

**Moving Towards a New Relation?**

**The Struggle to Preserve Huichol Self-Sufficiency in the Face of the  
Developmentalist Politics of the Mexican State**

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*I dedicate this thesis to my father whose passion and commitment  
to the Huichol culture inspired me to follow in his footsteps.*

*“...quitarte la tierra es quitarte el pan y la paz, la libertad y la alegría, el aire, el sol y la lluvia...quien se apodera de la porción de suelo que a ti te corresponde, se apodera en cierto modo de tu ser...destruye tan monstruosa aberración, haz que la tierra sea para todos, como la atmósfera y el mar, porque sin tierra continuarás esclavo y miserable.”*

*-Sabiduría mayo, tomado de un comunicado zapatista-*

*“...to take away your land is to take away your bread and your peace, liberty and happiness, the air, the sun and the rain...who takes over the portion of land that corresponds to you, takes over in a certain way your being...destroy such a monstrous aberration, make the land for everyone, like the atmosphere and the ocean, because without the land you will continue a slave and miserable.”*

*-Mayo knowledge, taken from a Zapatista communiqué-*

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## **I. Introduction**

The idea for this thesis project came naturally to me as I was raised in the midst of many of the fierce struggles to protect Huichol land and culture in the 1980's and early 1990's. In fact, my very first memory happens to be of riding a donkey towards a *ranchería* (extended ranch) in the Huichol community of Santa Catarina Cuexcomatlán. I therefore grew up surrounded by my parents' Huichol *compadres* and *comadres*, artists, shamans and entrepreneurs who were constantly passing through or living in our home in Guadalajara. Often they came to settle land disputes and meet with allies who could help them fight the *teiwárite* (non-Huichol neighbors) who were eager to exploit their territory. As my parents' non-profit work in the Huichol Sierra deepened, several local strongmen or *caciques* backed by the Mexican government began to threaten my father and as a result, some of my family moved to California. Nevertheless, the profound relationships already established after many years of work allowed us to remain connected with the Huicholes. In the spring of 2002 my father, Juan Negrín, and I returned to the Huichol mountains to witness the unfolding of President Fox's development project in the zone. For the Huicholes and those *teiwárite* who support their self-determination, Fox's project introduces a dangerous precedent because it threatens the Huicholes' autonomous organization and self-sufficiency.

During the summer of 2003, I returned to the Huichol Sierra and several government offices in Mexico in order to continue the documentation of the National Plan for the Development of Indigenous People (NPDIP) pushed forth by President Fox and the newly reorganized National Indigenist Institute (INI), now called the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples. I was particularly interested in the forms in which this massive development project, which includes electrification by posts and cables, roads and dams, was presented to the Huichol communities. I not only wanted to explore the rhetoric used by the Mexican State but also the ways in which the Huicholes interpreted and understood it. I chose to focus my work in two distinct Huichol communities in order to get a broader spectrum of the problems faced by the two, the solutions they themselves saw for these problems and the role, if any, they felt the national, state and municipal governments should have in their territory.

The first community I visited was Tuxpan de Bolaños in the municipality of Bolaños, Jalisco. This particular community interested me because it has a history of government development projects which have had various consequences, many of them detrimental to the community's cultural and ecological integrity. I was nevertheless surprised by the strong skepticism the inhabitants shared towards the government as they felt that they had been misled and cheated by these very projects; in fact, I discovered that communities who have been strongly acculturated into Mexican customs and consumption patterns were nonetheless politicized and fairly resistant to further State development projects. The second community to which I chose to go to was Santa Catarina Cuexcomatlán in the municipality of Mezquitic, also in Jalisco. The attraction to Santa Catarina was based on the general understanding that it is the most culturally intact of all the Huichol communities; consequently, they stand to be the most affected by the NPDIP. Generally speaking, the inhabitants of Santa Catarina have opposed many

governmental and private efforts to intrude on their territory, preferring to focus their energy on local sustainable development projects that remain under the strict control of their community. Outside of these two communities, I was able to visit the urban Huichol neighborhood of Zitacua, Nayarit, as well as a few governmental institutions supposedly established for the protection of Mexico's native cultures and ecologies. I must add that I would not have been able to do my research in the Huichol Sierra had it not been for my family's reciprocal relationship with the Huicholes who are notably strict about who they permit to carry out research or even visit their communities.

It is essential to mention that much of the academic work published about the Huicholes has been anthropological or ethnographic. More often than not, this academic work has been unable to grasp the complexity of the Huichol culture by falling into extremes that ultimately portray them as a naïve people. Anthropologist Johannes Neurath notes that:

Reviewing the first paragraphs or pages of the publications about this ethnolinguistic group, we become aware that the majority of the authors start from one same presupposition that, generally, is also the principal justification of their work: what is most important to show is that the Huicholes or *Wixaritari* are a group that lives *isolated* in an *inaccessible* highland where the *prehispanic*, "prehistoric" or *neolithic* time remains.<sup>1</sup>

These presuppositions that Neurath point out have also been central in the Mexican government's understanding of the Huicholes. As we will see, the government's own documents are laden with racist and developmentalist notions about indigenous people, thereby justifying their own development projects which place Western models as superior to local native ones. My research found that the governmental projects that have emerged from these developmentalist discourses continue to be extremely problematic and regularly fail as they impose outside models that are antagonistic to local indigenous ones; furthermore the governmental institutions themselves are loaded with inconsistencies.

Finally, I explored the Huicholes' own means of development and resistance that seek to retain their levels of territorial autonomy and self-sufficiency. Rather than being a series of communities that are captured by stagnant ideological agreement, they readily renew and expand their strategies for resistance. Partha Chaterjee from the Indian School of Subaltern Studies states that indigenous people have a great ability for "ideological elasticity" and "innovative capacity".<sup>2</sup> With the cooperation of some non-governmental organizations, the Huicholes provide admirable examples of this ability to innovate outside of the dominant paradigms of market-based development.

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<sup>1</sup> Neurath Kugler, Johannes. *Las fiestas de la Casa Grande*. Mexico: CONACULTA-Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia and The University of Guadalajara, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Chaterjee, Partha. "La nación y sus campesinos" in Silvia Rivera and Rossana Barragán, *Debates PostColoniales-- Una introducción a los estudios de la subalternidad*. La Paz, Bolivia: Editorial Historias, 1997, p. 202.

I would like to thank the Huichol communities, in particular Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán and Tuxpán de Bolaños, for laying the foundation for my thesis research and allowing me into their homes. This thesis was also made possible by the academic and social justice work of Juan and Yvonne Negrín, Johannes Neurath Kugler, Paulina Alcocer Páez, John Lilly and Antonio Muníz Nava. Many thanks go to Percy C. Hintzen for guiding me during the past year in the creation of this thesis, and to Margaret Chowning for taking the time to review my work.

## **II. Brief Overview of Huichol History, Culture and Geography**

The Huicholes, or *Wixaritari*, located in Mexico's Western Sierra Madre, are considered to be one of the country's most esoteric indigenous groups. For better or for worse, their fame has mostly revolved around their ceremonial use of the peyote cactus and their internationally recognized artistry. As ethnographer Juan Negrín writes: "The *Wixaritari* are amused, when they are not irritated, by the vast array of people who only associate them with the peyote cult of their purportedly folklorist culture."<sup>3</sup> Many of those who have taken interest in the Huicholes have done so through 'new age' spiritual quests organized by non-Huichol self-proclaimed healers or shamans, or via commercial acquisition of their beadwork and yarn paintings.<sup>4</sup> As a result of this rather superficial interest in Huichol culture, the complexity of their cosmogony, history, art and general culture has largely been ignored or minimized. Nevertheless, there are some anthropologists, ethnographers, ecologists and indigenous rights advocates who have dedicated themselves to the deeper study of the Huicholes' aesthetic, political, religious and economic organization.

Today, the Huichol live in distinct rural and urban communities that span the western states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Durango and San Luis Potosí. However, the core of their four-thousand square kilometer territory is located in the abrupt terrain of Jalisco and Nayarit's Sierra Madre where the highest peaks reach an altitude of at least 2400 to 2800 meters and the canyons are at 800 meters above sea level.<sup>5</sup> While outsiders tend to view their terrain as completely inhospitable, Huicholes have always been mobile whether by foot or mule crossing the Sierra to neighboring extended ranches, or *rancherías*, and ceremonial centers or descending into the *mestizo*<sup>6</sup> towns and cities. Although they have often been described as an isolated people, the Huicholes have historically interacted with non-Huicholes, whereas the latter have found it incredibly difficult to visit the formers home base. Those who penetrate the Sierra and have sincere and reciprocal relations with the Huicholes are often left in awe of a land, a people and a culture that remain at odds with the often devastating developments occurring in the rest

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<sup>3</sup> Negrín, Juan. "Early history" and "Recent History" in [www.wixarika.org](http://www.wixarika.org).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that it has not been until very recently that a few Huichol artists have been recognized as actual artists and not merely as craftsmen. Presently, contemporary Huichol art continues to be restricted to ethnographic and anthropological museums, and is still rarely exhibited within the context of world class contemporary art.

<sup>5</sup> Rojas, Beatriz. *Los huicholes en la historia*. Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos, Colegio de Michoacán and Universidad de Guadalajara, 1993, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> People of mixed racial heritage.

of the country. While there have been some transformations within Huichol culture (as with other societies, theirs is not static), the fundamental aspects of their pre-Hispanic traditions remain strong.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the Huicholes' ability to preserve much of their cultural and territorial autonomy is largely due to their sophisticated (and in some instances seemingly paradoxical) networking with other groups.

Currently, there are three main Huichol communities that were delineated by the Franciscan missionaries in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: San Andrés Cohamiata or Tatei Kié with its annex of Guadalupe Ocotán, Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán or Tuapuri, and San Sebastián Teponhuastan or Wautüa with its annex of Tuxpan de Bolaños. Of these three, Santa Catarina is typically considered to be the one that most upholds tradition, although areas of San Sebastián and isolated parts of San Andrés are equally traditional. Government sources tend to underestimate the Huichol population, while researchers have placed their numbers at around twenty thousand; ten thousand of which live within the current communal lands. Today, the *Wixárika* territory is surrounded by *mestizo* towns and dispersed settlements as well as other indigenous groups, including the Coras, Tepehuanos, Tepecanos and some Nahuatl groups.

The Huichol Sierra is the home of innumerable plant and animal species that are either unique to the area, as is the *Pinus Lumholtzii* species, or quickly disappearing in other forested areas of the country. Like other indigenous groups, the government and popular culture perceive the Huichol as an impoverished people whose diet is limited to corn tortillas and consequently in need of outside sustenance. Contrary to this notion, prickly pear cacti, guavas, plums, guamúchil, peaches, wild potatoes or yams and mushrooms, as well as the essential crops of amaranth, beans, squash, chili peppers and small tomatoes are just some of the many food stuffs the Huicholes have collected and cultivated for centuries. In the lower regions of Nayarit, tropical fruits such as mangoes and bananas are cultivated. In addition, the Huicholes have historically consumed the meat of deer, squirrel, birds, peccary and fish, and more recently chicken, pork and beef. As I will discuss later, preconceptions of the standard of life of the Huicholes serve to legitimize the government's introduction of stores and other market based systems of organization that bring about a decline in self-sufficiency.

