en oposición a la lógica fría y calculadora de los mercados capitalistas. Muestro cómo mis interlocutores movilizaron prácticas y términos, como autogestión, participación directa, apoyo mutuo, que se originan en una historia de movimientos de izquierda de la era de la guerra civil y se conservaron durante toda la dictadura franquista en varios espacios contraculturales. Al destacar las raíces históricas de las formaciones económicas alternativas contemporáneas, también disputo la narrativa de la crisis, es decir, el concepto de crisis se ha convertido en un marco analítico común para explicar la aparición de prácticas económicas alternativas y otras formas de aprovisionamiento que normalmente no consideraríamos como “económicas”. Basándome en el historiador social E.P. Thompson, sin embargo, he enfatizado, que las personas no están motivadas de manera singular por la escasez económica. Por lo tanto, en este capítulo sostengo que si bien debemos reconocer la importancia de eventos como la crisis financiera de 2008, debemos tener en cuenta que ciertos fenómenos que se hacen visibles en tiempos de crisis a menudo tienen una trayectoria histórica mucho más larga y están motivados por marcos morales específicos.

En el Capítulo Dos abordo la cuestión de cómo es una vida alternativa. Varios académicos han demostrado que la relación entre trabajo y capital ha cambiado a un punto en el que ahora vemos una cantidad cada vez mayor de personas en condiciones

laborales precarias que carecen de la seguridad financiera y los sistemas de bienestar respaldados por el estado que la clase trabajadora en Europa tenía después de la segunda Guerra Mundial. Esta literatura a menudo opera bajo el supuesto de que las personas aspiran a una vida estable, cómoda y asalariada. Sin embargo, yo demuestro que mis interlocutores a menudo rechazaron explícitamente *el món assalariat* (la vida asalariada) y trataron de minimizar su dependencia del trabajo asalariado. En su lugar, crearon actividades alternativas de generación de ingresos que no necesariamente les brindaron prosperidad financiera, sino que les dieron un sentido de satisfacción y propiedad sobre su existencia. Sin embargo, no todos pudieron perseguir una vida alternativa en el mismo grado, y demuestro que la experiencia de la vida y el trabajo alternativo a menudo oscilaba entre una sensación de empoderamiento por un lado y fatiga, frustración y explotación por el otro.

En el Capítulo Dos también describo cómo, de hecho, había visiones opuestas sobre lo que constituía el trabajo alternativo. Algunos creían que era un proyecto de vida, un llamado que no podía regularse a través de mecanismos de cuantificación y no debía someterse a estructuras organizativas jerárquicas. Otros, sin embargo, sostuvieron que el trabajo, independientemente de si se realizó en espacios económicos alternativos o en “el Sistema”, debía formalizarse y regularse. En el Capítulo Tres, analizo en profundidad el problema de visiones competitivas de la “economía alternativa” y muestro por qué ciertos modelos tenían más poder de permanencia que otros. La literatura sobre la performatividad de la economía ha mostrado cómo ciertos modelos expertos son constitutivos más que descriptivos de la vida económica. Sin embargo, esta literatura no puede explicar por qué ciertos modelos tienen más éxito que otros. Basándome en la perspectiva dramática de Erving Goffman y su metáfora de las frentes traseras y delanteras de la vida social, muestro cómo mis interlocutores presentaron diferentes formas de la economía a través de conversiones performativas entre los frentes traseros y delanteros de la Cooperativa y la eco-red. En particular, presto atención a la asamblea como una arena en la que tuvo lugar una batalla de formas en el sentido de que fue aquí donde se presentaron visiones competitivas sobre formaciones económicas alternativas a través de actuaciones cuidadosamente ensayadas. La forma en que se le dio forma a una economía alternativa, entonces, dependía de estas conversiones performativas entre las regiones delanteras y traseras.