### Foundation and pre-Hispanic history

There are differing theories regarding the history and establishment of the Huicholes as an identifiable community of people. Nonetheless, there are some general theories that most investigators and the Huichol oral history hold as true. Before proceeding with this very brief historical overview, it must be noted that a large portion of early and recent Huichol history runs in conjunction with that of their Cora and Tepehuan neighbors who live in the same geographic area. The Huicholes themselves state that they are descendants of a black female dog which would probably link them to

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<sup>7</sup> The Huichol are still deeply rooted in their pre-Hispanic cultural traditions and socio-political organizations, they have therefore selectively incorporated only some Mexican and Western structures into their daily lives. Of course, the extent of this differs between and within each Huichol community.

the Chichimecas (literally meaning ‘dog people’) who descended to central Mexico from the north and speak the Nahuatl language. In fact, the Huicholes speak a language rooted in the Uto-Nahuatl linguistic tradition, bringing further connections with those people who migrated from north to south.<sup>8</sup>

Several historians believe that the Huicholes formed part of a nation located in what is now northern Mexico and the southwestern United States. This nation comprised the Coras, Tepehuanos, Opatas, Tarahumaras and Pimas. Mexican historian J. Ignacio Dávila Garibi and French anthropologist Léon Diguet share the hypothesis that the Huicholes inhabited a broad territory in today’s states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Durango, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Coahuila and Aguascalientes. This area was known as *Hikuripa* or the ‘periphery of the peyote’ and retained its heart in San Luis Potosí where the Huichol continue to make pilgrimages today.<sup>9</sup> Through close investigation of their oral and artistic histories as well as information gathered by early missionaries, it is said that their political and spiritual leader at the time was named *Maxakuaxi*, or Deer-Tail, who worked to unite the Huichol, Cora and Tepehuan people to flee into the Western Sierra Madre when the Toltec Empire occupied the area.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, it is calculated that the Huicholes along with the Coras and Tepehuanos began to settle the region where they currently live as early as 200-700 A.D. during the period in which the Teucaltichlán Tradition of Western Mexico is believed to have built a series of circular temples similar to the *tukipa* found today in Huichol ceremonial centers.<sup>11</sup> Soon after, the Chalchihuites Kingdom was established in the area east of the Sierra Madre. As with the onset of the Toltec Empire, the Huicholes did not fall under the dominion of the Chalchihuites as they were able to escape into the immensity of the Sierra. Although the Huichol were never subdued by the Chalchihuites, they were nonetheless influenced by their culture formed in La Quemada, Zacatecas. Similarly, all researchers agree that the Aztec Empire was never able to subjugate the *Wixaritari*.

### Colonial History

The Huicholes were mentioned in Spanish missionary records as early as 1579, just a few decades after the fall of the Aztec Empire. As the Spanish began to penetrate the western regions of Mexico in search of silver and gold, the Huicholes began to lose segments of their land, namely on the coast of Nayarit. In 1550, the conquerors discovered silver west of the Huichol territory in what is today Zacatecas; this further threatened Huichol territory and led to a significant insurrection against the Spanish known as the ‘Chichimec War’. This particular rebellion lasted until 1592 and became the first of many subsequent uprisings against colonial and post-colonial governmental land encroachments and unwanted Spanish and *mestizo* intrusions on native land.

Towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the colonial regime built a series of catholic missions as well as presidios and small *mestizo* towns

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<sup>8</sup> Negrín. Op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.



around the mineral rich region on the periphery of Huichol territory. The missionaries unsuccessfully attempted to convert the natives of the region who chose to flee rather than populate the missions. To a large extent, these very same missions that were built within Huichol territory during the colonial period are presently either in ruins or have been transformed for indigenous ceremonial use. During this time, the Sierra Madre also served as a refuge for many indigenous people (and in some cases *mestizo* and Africans) fleeing the brutality of the Spanish colonial regime. Archeologist Phil Weigand states that during this period the Coras and Huicholes were “composed societies organized in a reactive manner in order to resist integration into the colonial system”.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the Huicholes were somewhat subdued by the Spanish in 1705 who, with the help of the Franciscan missionaries, organized them into three distinct communities. In 1722, some Huicholes actually aided the Spanish in ‘pacifying’ the neighboring Coras who had been much more defiant than the Huicholes and were consequently more strongly repressed. As a result, the Coras were forced by the Jesuit missionaries to relocate into towns rather than continue living in the dispersed *rancherías* where the Huicholes were able to remain.

### Post-Independence History

Post-independence Mexico did not bring about any significant changes in the way the governing state perceived and related to indigenous people. In fact, virtually the same ideology of assimilation and extermination continued to lead governmental policy towards the country’s native population. During the 1850’s the Liberals, led by Benito Juárez, introduced the Constitution of 1857 and a series of secularizing laws known as *La Reforma*. The 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution called for the expropriation of communal landholdings. Although the ban on communal land was said to mainly be aimed at the Catholic Church, the very foundation of indigenous communities was severely attacked as their right to autonomy was abolished. The Huicholes and their Indigenous neighbors were very quickly dispossessed of much of their land which was then transferred to the hands of powerful *mestizos* (already by 1800, *mestizos* made up over 70% of the population in the Sierra Madre).<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the drastic changes imposed by the laws of *La Reforma*, Manuel Lozada, a *mestizo* from the Sierra Madre, led a popular uprising against the Liberals from approximately 1854 until his assassination by government forces in 1873. This particular rebellion had as its foundation the participation of Coras, Huicholes and poor *mestizo* peasants and was aimed in a general way against the Liberal politics that strengthened the clout of a small emerging bourgeoisie. According to historian Jean Meyer, Lozada’s rebellion:

...in a general measure crystallized the resistance of the *pueblos*, up until then isolated in each ones particular brawls, against local adversaries. From here is born

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<sup>12</sup> Weigand, Phil. “Mexicaneros, tecuales, coras, huicholes y caxcanes” cited in Jean meyer, *Esperando a Lozada*. Guadalajara, Mexico: Editorial Hexágono, 1989, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Coyle, Philip. *From Flowers to Ash*. Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 2001, p. 84.

a casual coalition of many peasants, indigenous or not, with the Conservatives (in a very relative manner), with the Empire (in a much more obvious manner) and with the Church which is at the same time part of high society, with the government, and with the rural *pueblo*.<sup>14</sup>

This quote brings to light the complex and often antagonistic alliances the Huicholes forged with others in order to protect and uphold their territorial, political and cultural autonomy. Some anthropologists agree that as a result of the Lozada Rebellion, there was a revitalization of indigenous customs and forms of socio-political organization that had begun to fade under the colonial regime.

In respect to the increasing social discontent caused by the Constitution of 1857 and the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, the rebellion of Manuel Lozada is a predecessor of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. While a great majority of the country was deeply shaken by the Revolution, the call for electoral reform did not draw the Huicholes into the conflict as they did not participate in the national political system in the first place. On the other hand, Emiliano Zapata's cry for a revolution in land tenancy and justice and dignity for peasants and indigenous communities was perhaps the only issue of interest for the Huichol.<sup>15</sup> Later, the dramatic Catholic *Cristero* Rebellion (or *Cristiada*), centered in Jalisco during the 1920's and 1930's, did have an effect on the Huicholes as a few joined forces with the *Cristeros* in hopes of recuperating the land lost in previous decades. To a certain extent, the *Cristiada* divided the Huicholes as those from San Sebastián were largely pro-*Cristero* and those from Santa Catarina were anti-*Cristero*. Although the revolutionary Constitution of 1917 set the stage for reaffirming the fundamental rights of indigenous communities in Mexico, the actual restoration of some of the dispossessed land was not carried out until the Cárdenas Administration (1934-1940). Since then, the Huicholes have searched out colonial titles to regain much of the land that was lost since the Spanish conquest. However, this has been largely unsuccessful as the modern Mexican State has done very little to actively respond to the demands placed by the country's indigenous population.

With the establishment of the National Indigenist Institute (or INI) in 1951, the State has set out a series of policies allegedly aimed at the 'development' of indigenous communities throughout Mexico. Perhaps the most successful of these policies has been the replacement of traditional authorities with acculturated Huicholes who have often undermined the will and integrity of their communities, thus securing the State's economic and political interests in the region. In the next section, I will examine how these governmental policies are essentially flawed as they emerge from a grossly market oriented and racist conception of world organization. As a consequence of the INI's and other government institutions' unpopular intervention in the Huichol Sierra in the past four decades, the attitude that Huicholes have towards government projects is skeptical and in many cases adamantly resistant. The following section will discuss some of the notions that have driven the Mexican State's relations and policies regarding indigenous communities, and the Huichol in particular.

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<sup>14</sup> Meyer, Jean. Op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> Rojas. Op. cit., p. 160.

### **III. Developmentalism and Post-Revolutionary Mexican Indigenist Thought**

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient--dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.

-Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3-

Just as the West has created a set of policies, images, language, academia and institutions to represent and subsequently dominate the Orient, so too has the larger Global North done in regards to the Global South. *Developmentalist* thought is founded on a series of dichotomies that separate what is termed the developed from the underdeveloped, the proactive North from the passive South, Western peoples from non-Western peoples. In this way, the discourse constructed around development remains one in which those who disagree with the dominant capitalist mode of development, or those who propose alternative modes are either cast out or made to significantly compromise in favor of the ruling class. As Arturo Escobar points out in *Encountering Development*, this discourse presents a social reality much like that of *orientalism*, one that legitimizes the dominant socio-economic current while disqualifying and even obstructing others. The “Third World” has precisely been constructed along these discursive lines that eliminate the political, economic, ecological, cultural and geographical complexities in this region of the world and replace it as a “space for ‘subject peoples’”.<sup>16</sup> In the following section, I will look at how the general discourse of free market development directly influences the rhetoric and policies geared towards indigenous people, as it attempts, directly and/or indirectly, to place them in positions of subjugation. More specifically, I will analyze how through the INI (the National Indigenist Institute), the Mexican state has legitimized its projects and policies that continually favor the national and international corporate elite at the expense of the indigenous people they claim to serve.

As stated earlier, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 brought to center stage a series of complex problems stemming from the Colonial Era, most notably the necessity to establish a democratic state and execute seriously needed land reforms. The resistance that peasant and indigenous communities had put up forced the State to constitutionally recognize their right to participate in the national arena. In this sense, the Constitution of 1917 was truly revolutionary as it limited the presence of foreign exploitation of human and natural resources and instilled socialist laws including workers’ rights, universal education and the right of communal landholdings for the country’s indigenous and peasant population. But despite the fact that the Mexican peasants led by Emiliano Zapata were crucial in pushing forth the Revolution’s agenda, most of the discussion regarding

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<sup>16</sup> Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 7.

the place of the peasantry was controlled by the elite (as it is to this date). On a global scale, this discursive reality is all too common, as the elite tend to treat the poor as subjects that need to be influenced, controlled and appropriated into the State's structures.<sup>17</sup> So in order to maintain its 'revolutionary' legitimacy throughout the past century, the Mexican government has depended on the perpetuation of populist iconography and institutions that result in a false or in the best of cases superficial union between the State and the country's 'peripheral' groups.

Because of the populist rhetoric and imagery as well as the opposing groups that partook in the Revolution, Mexico's ruling class, specifically under the PRI, has had to accept that it can neither make possible the full privatization of the State's industries and resources, nor fully restore the lands and sovereignty of the native communities.<sup>18</sup> One result of this is the formation of hybrid discourses that use national icons to push forth 'modernity' and universalize capital, consumer goods and labor. According to Guillermo de la Peña, the concept of citizenry has subsequently been used by the State to validate its complete political domination and legitimize its prohibition of parallel governments that threaten its hegemony. So while the discourse appears to be a hybrid one, the national profile is based on a Western capitalist identity that erases the social and cultural diversity of the country.<sup>19</sup> Essentially, the Mexican State has struggled between following the more progressive ideals of the constitution that uphold diversity, or bowing down to the mandate of the Global North (specifically the United States) and a homogenizing market system. More often than not, this internal struggle has ceded to the latter's powerful interests, ultimately contradicting the very laws established in the constitution and further corroding any possibilities for a just dialogue with the country's subaltern groups. However, it is important to remember that although the State has attempted to absorb the indigenous and peasant classes into a westernized *mestizo* sphere, resistance and fragmentation within the national body points to a pseudo-harmonious union between the State and the general population.

The need for the Mexican government to recognize peasants and indigenous peoples' demands led to post-revolutionary policies that allowed these sectors to have a degree of autonomous organization. Nonetheless, this granting of a space for autonomy and permissible protest has been accompanied by the government's own attempts to assimilate indigenous communities into Western capitalistic modes of political, social and economic organization. This last strategy is by far more pervasive, as throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Mexican State developed a sophisticated populist rhetoric to co-opt the various subaltern groups that placed demands on the government.<sup>20</sup> Basically, this signified a creation of an institutional language and imagery based on the ideals of the Revolution while the political body that ruled Mexico remained virtually unchanged.

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<sup>17</sup> Chaterjee, Partha. "La nación y sus campesinos" in Silvia Rivera and Rossana Barragán, *Debates PostColoniales-- Una introducción a los estudios de la subalternidad*. La Paz, Bolivia: Editorial Historias, 1997, p. 195.

<sup>18</sup> Roux, Rhina. "Historia y comunidad estatal en México" in *Viento del Sur*, No. 15, (July, 1999), p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> De la Peña, Guillermo. "Apuntes sobre los indigenismos en Jalisco" in Rodolfo Fernández, et. al., *Estudios del hombre 13 y 14, Jalisco al cierre del siglo XX, Lecturas antropológicas*. Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2002, pp. 95-97

<sup>20</sup> Rhoux. Op. cit., p. 53

Consequently, this has given the Mexican government an international appearance of being favorable and even celebratory of the popular sectors of its society at the same time as it imposes neo-liberal policies often dictated from the Global North that devastate the very foundations of Mexico's aboriginal cultures. In other words, the construction of the Mexican nation has meant the destruction of its various *pueblos*, replacing communal networks with a faceless market culture.

Borrowing from Said's introductory statements in *Orientalism*, the Mexican State has managed to organize "a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators" to set in place institutions, academia and policies that speak for and control the subaltern groups of the country. In this sense, the relation that Said describes between the West and the Orient is similar to that between the Mexican State and indigenous people: the former see the latter as subjects that impede development. According to this line of thought, the subalterns must adapt to the workings of the modern State and essentially face the degradation if not total obliteration of their traditional forms of organization.<sup>21</sup> Escobar notes that the discourse of development is founded on the belief that 'economic progress' must be accompanied by the sacrifice of local and traditional forms of political, cultural and economic organization. Under this paradigm, the end of capitalist economic growth eventually will justify the means, no matter how irreversible the damage.

Escobar analyzes how the discourse of development essentially shapes the social, political and economic reality of the world's population, specifically of those in the Global South. This construction includes the theory that outlines the knowledge and policies regarding development, the "system of power that regulates it", and most importantly, the subjectivity that results from everyday people's internalization and conditioning of seeing themselves as either 'developed' or 'underdeveloped' subjects.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, this discourse influences both the dominant as well as the subordinate classes, allowing for those that follow the official discursive line to adopt a sense of superiority over those who do not. By ignoring differing perspectives regarding development, the official public discourse attempts to give an image of consensus between the State and indigenous people. At the same time, the State hides the coercion it uses to create this image of consensus, as well as the opposition it faces from the communities. Later on, we will see how the alliance between the State and the Huicholes who favor 'development' is instrumental in order for the government to carry out its projected plans in the region and give the appearance of the native peoples' consent of the projects.

Because development requires a strong hegemonic presence in order to function, the Mexican State has consistently worked to destroy people's communal links and replace them with ties to the capitalist market.<sup>23</sup> However, the PRI party was careful (at

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<sup>21</sup> Historically, the only aspect of indigenous traditions that the Mexican State has allowed to exist in the national discourse has been that of folklore; an aspect that has been primarily marketed in the tourism sector.

<sup>22</sup> Escobar. Op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Rhoux. Op. cit., p. 49.

least through the decade of the 1970's) to not display itself as an obvious puppet of the Global North, particularly of the United States. Consequently, the PRI exploited its revolutionary rhetoric which was laced with paternalistic and racist notions of the subaltern groups of Mexico who purportedly would never escape their marginal conditions without the direct assistance of the State. Since the Revolution, the Mexican government established several national and local institutions to “negotiate” and “mediate” the relation between native communities and the national government.<sup>24</sup> The INI was fundamental for the State’s penetration into the indigenous communities not yet subordinate to the market system. The Huichol communities were a major challenge for the INI as they had a history of successful resistance to State imposed structures and their territory was virtually impenetrable to outsiders.

### The Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI)

According to Karen Reed, author of *The Huicholes and the INI*, Mexico has won worldwide praise for its approach to indigenous peoples’ issues and has served as an inspiration to numerous countries for its *indigenist* policy.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps Mexico’s humanity towards indigenous people is somewhat true if compared to other countries which have virtually exterminated the native population, or if one concentrates on the numerous nostalgic *indigenist* murals and books produced after the Revolution. What Reed and others seem to have overlooked is that this supposed humanity is not based on the respect and fomentation of indigenous culture and worldview *per se*, but on its replacement with foreign and often destructive cultural formations that ultimately benefit the status quo. In other words, the State will offer a measure of respect as long as the subalterns conform to its value system and political economic agenda.

Reed’s fieldwork was carried out in the midst of the INI’s initial policies in the Huichol Sierra during the decade of 1960. The content of her book mirrors the perceptions many outsiders have of indigenous people, largely that they are an unproductive and marginal sector of society since they do not have what it takes to be active consumers on a national or international scale. The notions that embody her work are compatible with those held by the INI’s own coordinators. Essentially, it is the academic tendency to view and portray subordinate groups as lacking consciousness and as being passive victims of history.<sup>26</sup> As a matter of fact, Reed states that the INI’s goal is to meet the promises made by the Revolution and be an “instrument” to protect indigenous people and their rights as they are “pacifists” by nature and prefer to “escape rather than resist” those who threaten their wellbeing.<sup>27</sup>

While many like Reed imagine themselves as compassionate and favorable to indigenous people and their general welfare, there is a definite paternalism and outright racism that guides their theories about the development of peripheral communities. All

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<sup>24</sup> De la Peña. Op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> Reed, Karen. *Los huicholes y el INI*. Mexico: SEP and INI, 1972, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Dube, Saurah. *Sujetos Subalternos*. Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2001, p.44.

<sup>27</sup> Reed. Op. cit., p. 83.

too often, the so-called *indigenists* cannot recognize that these communities can make their own decisions and contributions independently from the elite power structures. This said, there is a fundamental problem when policy is shaped by institutions and people who believe they know what is best for a series of complex communities that they have little knowledge or genuine respect for.

Accordingly, the role of the anthropologists has been central for the INI, as he or she is considered to be the person best equipped for the direction of policy in indigenous areas. Reed points out that the centrality of anthropologists is due to their knowledge of how to “integrate” and “develop” non-Western peoples; they are the link between the modern *mestizo* Mexico and the backward and naïve Indian. Reed describes how within the INI, the lead anthropologist for each base is to facilitate “cultural change”, determine which aspects of indigenous culture are “necessary” and which are not, and finally “guide”, “coordinate” and “evaluate” these transformations within native communities.<sup>28</sup> De la Peña points out that the *indigenist* definition of acculturation can be described as “the gradual introduction of Western elements in the daily lives of indigenous people, supposedly in exchange for indigenous elements that enrich the national culture. This latter part tends to be simply understood as the commercialization of craftwork” or consumable folklore.<sup>29</sup> The duties set by the INI for the anthropologists demonstrate the attitude guiding this particular entity, bringing to question the very foundations of Mexican *indigenist* thought. Clearly the anthropologist is given the power to judge the relevancy of each ethnic group’s cultural institutions and determine how they need to be restructured in order to conform to the larger national trends. Said more blatantly, the academic is set out to find ways in which the State can subjugate the politics and economics of these societies.

In his study on Mexican *indigenisms*, De la Peña points out that the INI, established in 1948, was founded on the ideals of “classical Mexican *indigenism*” that upheld the role of the anthropologist as the executor of public policy in native communities.<sup>30</sup> According to De la Peña, classical Mexican *indigenism* is based on the recognition of ethnic diversity as a fundamental feature of Mexicanness, a decentralized State (that has often led to inconsistent policy) and the participation of civil society in issues pertaining to indigenous peoples’ development. Keeping this general *indigenist* theory in mind, the INI has shifted its rhetorical emphasis along with the national social, political and economic trends. De la Peña indicates three distinct models followed by the INI: 1) the *coordinating model* based on anthropological investigation as the guiding factor for each of the INI’s regional centers, 2) the *sectarian model* that shifted the INI’s role from one of coordinating to actually executing policy (this came as a result of the State’s centralization of the institution) and 3) the *self-determination model* that upholds multiculturalism and supports autonomous and self-sufficient projects in each community; here the INI’s role is to lend out human and material resources.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Reed. Op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> De la Peña. Op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>30</sup> De la Peña. Op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 98-99.

In theory and in practice, all three of these models have shown to be contradictory and/or insufficient as they continue to be formulated by individuals that often have little connection with the communities, and because of the lack of consistency between each administration. In fact, the current administration's claim of support for sustainable development and the participation of civilian organizations is, for most people active in sustainable projects in the Huichol Sierra, an absolute lie. Variations in the institution's rhetoric do not affect the larger developmentalist trends followed by the State. Certainly, the State, and therefore the INI's driving force, has been to acculturate indigenous people into national society via colonial and classical assimilationist models.<sup>32</sup> More often than not, the results of the INI's policies have fractured the socio-economic, political and cultural integrity of local communities.

### The INI in the Huichol Sierra

The theory is that only when the Huichol no longer has to constantly preoccupy himself with simple subsistence, he will have time to think of other things, such as education for himself and his children, and only then will he have funds and time to carefully look for correct medical care in the city in place of solely trying to cure himself or trust in the magic cures or in plants within the Sierra. (Reed, p. 79)

On July 8, 1960, the Centro Coordinador Indigenista Cora-Huichol was established based on the notion that the Huicholes and Coras presented "sensibly low standards of living, a precarious economy, great isolation and unhealthy living conditions."<sup>33</sup> While it is true that the Huichol and Cora communities experience a number of difficulties, particularly during drought years, it can be argued that their standards of living were (and are) not nearly as disastrous as many outsiders like to think. Obviously there exists a difference in opinion concerning what is and what is not a healthy lifestyle or a good standard of living. However, the dominant attitude overwhelmingly favors Western models and standards, from education and medicine to economics. More specifically, the aim of acculturation is an economic one as it looks to build the buying power of indigenous people to give them "larger participation in the national economy".<sup>34</sup> Thus the launching of "strategic" government subsidized stores (CONASUPO) in 1967 that offer assorted items such as soft drinks, corn tortilla mix, cigarettes, pesticides, candy, beer and in some cases, beadwork.