El Capítulo Tres también es donde discuto las relaciones de poder (de género) en la Cooperativa y la eco-red y exploro algunos de los conflictos relacionales que se desarrollaron dentro de estos proyectos. En el Capítulo Cuatro, me concentro más en la experiencia de estar en un proyecto económico alternativo a lo largo del tiempo al examinar las relaciones de confianza y desconfianza en la Cooperativa y la eco-red. En un contexto de profunda desconfianza hacia las instituciones políticas y económicas,

los miembros de la Cooperativa y las redes ecológicas trabajaron para crear relaciones económicas que, según se decía, se basaban en la confianza mutua. Basándome en ideas sociológicas y antropológicas sobre la confianza y la desconfianza, presto atención a cómo mis interlocutores crearon las condiciones que consideraban necesarias para que se materializara la (des)confianza. Analizo este trabajo de (des)confianza como teniendo lugar dentro de lo que yo llamo una economía de (des) confianza. De esta manera, demuestro que varias prácticas de (des) confianza, como la creación y circulación de ciertas narrativas que infundieron confianza o desconfianza, ayudaron a osificar formas de la economía en estados más duraderos o, alternativamente, sirvieron para romper ciertas formas organizativas a favor de otras.

El Capítulo Cinco es el capítulo etnográfico final y está dedicado al análisis de la relación entre el estado y las formaciones económicas alternativas. La literatura sobre espacios económicos alternativos no tiene una teoría del estado, y a menudo lo trata como un problema a evitar o simplemente como parte del contexto de fondo. En este capítulo, sin embargo, muestro cómo los espacios económicos alternativos también nacen de las luchas contra y sobre el estado. Basándome en la antropología del estado, demuestro que el estado fue un actor importante en la batalla de formas que describí en los capítulos tres y cuatro. Es decir que la fuerza reguladora y las prácticas del estado aparecieron de manera importante en la formación de la Cooperativa y la eco-red. En particular, muestro cómo una serie de inspecciones realizadas por el Ministerio de Trabajo obligaron a la Cooperativa a hacer que partes de su organización cumplieran con la ley. Sin embargo, en lugar de ver esto como la formalización directa de las actividades “informales” o la incorporación de alternativas a la corriente principal, muestro cómo este momento de formalización también impulsó a mis interlocutores a reflexionar sobre la economía que habían creado y los instó a ensamblarla de manera diferente. Este no fue el simple redescubrimiento de una utopía alternativa, sino un proceso acompañado de prácticas excluyentes y la consolidación de ciertas relaciones de poder dentro de la Cooperativa.

En la conclusión reflexiono sobre mis hallazgos y destaco cuál es la contribución teórica de esta disertación. Comienzo enfatizando los hallazgos de los capítulos uno y dos que muestran que no debemos ver las economías alternativas solo como reacciones a las crisis económicas y políticas, sino prestar atención a las trayectorias históricas que tienen estos proyectos y cómo los participantes en proyectos económicos alternativos están motivados por algo más que únicamente la precariedad material. El resto de la Conclusión reitera la importancia de una comprensión procesal de la manera en que se establecen las formaciones económicas alternativas. Sostengo que, en lugar de participar en un estudio taxonómico de la alteridad es importante analizar cómo surgen categorías como “el alternativo” a través de prácticas y discursos performativos

y cómo las personas movilizan estas categorías en su vida diaria. De esta manera, llego a una comprensión de las formaciones económicas alternativas que está atenta a cómo ciertas prácticas emergentes o existentes se ensamblan y moldean en formas económicas inteligibles y tangibles a lo largo del tiempo. Al mismo tiempo, sin embargo, sostengo que debemos reconocer que si bien “la economía” puede ser el resultado de un proceso perpetuo de devenir, hay momentos en los que ciertas formas de la economía se convierten en una realidad tangible. Sostengo que estas formaciones económicas son fuerzas poderosas y evocadoras que, de manera recursiva, revelan la configuración específica de la economía.