One of the first projects carried out by the INI was the construction of schools in several Huichol communities as they are a means by which the national discourse can enter the communities via the students. In this way, the youth ideally become more accepting of cultural change from the start.<sup>35</sup> Previously, schools in the region were managed and taught by Franciscan nuns and priests, but under the INI the teachers would be *mestizo*, and later, bilingual natives of each community. According to Juan Negrín, the

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<sup>32</sup> Torres Contreras, José de Jesús. *El hostigamiento a "el costumbre" huichol: los procesos de hibridación social*. Zamora, Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán; Universidad de Guadalajara, 2000, p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Reed. Op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 101-103.



requirements for being a bilingual teacher were only to have completed the sixth grade; in this sense, the education happened to be of an inferior academic level to that given by the Franciscans. Furthermore, the position of a teacher has served as a springboard for governmental positions in the Sierra: “The [Mexican] government eventually said if you are going to become an important member of the community you are going to have to read and write and you are going to have to respond to the knowledge of the outside world.”<sup>36</sup> The Mexican government’s offer of political positions for many of the bilingual teachers was essentially the beginning of separating those who were elected by the Huichol communities for traditional political posts, and those who were selected by the State to make decisions regarding the region. The latter consistently ignore the positions of the traditional representatives, acceding to the will of the State. More often than not, the bilingual teachers have shown little interest in preserving the traditions of their communities, and as a result have actively supported outside interventions from which they may financially benefit.

Reed explains how, in order to have a more objective stance, the INI searches for teachers that are “ethnically similar” yet stand apart from the community. She mentions that teachers are not to involve themselves in political issues, much less become elected officials. This however contradicts her later mention of the teachers being called “promoters” as their job is to promote *mestizo* culture. Being a promoter hardly seems to be a neutral or objective position within a community. As stated by Juan Negrín, the government did in fact give political positions to teachers, further contradicting the rhetoric espoused by the INI. Currently there are a number of teachers who serve political posts both inside as well as outside of their native communities.

The first schools were established in 1963 in Tuxpan de Bolaños and Ocota de la Sierra, and in 1964 in San Andrés Cohamiata.<sup>37</sup> However, by 1967 the schools in the Sierra had a large desertion rate which led to the creation of boarding schools. Inscription rates are relatively low because of the curriculum’s lack of relevancy to Huichol realities as well as the larger preoccupation that the form of education administered will internalize concepts of cultural and racial inferiority amongst the youth.<sup>38</sup> This is not to say that the general presence of schools is one that is bad. For one, more Huicholes are bilingual which helps them negotiate when they are outside of their territory. Secondly, there are some teachers who have genuinely served their communities and helped foment the youth’s respect for their own culture. Nevertheless, one of the major complaints I have received from the Huicholes is that there is a serious need for “conscious teachers” who can help the communities make better decisions concerning the type of development that benefits them. Currently, the curriculum undoubtedly continues to be one that mirrors a whitened, westernized Mexico which collides with traditional beliefs and institutions. This said, schools are at odds with several aspects of Huichol cosmogony and veer away from stimulating cultural pride amongst the youth.

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Juan and Yvonne Negrín, March 2, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> De la Peña. Op. cit., p.100.

<sup>38</sup> Torres Contreras. Op. cit., pp. 190-193.

Simultaneous to the establishment of schools, the INI began other interventions such as the construction of landing strips to facilitate the penetration of government officials, and the carrying out of various assessments based on the notion that there was “nothing” in the region. These allowed the INI to execute a “selective acculturation” process that chose which aspects of traditional culture would be preserved and which ones would be discarded and replaced with Western practices.<sup>39</sup> This led to the introduction of the hand mill for corn, the radio, and the replacement of aboriginal animals for “high grade” cattle. Although several of these items have been welcomed by the communities, the introduction of others, namely agrochemicals, caused negative short and long-term effects. Furthermore, some of the government officials in charge of bringing these products into the Huichol Sierra were known for extreme corruption. It is worth mentioning Dr. Enrique Campos, a veterinarian who was partially in charge of introducing some of the high grade cattle into the Huichol Mountains (he was also one of Karen Reed’s main informants). Dr. Campos actually spent nine months in jail for selling the improved cattle stock for his own benefit and knowingly replacing it with tuberculosis-infected cattle, thus causing a devastating tuberculosis epidemic in the Huichol Sierra in the 1970’s.

The INI also occupied itself with introducing “better quality” seeds for higher yields and supposed higher nutritional value than the native seeds. At the same time, the institution established the first CONASUPO stores that sold these seeds and the pesticides required for them. These stores were a major feature of the Plan Huicot which will be discussed later. The State’s stores moved to commercialize Huichol craftwork such as beaded jewelry and masks that are now internationally known and bought. Through the commercialization of their crafts, some Huicholes have found a relatively dependable livelihood while others have been consistently cheated by the intermediaries that sell their work. The government stores have actually brought down and fixed the market price of their crafts; in this way, the Huicholes have lost the ability to negotiate prices and have continuously lost money in this tourist oriented market.

The goal of the government stores was not only to supply the Huicholes with packaged goods but also initiate them into a consumer oriented society. One consequence of orienting the Huicholes towards the market system is the introduction of a defined social stratification based on those who have buying power (usually store owners and some teachers) and those who do not. As more outsiders entered Huichol territories, namely because of the construction of the first roads in 1975, many Huicholes became conscious of the material objects that the outsiders carried with them. Yvonne Negrín has worked with the Huicholes since the early 1970’s and feels that a major transformation since she became acquainted with the Huichol community of Santa Catarina is materialism:

...when I say materialism I mean that my early experience with the Huichol is that they didn’t think of themselves as poor and they had a certain pride. And you know, the more and more they came into contact with the outside world and were told “you poor things you don’t have this, you don’t have that, you don’t have the other”, it

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<sup>39</sup> Reed. Op. cit., p. 93.

was like a form of brainwashing, they began to feel poor, they began to develop new needs.<sup>40</sup>

Although previous to these roads the Huicholes were mobile and had contact with *mestizo* Mexico, they did so on their own terms. This changed as the INI began implementing their projects and more outsiders entered the Sierra with their own notions of what the communities needed in order to live ‘correctly’. As can be seen in much of the INI’s rhetoric, the Huicholes were viewed by academics and politicians as a people who had virtually nothing and therefore needed everything brought to them.

Healthcare and medicine is the kind of an area in which the Huicholes were perceived to be particularly deficient. Therefore, the INI assumed the role of introducing “correct medical care” to the Huicholes; certainly this has meant Western or allopathic medicine which is intended to substitute traditional Huichol medicine. Reed and others place great emphasis on the perceived sickness of the Indians and the inefficiency of their own medicine. Westerners tend to degradingly term non-Western medicine as “magical”, hinting at its uselessness. However, people who have judged the Huichol and other indigenous people’s medicine as useless know very little about it. *Maraakate*, or shamans, possess a great deal of knowledge regarding illness and cures, for they are doctors. But because of the Mexican government’s imposition of Western structures, the role of the *maraakate* both as doctors as well as political figures has consistently been delegitimized.

Nevertheless, Western medicine has been able to contribute to curing some illnesses unknown to the Huichol, illnesses brought about by the Western world for which the Huichol have no immunity to. The INI has fallen short of creating clinics that can solve health problems in the Sierra and Huicholes continue having to go to cities in order to get treated for more serious illnesses such as tuberculosis and cancer. The trek to the cities from the Sierra winds up being extremely expensive and all too often *mestizo* hospitals mistreat and reject indigenous people out of racism and classism. Because of the government’s own inefficient health care system, Rocío Echevarría and others created the *Casa de la Salud* (House of Health) in Guadalajara to receive and treat the Huicholes and other indigenous people of the area. In my own trips to the Sierra, Huicholes mentioned that the government still did not meet its promise of creating dependable clinics that were also inclusive of local medical practices. In addition, the influx of junk food (in great part because of the INI’s projects) has created a series of health problems among the younger population.

In addition to attempted changes in the areas of education and healthcare, the INI also has created various political councils that serve as intermediaries between the traditional Huichol authorities and the municipal, state and federal governments. The three main councils are the Consejo de Bienes Comunales (Council of Communal Goods), the Consejo Supremo Huichol (Supreme Huichol Council), and the Unión de Comunidades Indígenas Huicholas de Jalisco (Union of Indigenous Huichol Communities of Jalisco) which supplanted the Consejo Supremo Huichol in 1990. These

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Juan and Yvonne Negrín, March 2, 2004.

political entities have been a mixed blessing for the Huichol communities. While they have at times served the purpose of presenting a legit Huichol opinion before the State, they have also usurped the powers of the traditional governors creating conflict within the communities over who are the legitimate representatives. According to various investigators, the government created these councils in order to dispossess the Huicholes of their political sovereignty.

Created in the 1960's, the Consejo de Bienes Comunales, has for the most part been an effective tool for the mediation between the communities and the Mexican State. Yvonne Negrín mentions that prior to the creation of this council, Huicholes hid from State officials when the latter entered their territory. Hiding was a form of resistance to direct negotiation with the *mestizo* political system and allowed for the Huicholes to maintain a parallel government to that of the State's. But eventually, as government authorities and other outsiders became more interested in the region, the Huicholes realized that evasion was no longer an effective tool. To the Mexican government's dismay, the three Consejo de Bienes Comunales representing each of the Sierra communities, mirrored and sided with the traditional government much more than with the State. In the past, this council has achieved the purpose of corresponding with the Mexican government at the same time as it has allowed for the traditional governors to maintain their say, therefore keeping a sort of balance between Western and local governmental models.<sup>41</sup>

While there is one Consejo de Bienes Comunales for each community, the Consejo Supremo Huichol (also established in the 1960's) designated one Huichol to represent all three of the communities before the State. This representative was elected by the INI. The first Consejo Supremo Huichol representative was Pedro de Haro from San Sebastián, a *mestizo* raised by Huicholes within Huichol tradition. De Haro stands even today as one of the most effective and famous Huichol leaders as he was and is considered to represent the territorial, political and cultural interests of all three communities. Under his leadership, the San Sebastián area actually regained much of the land it had lost to *mestizo* land encroachers. Despite being *mestizo*, the Huichol consider him a sincere spokesperson of their interests as he has devoted his life to their defense. Today he continues to fight against outside impositions and is in fact a *maraakame*. In a recent speech given in March of 2004 at the National Indigenous Congress, de Haro made the following statements:

The government that exists now is not a government—it goes against the current—and it goes in the temptation of money, or in pure revenge. But they do not realize that all the money is lent. The day in which the Earth lifts up its basket they will not know how to manage...In Mexico the politicians are in a bramble and don't know how to manage. They say they want to defend the communities but what are they going to defend—if they want to sell it all. Really the laws were done an injustice with the reform of Article 27 of the Constitution.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Juan and Yvonne Negrín, March 2, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Verra Herrera, Ramón. "Reunión de Congreso Nacional Indígena Región Centro-Pacífico: A contrapelo de la clase política" in *Ojarasca*, No. 83, (March, 2004).

Unfortunately, de Haro's successor, Maurilio de la Cruz Ávila, brought about mass corruption and conflict within the Huichol communities. Under de la Cruz Ávila's leadership, *mestizo* land encroachment increased and massive logging and drug plantations became a serious problem for the territorial, political and economic integrity of the region. Sentenced to jail for murdering his wife and lover, the government released him from jail in order to become de Haro's successor.<sup>43</sup> In 1990, the council was terminated by popular demand due to de la Cruz Ávila's undemocratic and corrupt presidency (he remained president of the council for several terms without holding elections). However, since then, he has run for municipal governor of Mezquitic under the center-left PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) and more recently allied himself with the far-right PAN party which is infamous in the region for permitting clear cutting of the forests. Around 2001, de la Cruz Ávila was kicked out of the headquarters of his community of San Sebastián and resettled in the outskirts to the territory of Barranca del Tule which is heavily influenced by *mestizos*. It is said that the *caciques* that exert power over this region are now involved in drug trafficking as well as in future plans to place a *maquiladora* in this area of the Sierra. Both of these developments pose a clear threat to the Huicholes' control over their territory.

De Haro and de la Cruz Ávila's presidencies show how contrasting these leaders can be, as it is difficult to find a person that will genuinely represent all three of the Huichol communities without falling into the web of corruption and self-interest. The Unión de Comunidades Indígenas Huicholas de Jalisco (UCIHJ) was formed as a replacement for the Consejo Supremo Huichol in order to give leadership to the president of Bienes Comunales who is considered to be most knowledgeable and capable of working across these divergent systems of governance. The elected president, whose term lasts one year, not only makes political and economic decisions for the three communities but also receives and administers money for development in the region. As with the councils, the UCIHJ confronts the problem of choosing people who legitimately serve the interests of the communities. In addition, the UCIHJ has accepted various development projects without properly evaluating them and without discussing them with the Huichol communities. As a result, many Huicholes agree that it is the same group of *caciques* who continue to be favored by these projects. As it stands today, the officials of Bienes Comunales no longer tend to consult the traditional elder authorities, who are reluctant of outside intrusions, and prefer going directly to the UCIHJ, eliminating the voice of the elders in major decisions.

#### **IV. Previous State Development Projects in the Huichol Region**

In this way, proletarianization and ecological destruction, ethnocide and ecocide, integration into "development" and poor use of natural resources are not, in their most recent version, but two faces of the same process. Both processes (one interior another exterior, one ecological and another social) of one same

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<sup>43</sup> Various interviews both inside and out of the Sierra, July, 2003.

face: the gradual substitution of the diverse forms of peasant and indigenous economies for that based on the massive production of merchandise and on the accumulation of capital.

-Víctor Toledo-<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the various State interventions discussed in the previous chapter, there are several other projects that both the INI and the Mexican federal and state governments have pushed forth within the Sierra and around the Sierra's perimeters. In the following, I will discuss two major development projects that have had significant consequences for some of the Huichol communities. Once again, the main premise behind these projects is the substitution of local indigenous structures of organization with Western models considered to be politically, economically and culturally superior.

### The Plan Huicot

Named after the region comprising the Huichol, Cora and Tepehuan communities, the Plan Huicot was part of the larger Plan Lerma, a series of intensive State projects geared towards the development of the occidental region of Mexico in the 1960's and '70's. The objective of the Plan Huicot was to promote the development of these three indigenous groups as well as some peripheral *mestizo* communities that "have remained at the margins of all human progress, and live at primitive levels".<sup>45</sup> Once again, the notion of this state of primitivism and non-development was based on the fact that these communities remained outside of the Western capitalist paradigm. According to this line of thought, not subscribing to developmentalist models essentially means to be backward and uncivilized. Thus the Huicot region was targeted with support from the United State's own Alliance for Progress which sought the development of commercial, export-oriented agriculture in Latin America.<sup>46</sup>

The governmental documents that outline the plan begin with an overview of the region's geography and demographics. The principal sources for the government's synopsis are the INI, the Franciscan Religious Order and a survey carried out by the National Commission for the Eradication of Malaria. There was no consulting of any non-governmental entity that might have information about the region and much less of the indigenous communities being targeted. It is notable that the government places the total Huichol population both inside and out of the Sierra at 8,291, whereas the general established number is roughly 20,000.<sup>47</sup> This means that from its formation, the Plan Huicot sketches a territory far less inhabited than in reality. One reason for this is the government's own interest in removing land from the Huicholes for resource extraction and cattle ranching. In fact, many government officials and *mestizos* held the view that all

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<sup>44</sup> Eloy Rodríguez, Luis. *Los huicholes y su relocalización involuntaria por el proyecto hidroeléctrico Aguamilpa, Nayarit con algunas particularidades en los ejidos de Colorado de la Mora y Playa de Golondrinas*. Mexico City: UNAM undergraduate thesis, 1994, pp. 38-39.

<sup>45</sup> Estados Unidos Mexicanos. "Plan Lerma de Asistencia Técnica: Operación Huicot". Guadalajara, Mexico, (May, 1966), p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Torres Contreras. Op. cit., p. 200.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

“unused” land should be given to the Mexican government for “other purposes”.<sup>48</sup> After all, these folks perceived the Huicholes and other Indians as passive and lazy people who had an excess of land. Not using it for “productive” purposes therefore meant that they were undeserving of it.

The plan’s documents repeatedly speak of the Huicot region as being backward and miserable due to its inhabitants’ passivity towards the outside world’s transformations. Because of the Indian’s passive role, the State needs to take on the active role of fundamentally changing indigenous communities into productive entities: “Here, like in many other aspects, *everything is yet to be done*; as observed in the area of nutrition, housing, dress, health, culture, etc.”<sup>49</sup> The concept that “everything is yet to be done” directly contradicts decades of anthropological studies that detail the elaborate food stuffs, clothing, housing and culture of these very communities. It thus becomes obvious that the government’s view of *having* is based on Western values and constructs. This is particularly true in regards to economic models. According to the dominant perception of what a healthy economy is, the Huichol economic system based on self-sufficiency was and is null. The Plan Huicot would therefore bring them the basis of a capitalist economy, including foreign investment and credit.

Throughout this particular document, as well as in others, the government likes to think of itself as a protector of the Indians from the *mestizos* who are ready to take advantage of the first’s ignorance. According to the government, this supposed ignorance can be manifested in the way the Huicholes see territorial boundaries and disputes:

It must be clarified that the Huichol settlements do not limit themselves to the authorized territories in the mentioned communities [the three communities plus their annexes]: formerly the Huichol area was much larger, but the creation of some *mestizo ejidos*<sup>50</sup> has come to lesion the indigenous patrimony, reducing their land, reality that the ignorance and ingenuity of the Indian cannot comprehend; the segregated parts of the Sierra are territories inherited from their grandparents, and they continue to occupy them feeling themselves as the proprietors, with the firm hope that they will receive justice, have their rights met.<sup>51</sup>

This quotation not only demonstrates the lack of understanding the Mexican officials have of Huichol land tenancy, but also shows their sense of the racial superiority of the white and *mestizo* world. Once again, indigenous people are portrayed as naïve and passive humans that need to be taught “proper” forms of territorial organization, i.e. private property. Furthermore, the outsiders that design projects like the Plan Huicot either seem to make little or no effort to comprehend native institutions and organization, or simply do not understand them, so consequently they invalidate them.

The issue of land is central as it is the essence of any community’s livelihood. By the mid-twentieth century, the Mexican government had begun to see that the Huicot

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<sup>48</sup> Reed. Op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>49</sup> Operación Huicot. Op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> Agricultural unit, often held in common, established by the Mexican State after the Revolution of 1910.

<sup>51</sup> Operación Huicot. Op. cit., p. 78.

region was rich with natural resources that could be exploited by private and public enterprises. With the value of their territory being discovered by outsiders, the Huicholes' use of land became subject to criticism as they were not considered to be productive with it. The following is a quote from the Plan Huicot's outline which further discredits the Huicholes' relation to their land:

For lack of infrastructure, the forests have not been industrially taken advantage of; forests that, because of ignorance, the Huichol has come to destroy, be it by irrational logging, be it by fires that he deliberately provokes year after year before the beginning of the rains. In the mind of the indigenous person, these fires can primordially obey to the following reasons: 1) Form clouds with the produced smoke, and with them propel the rain, 2) Burn the dry brush to prepare the new harvests, 3) Destroy the grazing land to drive away the *mestizos* and their cattle.<sup>52</sup>

The authors of this plan add that the Huicholes' ignorance is attributed to their lazy nature, their poor nutrition and precarious living that would allegedly affect any person's judgment. These statements are bogus to anyone who has any knowledge of the Huicholes or of other indigenous groups that have received similar denigration. However, these commentaries go beyond lies, they are based on the concept that the Western white man is racially superior as is his framework for organizing the world. Following this construction, Western man's models must be adapted by all as they are the only acceptable form of land tenancy. Moreover, it is extremely ironic that the government accuses the Huicholes of destroying their forests simply because it is widely acknowledged that they have preserved the integrity of their territory throughout the centuries, if not millennia, they have inhabited it. Rather, it is the government and other outsiders who first began to destroy and irrationally log these same forests.

In fact, initial problems with logging began to appear with the first roads put in by the government under the Plan Huicot in the early seventies. As the roads were being built into the Huichol Sierra, trees were inevitably cut down. However, logging was occurring well beyond the roads' delineation, timber companies quickly took advantage of the roads and penetrated the Huichol territory to clear cut their forests.<sup>53</sup> Although the Huicholes generally supported these roads in order to facilitate their own movement in and out of the Sierra, they did not envision that timber, beer and soft drink companies were to be major beneficiaries of them. The communities that became most affected by this intrusion were those that were already less self-sufficient, such as Tuxpan de Bolaños. On the other hand, Santa Catarina Cuexcomatlán remains until today relatively unfazed by these commercial enterprises as its inhabitants continue to be self-sufficient as well as resistant to most outsiders, especially those who come looking for profit.

Under the Plan Huicot, military officials and tourists also took advantage of the landing strips and roads to enter the region. De la Peña cites a comment made by one Huichol of the Santa Catarina community regarding the concrete effects of the Plan Huicot:

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<sup>52</sup> Operación Huicot. Op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Juan and Yvonne Negrín, March 2, 2004.



There came soldiers to build more landing strips and there came many jets, of the government and private...The people were scared of the soldiers...and the coming of tourists and *mirones* [voyeurs]...it was something very bothersome.<sup>54</sup>

De la Peña also mentions the general competition between different governmental agencies over the Huichol territory, something that resulted in a great waste of money through corruption and abandoned or useless projects. What became even more problematic was the flux of soft money into the hands of intermediaries and businessmen, specifically the *caciques* who gained significant power under the government's projects. These Huichol *caciques* quickly started to usurp the power from the elected Huichol officials and *maraakate* by forming ties with the government and some of the neighboring *mestizos*. At this time, the Mexican government created a series of political posts that rivaled the traditional leaders and backed the new local capitalists. Although the Plan Huicot stopped functioning by the mid-1970's, its effects were long felt, particularly because it was a period that disenfranchised the Huicholes from much of their land.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, both the public as well as the private sectors greatly benefited from the Plan Huicot as they gained access to the land they had longed for.

Roughly a decade after the Plan Huicot was formally terminated, the Aguamilpa Hydroelectric Dam project was executed. However, this project was the product not only of the Mexican government's interest in the region but also of the World Bank and private enterprise. In this sense, the Aguamilpa Dam is one of the first examples of these national and international interests operating in conjunction within Huichol communal lands.

### The Aguamilpa Hydroelectric Dam

The Aguamilpa region is located where the Huichol, Cora and *mestizo* territories converge at the foot of the Sierra region and the coast in the state of Nayarit. It is here where the Chapalagana, Huaynamota and Santiago rivers meet. The construction of the Aguamilpa Hydroelectric Dam on the Santiago River is rooted in Mexico's attempt to industrialize and exploit its natural resources. The development of the energy industry is a case in point as it continues to bring about discussion regarding the role of state and private enterprises in the development of national industries. Until the 1920's, Mexico's energy industry was largely controlled by foreign companies, this obviously began to change with the implementation of the Constitution of 1917 which authorizes the State as the owner and beneficiary of the nation's subsoil resources. As a result, most of the private energy companies were slowly nationalized and consolidated into the State owned National Commission of Electricity or CFE for its Spanish acronym.<sup>56</sup> By the 1960's, Mexico's push for modernization led the CFE to devise a series of dam projects that created mass human and ecological displacement as well as an increase in the national debt. These projects were based on the gigantic public works of the Global North and

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<sup>54</sup> De la Peña. Op. cit., pp. 102-103.

<sup>55</sup> Torres Contreras. Op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>56</sup> Eloy Rodríguez. Op. cit., p. 14.

paid no attention to local environmental and social conditions. The justification for such massive projects has been that there is an increasing demand in the country for electricity. But rather than regulate the consumption rates or promote alternatives, the solution has been to build more hydroelectric dams.

It is important to note that Carlos Salinas de Gortari's Administration (1988-1994) opened the doors for private enterprises to step up the exploitation of the nation's energy and oil resources. Precisely in 1988, there was a national resurgence to generate electric power through river basins; the Aguamilpa Dam (financed with World Bank loans, the CFE and Grupo ICA, a private construction enterprise) became part of a global initiative to take advantage of the Santiago River.<sup>57</sup> Although its preliminary planning began in 1954, it was not until 1980 that the engineering studies for the dam were carried out and until 1989 that the actual construction began.<sup>58</sup> Measuring 187 meters from the base to the top of the curtain, the Aguamilpa Dam stands to be one of the tallest such dams in the world and the third tallest in Mexico, after Chicoasén, Chiapas and Zimapán, Hidalgo.<sup>59</sup> The CFE and Grupo ICA place the dam's capacity at one million cubic meters of water that inundates a surface of thirteen thousand hectares that belonged to twenty-two *ejidos*, three communities, and three properties of the municipalities of El Nayar, Tepic and Santa María del Oro.<sup>60</sup> Of the affected communities, 61% were Huichol and the rest were *mestizo*. The Mexican government stated that the beneficiaries of this massive work would be the general national population as the generated energy would be used for the development of industrial centers and therefore boost the economy. According to the CFE, the principal objectives of the dam include the generation of electricity for urban centers, the development of the local fishing industry, construction of infrastructure in the area (such as roads and electricity), irrigation to boost crop production and flood control.<sup>61</sup>

What the government fails to properly acknowledge are both the short and long term social, environmental and financial costs of such an immense project. These include loss of fertile land, displacement of well established agrarian communities, environmental degradation, fundamental changes in the inhabitants' productive system, loss of subsistence and an ever growing national debt. Luis Eloy Rodríguez's thesis on the involuntary relocation of the affected Huichol communities of Playa de Golondrinas and Colorado de la Mora, stresses the socio-cultural component of displacement which threatens the continuity of traditional governments, social networks and family units, and causes both physical and emotional anxiety for the affected individuals.<sup>62</sup> However, the institutions and corporations that push these projects pay little attention to these factors and focus their attention on the technical components. In all cases I have analyzed, social and environmental impact studies are pursued after the technical project is in the process

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>58</sup> Comisión Federal Eléctrica and Grupo ICA. *Aguamilpa: Ojo de luz en territorio mágico*. Mexico City: Editorial Espejo de Obsidiana and Clio, 1994, CFE., pp. 74-79.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>62</sup> Eloy Rodríguez. Op. cit., p. 24.

of being constructed, leaving little space for the results of these studies to alter the original plans. Furthermore, the engineers and politicians who manage the projects lack understanding of the socio-cultural, political and economic organization of the affected people. This is particularly problematic when the government and its private associates operate in and around indigenous communities. As seen with the INI, both the government and private institutions present themselves as socially and environmentally responsible, but one must only look at the allocation of their funds to see where their major concerns lie. In the case of the Aguamilpa Dam, 32% of the funds (the World Bank's share) went to the construction of the dam, 41.8% (allotted by the private Grupo ICA) went towards the equipment, 5.6% of the CFE's funds went towards the dam and the resting 20.6% given by the CFE went towards relocation and indemnification, environmental impact studies, transmission lines and infrastructure (i.e. roads and temporary homes for the 5,000 workers).<sup>63</sup> These numbers indicate that funds for the social and environmental components of the project were shared with those going towards infrastructure to make possible the project, in this sense it is unclear how much of the funding actually went towards the communities' and the environment's welfare.

Under pressure from the civil community, the CFE created the Office of Readjustment and Indemnifications to investigate the affected communities in order to relocate them as best possible:

The strategy of these research groups was based on the direct relocation of the communities in question, to live with the inhabitants day and night and share their cycles of life, learn of their traditions in practice and not only in theory... From that first moment the analysis began and the proximity continued during a length of time that permitted the creation of authentic channels of communication that, at the same time, generated the trust to place doubts, unconformities and even stimulate the participation of the inhabitants in the configuration of this magnum project.<sup>64</sup>

According to the CFE, these studies allowed for a relocation that, through new housing, potable water, electricity and assistance in production, actually increased the standard of living of the communities. However, Eloy Rodríguez's study indicates that although there was an office created, the relocation actually did not include the alleged complex procedures to minimize negative socio-economic impacts; the process therefore can be described as outright displacement of several established communities. One concrete example of this is that the CFE's office executed an aerial inspection of the land rather than one by foot or truck as stated in official documents. Furthermore, 89% of the people interviewed by Eloy Rodríguez stated that they had not been approached to participate in the project; in fact, none of the local authorities were consulted or invited to participate.<sup>65</sup>

One of the major issues at hand was that of proper indemnification for the lost land. The Huichol communities were offered 500 pesos (50 dollars) per hectare while the *mestizo* communities were offered slightly more. The argument for such a low price was that the land was not considered to be high yielding. This however does not take into

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>64</sup> CFE. Op. cit., pp. 136-137.

<sup>65</sup> Eloy Rodríguez. Op. cit., p. 112

consideration the actual benefit reaped by the communities and the fact that they were later relocated to much poorer land. After several protests, the CFE conceded a 36% increase in the initial per hectare price.<sup>66</sup> While the entities involved in the dam's construction were eventually satisfied by the end results of the relocation, the Huicholes interviewed by Eloy Rodríguez stated the contrary. Much like other governmental initiatives in the region, State authorities entered the communities with little forthright information about the cost-benefit of the dam. In fact, the majority of the Huicholes were unclear about the consequences they would face with the construction of the dam (79.1% of those interviewed stated that they did not understand the project), the project was discussed only once, with no visual aids and in Spanish (many of the inhabitants, especially women, only speak Huichol and 93.4% stated they would have preferred an explanation in their own language).<sup>67</sup> Consequently, 62% believe that not all of the land was indemnified and 87.2% believe that the land was not properly compensated for.<sup>68</sup>

One last crucial point to bring up regarding the indemnification money is that although it was intended for the economic re-establishment of the communities, it actually was spent on more immediate needs such as clothes and household goods. As a result, few people invested their money in long-term productive needs. Eloy Rodríguez argues that this is due mainly to the lack of counseling given for these communities that had never handled these sums of money or dealt with the Rural Bank of Mexico. In the end, only nine of the twenty-two affected communities had the possibility of carrying out productive activities on their new land. In addition, the relocated communities were not given much of the infrastructure promised, such as potable water and social services.<sup>69</sup> Fundamentally, the State did not attempt to understand differences in traditional Huichol socio-economic and productive systems and eventually did very little consulting to make the relocation beneficial for the affected communities. During my own field research in the summer of 2003, I visited the Colonia Zitakua, a Huichol neighborhood on the outskirts of Tepic that has several families who were displaced by the construction of the Aguamilpa Dam. Because the land given to them by the government was so poor, they eventually moved to the city in order to make a living selling artwork and performing other remedial jobs. Many of those I spoke with showed clear skepticism towards governmental and private development projects, including those being carrying out presently both in the Sierra and on the coast.

The Plan Huicot, the Aguamilpa Dam and the various INI initiatives discussed in chapter III are examples of just some of the Mexican State's interventions in Huichol territory and affairs. Besides the inherent racial and developmentalist notions that embody these strategies, there is a clear problem with the lack of continuity within the federal, state and municipal governments. This absence of continuity translates into abandoned projects and a constant change of the governmental institutions and their bureaucracies. In this sense, there is very little possibility that the governmental initiatives will convince the indigenous communities that their economic and political

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<sup>66</sup> CFE. Op. cit., pp. 107-108.

<sup>67</sup> Eloy Rodríguez. Op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-135.

system is any better than their own. Yvonne Negrín points out that whenever there was a good INI program, the end of the six year presidential administration (*sexenio*) would come and the programs of the outgoing administration would be dismantled. This discontinuity obviously produces a tremendous waste of resources:

So the problem there was waste, they [the government] would spend all this time and money and energy in building up an infrastructure and then the *sexenio* changes, the new guy comes in, and there is no continuation of the programs that might be 80% finished. And that's it, the new guy comes in and he's got his own ideas and his new programs. So I saw a lot of what the government tried to do, not just in the Huichol Sierra, but anywhere in Mexico, ultimately was very wasteful.<sup>70</sup>

The government's inefficiency subsequently has led to stronger local support of non-governmental organizations operating in the zone around issues of sustainable development, health, education and land disputes.

Although some of the NGO's have been effective, the government, and the INI in particular, has been very jealous of any other outside entities working in the Huichol Sierra. This has translated in competition rather than cooperation between the two. Furthermore, rather than change its top-down politics, the government continues to repeat past errors, placing a greater emphasis on a selling discourse than on programs that complement the Huicholes' own standards and models of economic development. Torres Contreras states that this is mainly attributed to the fact that the development projects are mere band-aids that do not examine local complexities and the true root of the problems being tackled:

In the last seven or eight years [1990's to present], a series of governmental and non-governmental institutions that seek to help the Huicholes have been overturned, but as of this date they have not come to an accord on how to carry out the different duties. Each one is going about their own account and arrive asserting and imposing systems foreign to the culture. With their attitudes they do not allow for the Huicholes to act by their own accord, which generates confusion and with that resources are wasted because the problems are not fundamentally resolved...<sup>71</sup>

In the following section, I will discuss the most current governmental initiative which, according to most every Huichol and non-Huichol I have consulted, essentially carries similar discursive and practical conceptions as those previously outlined. The major difference now is that many consider the current PAN Administration to be much more aligned with the Global North's agenda and therefore much more threatening to local political, economic and cultural models that stand in opposition to the neo-liberal paradigm of Western capitalist world organization.

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Juan and Yvonne Negrín, March 2, 2004.

<sup>71</sup> Torres Contreras. Op. cit., p. 197.

## **V. The National Plan for the Development of Indigenous People in Rhetoric and Practice**

The inauguration of the first electric post in the Cora-Huichol region on March 6, 2002 in the Municipality of Nayar, Nayarit, resembled any other governmental public relations tool aimed at convincing the nation that progress, however vaguely it might be defined, had arrived for all Mexicans. The inauguration was also the first time a Mexican president had gone to this particular region of the nation. As journalist Luis Hernández Navarro put it: “That the federal government makes an act of presence in Mesa del Nayar gives one message: it has arrived to the heart of the resistance.”<sup>72</sup> President Vicente Fox was accompanied by local governors, both Mestizo and Indian, and wore some of the traditional Indian clothing from the area as part of a century-old populist ploy. Out of the eighteen chairs placed on a stage for the event’s presenters, only one was for an Indian; the rest were for public servants, politicians and a member of the military.<sup>73</sup> Traditional governors, *marakate* (shamans), and all other Indians present took a seat, or stood, below the visitors who spoke to them about their needs and how they would be met.

Throughout the various speeches given, government officials emphasized the importance of Mexico’s pluriculturalism and biodiversity as well as the current government’s commitment to preserving it through the Consejo para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (Council for the Development of Indigenous Peoples) or CDI.<sup>74</sup> According to these officials, the CDI’s projects are designed to reinforce the cultural, economic, ecological and social values of each community. However, when seen within a historical context, governmental institutions have used this same rhetoric with the objective of securing the State’s authority in indigenous areas without consideration of the preservation of the communities’ integrity. If anything, the State has been effective at destroying the very values they claim to be protecting. Despite the government’s reputation of unmet promises, Xóchitl Gálvez, the director of CDI, ended her speech by stating that “nobody--ever again!--will remain outside” of the nation’s development.<sup>75</sup>

The inauguration ceremony of the first electric post would not have been complete without the presence of an historian to legitimize and further applaud the CDI’s unprecedented entry into this still “unknown Mexico”. Dr. León Portilla is one of Mexico’s most renowned historians of pre-Hispanic cultures and his presence beautifully played into the appearance of this “new relationship” based on mutual respect and inclusion. Dr. Portilla’s presence was utilized to support the assertion that under the new government indigenous people would no longer simply be objects of development but would become the “true subjects” of their own development (this remark seemingly ignores an entire history of native peoples’ economic, political and social self-determination). According to Dr. Portilla and the CDI, this “new” national discourse

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<sup>72</sup> Hernández Navarro, Luis. “Escenografía priísta, marco para presentar nuevo programa indígena” in *La Jornada*, (7 March, 2003).

<sup>73</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>74</sup> The CDI has replaced the INI as the governmental institution that deals with issues pertaining to indigenous peoples. Its current title obviously emphasizes development rather than *indigenism*.

<sup>75</sup> “Diversas intervenciones durante la presentación del Programa Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas 2001-2006” in the Sistema Internet de la Presidencia, <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx>.

would now include indigenous paradigms of development and an institutional respect for their notions of identity however separate from Mexican *mestizo* identity. Dr. Portilla ended his speech by reading a náhuatl poem by the Aztec King Nezahualcóyotl to signal this new stage in national cooperation and admiration for the indigenous heritage.

The general director of the CFE, Alfredo Elías Ayub's speech accentuated the event's paternalism as he stated that electrification by posts and cables was "to bring light of the *good* kind, bring light that is [available] all day long" (my emphasis).<sup>76</sup> Nayarit's governor, Antonio Echevarría, who is commonly referred to as "Toño", gave an emphatic oration in which he pointed to the current administration's novel relation to native peoples after centuries of repression and marginalization. Toño pointed out that indigenous people would now "cease from being forgotten...because they are Mexicans like Vicente Fox and like Toño Echevarría..."<sup>77</sup> With these words, the essence of Mexicanness is suddenly reduced to two powerful *mestizo* businessmen whose mission is to transform Mexico into a fully capitalist nation. More importantly, Echevarría's commentary points to deeply embedded notions of *mestizo* and white superiority over indigenous peoples. Along with these racial implications, is the perception that the capitalist mode of development is fundamentally more advanced than the native peoples' own forms of development based on concepts of self-sufficiency. Hence, there remains a strong racial and developmentalist dichotomy between what is considered to be the economic and social superiority of the white capitalist and the inferiority of the indigenous non-capitalist.

Perhaps the most telling of all of the speeches at the inauguration, was President Fox's that triumphantly declared to the indigenous audience: "Never again a Mexico without you!" With this, not only is the president blatantly appropriating the Zapatista movement's popular slogan: "Never again a Mexico without us"<sup>78</sup>, but he is also attempting to blur the ongoing conflict between the State and the Zapatista rebellion. The appropriation and subsequent alteration of this slogan from "us" to "you", shows the Mexican government's continuing paternalist approach to indigenous peoples. As previously noted, at the root of this paternalist rhetoric are the established racial and developmentalist hierarchies that consistently place native peoples at the bottom of the social and economic ladder. So while the current PAN government portrays itself in direct opposition to the PRI by proclaiming to be "the government of change" ("*el gobierno del cambio*"), it retains comparable attitudes towards the indigenous populations and is applying similar policies in order to secure its hegemony and push forth its economic plans.

It is important to mention that the president's use of this popular Zapatista slogan is above all an attempt to downplay the continuing struggle that the government has been engaged in with indigenous people since the beginning of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) uprising in 1994. The CDI's program claims to be based

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<sup>76</sup> "...traer luz de la buena, traer luz de la que está todo el día..."

<sup>77</sup> Hernández. Op.cit., "(ahora) han dejado de ser olvidados...porque son mexicanos como Vicente Fox y como Toño Echevarría..."

<sup>78</sup> "Nunca más un México sin nosotros".

on cultural respect with the purpose of effective assimilation, whereas the accords of San Andrés being pushed by the EZLN and other various indigenous organizations are founded on the recognition of the self-determination and autonomy of all aboriginal groups.<sup>79</sup> The CDI's current objective is considered by many to be the federal government's strategic initiative to undermine the accords of San Andrés and the COCOPA (Commission of Concordance and Pacification) law which would secure certain inalienable rights of indigenous communities.<sup>80</sup> These rights would consequently lay the legal basis for indigenous opposition to the government's assimilationist agenda. For some Huichol, the current push for development in their area is directly related to the resistance posed by the Zapatistas who have stalled some development projects in Chiapas.

### The National Plan for the Development of Indigenous Peoples

The transformation of the INI to the CDI took place on March 29, 2001. As it stands today, the CDI is the presidential branch that manages indigenous issues by lending technical support and acting as an advisory council. The CDI's stated intention is to increase the government's presence in indigenous areas and provide basic services to the inhabitants. According to government sources, the National Plan for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (NPDIP) is founded on a renewed understanding of Mexico as a heterogeneous nation in which the introduction of Western culture and consumption patterns directly affects a community's identity, often with very negative consequences. Furthermore, the CDI's rhetoric stresses that indigenous people should be regarded as political actors whose voices need to be included in all levels of decision making and planning for any given project that is to directly affect them and their territory. Hence, the CDI's "Special Program" or the NPDIP, is designed to abate the political, economic, social, ecological, linguistic and cultural underdevelopment of Mexico's indigenous communities. The target communities are those where at least forty percent of the population speaks an aboriginal language, where there is no potable water or electricity and where there are between one hundred and 2,500 inhabitants. According to the CDI, the program was written by indigenous representatives, academics, investigators, non-governmental organizations, public servants, and governmental institutions. Following the drafting of the "Special Program", thirty-three forums were purportedly organized by the now defunct INI to consult indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the institution gives no details on how and by whom the forums were organized and where they actually took place. Based on my own research, there was no mention of these forums by the affected people. As will be seen later in this chapter, word of the NPDIP did not reach most of the communities until the projects were already under way.

The CDI delineates "eight themes of interest" for the development of indigenous areas: bilingual education, culture, health and nutrition, gender equity, protection of the natural environment, sustainable development, justice and questions of migration. Again, no specifics are given on how these eight themes are to be addressed, especially the very

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<sup>79</sup> Hernández. Op. cit.

<sup>80</sup> Venegas, Juan Manuel. "Fox evade discutir reclamos de León-Portilla sobre indios" in *La Jornada* (7 March, 2003).



general themes of “culture” and “justice”. According to the CDI, the greatest obstacle for the government to overcome in order to address these themes is that of lack of proper infrastructure that communicates the dispersed Indian villages with surrounding *mestizo* towns and cities. The problem of infrastructure and communication as seen by the CDI is based on the notion that indigenous peoples are isolated and that their isolation is causing them deeper marginalization and poverty. In this respect, the government does not factor in the equal, if not in some cases greater marginalization of the average *mestizo* farmers and city dwellers that have all the apparent benefits of roads, telephones and transportation. One can deduce that infrastructure in it of itself does not decrease marginalization and poverty; it is nevertheless the response that the government has consistently taken to this problem.

The CDI emphasizes that for this grand plan to be achieved, Mexican society as a whole will need to have its own contract based on the acknowledgement and respect of indigenous people as equals and national participants who represent a variety of cultural, political and economic backgrounds. According to the CDI, this change in Mexican national society is one that must come gradually as the opposite ideals have been much more prominent for the whole of the nation’s history. In fact, the program’s slogan is that of “moving toward a new relation”<sup>81</sup> with indigenous people where equal opportunity, transparency and democracy reign. Dialogue, consensus, interaction between cultures, self-determination, diversity, equity, inclusion, equal access to the law and proper financial assistance and allocation are all interspersed within the NPDIP’s document as the building blocks for this “new relation”. The NPDIP’s final objective is that by the year 2025, indigenous people will actively participate in the national discourse and in all walks of public life, particularly within the dominant economic system.

Although the program outlined by the government is supposedly based on the aspiration that all indigenous communities define their own development projects and be active in all levels of planning and execution of these, there are no concrete mechanisms put in place to meet this objective. In addition, there are no structures in which indigenous people can negotiate at an equal level with the government around the policies that would impact their communities. In this light, the chance that the State will actually transform its relation with native communities remains far fetched. Furthermore, the emphasis for change continues to be placed on the indigenous communities making concessions to the Mexican State. So despite the NPDIP’s rhetoric regarding the Mexican State’s newfound respect for indigenous worldviews and forms of organization, participation in the national discourse requires assimilating Western values and not the inverse. Furthermore, the NPDIP fails to consider the possibility of a community’s decision to abstain from these national models of organization in order to continue their own local and independent socio-political structures.

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<sup>81</sup> “Hacia una nueva relación”

## The NPDIP in the Huichol Sierra

So what does this “new relation” look like in practice? As mentioned earlier, the Huichol territories largely lack infrastructure such as roads, electricity, potable water and telecommunications. While a few of the communities have acquired roads and electric posts and cables, many others have not. However, many communities have made an effort to acquire solar panels to light the schools, local government houses and clinics. In some cases, individuals have also managed to obtain their own solar panels to light their homes. This technology has been favored because of its ability to reach even the most remote areas of the Sierras. Nonetheless, the government has lent a deaf ear to the communities’ request for funding for more solar panels. This demonstrates that the State decides which resources it is or is not willing to allocate to indigenous communities. As a result, the government’s claim of supporting the self-determination of communities is supplanted by its own economic and political agendas.

The electric post inaugurated by the Fox Administration is the first part of the NPDIP’s project to install electricity via posts and cables in the headquarters or *cabeceras* of five Huichol and Cora communities and one *mestizo* enclave: Los Amoles<sup>82</sup>, San Sebastián Teponahuastán, Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán, San Andrés Cohamiata, Jesús María and Mesa del Nayar. Along with the installation of these posts and cables, is the construction of a two-way road spanning two hundred kilometers across the Sierra. This road is to connect Pueblo Nuevo, Jalisco with Mesa del Nayar, Nayarit and will run through some of the most ecologically intact areas of the Sierra as well as come as close as one kilometer to the Huichol’s most sacred site, *Teakata*. Up until now, transportation between these areas has been by foot, mule or helicopter. The estimated cost of the electrification was placed at \$60,470,000 pesos in February of 2002<sup>83</sup>, fifty percent of the cost is to be paid by the CFE and the other fifty will be split between the state governments of Jalisco and Nayarit, the corresponding municipalities and SEDESOL (Secretary of Social Development). The cost of the road was placed at \$200,000 dollars or \$1000 dollars per kilometer<sup>84</sup>. Because the CDI acts directly under the presidency, the project began with neither the proper environmental and archeological impact studies nor with the active support of the communities. When I visited the region in April of 2002, just one month after the inauguration, the road was advancing at one kilometer per week despite significant opposition by the community, the SEMARNAT (Secretary for the Protection of the Environment and Natural Resources), and the INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History).

Prior to the inauguration of the first electric post in Mesa del Nayar, Conservación Humana, A.C. (CHAC), a non-governmental organization that helped the Huicholes secure their sacred pilgrimage area in the eastern desert of *Huiricuta*, carried out a study of the NPDIP’s projects in the zone. Because most Huicholes do not live in the *cabeceras* but in dispersed *rancherías*, CHAC estimated that only 6.5% of the Huichol population

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<sup>82</sup> Los Amoles used to be a Huichol *ranchería* until it was dispossessed by the *mestizos* during the Cristiada from the community of San Sebastián Teponahuastán.

<sup>83</sup> Study compiled by Conservación Humana, A.C.

<sup>84</sup> Atilano, Alejandra. “Prometerán carretera y luz a los huicholes” in *Mural*, (21 March, 2002).

would actually benefit from the electrification by posts and cables. The official government estimate for the number of beneficiaries in the region was put at 5,000 people, that number includes the *mestizos* living in the area (often as encroachers), the Coras and the Huicholes.

A basic problem with electrification by posts and cables is that the bi-monthly costs incurred by those who have electricity are often too high, causing many communities to simply abandon the whole system and return to the use of candles and flashlights. As a result, the posts simply become an ugly reminder of yet another failed governmental project. In July of 2003, I visited the *cabecera* of Tuxpan de Bolaños in the state of Jalisco where the community has had electricity by posts and cables since the mid to late nineties. There, I was told that the bi-monthly bills ranged from \$34 pesos to \$280 pesos (between \$3.4 and \$28 U.S. dollars) depending on whether or not the household has a television and the amount of electric appliances regularly used. These costs are disproportionately high for communities that still operate largely on a non-monetary basis. Those who wish to acquire electricity and other modern commodities must search for regular paying work which more often than not means leaving the community. For the majority of Huicholes I have spoken with, working outside of the community comes far from solving their financial troubles as they are paid below subsistence wages that are quickly spent on food, transportation and shelter. In the garlic fields of Zacatecas, Huicholes are paid between \$8 to 10 dollars per day.<sup>85</sup> By and large, they return to their communities with empty pockets. In addition to the poor pay, entering the global workforce is often a humiliating process as they are faced with racism, language barriers and dangerous health effects caused from contact with agrochemicals. One young man from Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán told me that the tobacco plantations were much worse than the garlic fields for you are treated “almost like a slave” and are given no health benefits despite constant exposure to dangerous chemicals.

My findings in April of 2002, showed that there had been no communal assemblies organized to discuss the project until February, one month prior to the inauguration ceremony in Mesa del Nayar. By this date, trees to be removed for the construction of the road and the erection of posts had already been marked and construction of the project was in process. According to various people that attended the February assembly in Pueblo Nuevo (a headquarter heavily run by the local store owners who favor the project), there was very little information available on both the short-term and long-term governmental plans in the region; and there was no information on how the projects could be detrimental to the self-sufficiency and ecology of the Huichol communities. Local elders and teachers who opposed the projects were not allowed to express their concerns. In the Huichol tradition, the elders are the supreme decision makers in the community; however, it is the younger more assimilated Huicholes who gave the green light for the project regardless of their communities’ lack of knowledge and skepticism about the situation. For many, this assembly marked the undemocratic nature of the NPDIP and the continuing attempt to impose the State’s hegemony over the region by way of the local *caciques*. In this way, the execution of the projects pose a definite conflict because although the government states that it will respect indigenous

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with a young Huichol man from Santa Catarina, Cuexcomatitlán, July 6, 2003.

forms of political decision making, in practice, traditional leadership is not acknowledged in the process. It is important to note that not all of the younger generation favors the projects. In fact, much of the skepticism and concern comes from young people who want their traditions to continue and who have traveled away from their communities only to be disappointed by the lack of opportunities in the *mestizo* world.

While the news of the government's installation of electricity by posts and cables reached Huichol communities, albeit without general support, the subject of the road remained relatively in the dark. On March 21, 2002, one of Guadalajara's newspapers, *El Mural*, published an article on the government's promise of roads and electricity for the Huicholes.<sup>86</sup> *El Mural* stated that the road would be part of a larger highway that would connect the Huichol Sierra with the state of Durango, passing through Nayarit, Jalisco, Zacatecas and Aguascalientes. The governor of Jalisco, Francisco Ramírez Acuña, a member of the PAN party, was quoted saying that this project is of extreme importance because it would connect the region with the center of the republic and "because this is an area of development to take out all the products from the zone".<sup>87</sup> The governor's comments seemed to come as no surprise to the Huicholes I spoke with. In fact, state and local politicians have been rather straight forward about their strategic economic interests in Huichol territory. A Huichol teacher and member of the National Indigenous Council (Consejo Nacional Indígena) or CNI, José de los Altos, did not hesitate to point to Nayarit's governor, Antonio Echevarría's ownership of large tracks of land, several industries and even links with drug trafficking; as he put it, Echevarría "is the number one businessman of Nayarit". These conflict of interests between governing "for the people" and securing personal business whether it be timber, energy or drugs, is for many an old story; it is however the first time that these interests have posed such a clear threat to Huichol sovereignty.

#### Beyond the posts and roads: other development plans for the region

While the electrification and the road are the most visible aspects of the government's development plans for the region, a closer look shows a series of public and private projects that will affect the Huicholes and their territory. The most worrisome of these is a series of dams that have been waiting to be built for several decades on several rivers that run through Huichol territory. According to members of CHAC and the Wixárika Research Center, the construction of these dams would effectively leave Huichol ceremonial sites and centers under water, as well as seriously endanger and destroy the wildlife and general ecology of the area. At the moment, one of the Fox Administration's number one projects is the construction of the El Cajón Hydroelectric Dam on the Santiago River in Nayarit. The construction of this particular dam comes during a period of serious debate around the privatization of Mexico's energy industry. El Cajón is planned to have the generating capacity of 680 MW and would be the largest hydroelectric plant in all of the nation and one of the largest in the world. The

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<sup>86</sup> Atilano. Op. cit.

<sup>87</sup> "Esto es muy importante porque uniría lo que es Nayarit con Jalisco, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes y con el centro de la República, porque está es un area de desarrollo para poder sacar todos los productos de la zona."

construction of the El Cajón Dam began on June 6th of 2003 and is planned to be finalized no later than 2007.<sup>88</sup>

Other concrete plans in the region are the insertion of *maquiladora* industries both inside Huichol territory as well as on the bordering *mestizo* areas. The municipality of Mezquitic, Jalisco, to which several Huichol communities belong, has permitted the construction of the Japanese Nissan and a Toyota automobile plants that are estimated to create three hundred jobs.<sup>89</sup> Many of these jobs are destined to *mestizo* farmers who no longer can make a living within the increasingly fierce market further exacerbated by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Nevertheless, the *maquiladora* owners will also be looking for young Huichol men in search of work. Nacho Hernández, from the community of Santa Catarina, informed me that *maquiladoras* were not only due to be built in Mezquitic but also in Barranca del Tule which lies in the middle of the Sierra. As stated in the previous section, Barranca del Tule is an area now run by *mestizo* land encroachers and Huichol, Maurilio de la Cruz Ávila, who have opened the door for timber exploitation and drug plantations. José de los Altos of Santa Catarina also informed me of the plans for the construction of *maquiladoras* in the Sierra. He added that it was part of a long term plan to dispossess the Huichol communities and subsequently push them off of their land by the year 2025.<sup>90</sup> For José de los Altos and Nacho Hernández, one need only connect the points to understand the larger objective of these development projects: push the Huichol out of their communities to create a new flood of cheap labor for foreign industries operating in Mexico as well as opening up an area rich with natural resources. As noted earlier, 2025 has also been designated by the government as the year in which the results of the NPDIP and CDI will be seen through indigenous people's "inclusion" into Mexican political, economic and social life.

An ongoing form of exploitation in the Huichol Sierra has been the presence of the timber industry which has cut trees in the zone since the first dirt roads were constructed in the mid-1970's. José de los Altos' position as a teacher and member of the CNI requires him to make frequent trips out of his community. In our interview, he reported that on several occasions he ran into timber trucks exiting the Sierra late at night. In one instance he witnessed twelve trucks leave packed with timber. This rise in clandestine clear-cutting (it is illegal for the government to officially sanction logging in the area) has fueled several protests in Las Carreras, a Huichol community in the state of Durango. On May 14, 2003 Huichol community members from Bancos de San Hipólito or Calítique blocked the road heading to Las Carreras in order to stop the logging on 10,720 hectares of land to which they hold a title.<sup>91</sup> By June, members from all three major Huichol communities had joined the blockade in what served to reaffirm their unified stance regarding their right to defend their territory and culture from illegal land encroachment and resource exploitation. In fact, this recent show of unity has been quite

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<sup>88</sup> Rodríguez, Israel. "Se licitarán dos centrales hidroeléctricas, anuncia CFE" in *La Jornada*, (31 March, 2004).

<sup>89</sup> "Buenas noticias: Maquiladora japonesa para 300 empleos en Mezquitic" in *Mi Pueblo*, (March, 2003), p. 28.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Jesús Candelario, July 10, 2003.

<sup>91</sup> "Los huicholes frenan la tala ilegal de su bosque" in *Ojarasca*, No. 75, (July, 2003).

a victory so far, as the Huicholes stand with strong support both inside and outside of their communities. The wide road that the NPDIP is building in the Sierra increases local suspicion about the government indirectly responding to the timber industry's desire to enter the last complete forest in Mexico.

Outside of the timber industry, both members of Huichol communities as well as long-time non-Huichol allies fear that the roads would make possible the exploitation of other vital resources including minerals, water and botanicals. Huichol community members and the INAH are particularly concerned about tourist intrusions which could facilitate the pillaging of their sacred sites. There are recorded instances in which anthropologists and foreign tourists have descended by helicopter upon these sites to steal statues later to be sold in the international market to private or public art collectors. A road that passes one kilometer away from the region's most sacred points would unquestionably facilitate pillaging of these sites.

Perhaps the last but most prominent concern among Huicholes is the likelihood that the roads be used by drug traffickers, essentially magnifying and spreading their presence throughout the region. Because the road will run through five states, drugs would be easily transported by ground rather than by air. According to Carlos Chávez, the founder of AJAGI (Asociación Jalisciense de Apoyo a Grupos Indígenas), the trafficking of illicit drugs has become the dominant commercial structure within the region. The presence of drug dealers has been facilitated in large part by the government and military's complicity as well as by local *caciques* and corrupt teachers who profit from sales. The immediate consequences of this presence in some Huichol communities are the escalation of a violent climate never before seen and the suppression of the communities' free political and economic determination. For these very reasons, drug traffickers are regarded by many Huichol as the "agency of power" within the Sierra. However, it is noteworthy that the drug traffickers have not been able to penetrate the more traditional enclaves of Huichol territory. Thus, the members of these communities worry that the government's installation of roads will only facilitate the mobility and presence of the traffickers in their land.

## **VI. Huichol Opinion Regarding the State**

My field research in the Huichol Sierra shows that it is difficult to find a general Huichol consensus regarding outside intervention, whether it be governmental, non-governmental or individual. It is important to keep in mind that there are several Huichol communities with slightly different histories and positions on governmental development projects. Even within each community, there exist some divisions between ceremonial center areas, or clans, and older and younger generations, store owners, teachers, religious authorities, etc. Nonetheless, there is definite consensus that shows a clear disapproval towards projects that can affect ceremonial centers and a few of the more traditional *cabeceras*.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, one can also find approval for the same

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<sup>92</sup> Guadalupe Ocotán and Tuxpan de Bolaños are annex communities of San Andrés and San Sebastián, respectively. Of the three communities, San Andrés is the only *cabecera* that has fallen prey to large scale degradation.

projects in the few *cabeceras* that are heavily influenced by store owners and that have a notable presence of *mestizo* businessmen and tourists. Moreover, it is clear that in all of the above mentioned localities, a vast majority of the population lacks information or is extremely uncertain about the governmental projects. This could point to the local governmental authorities' lack of information or deliberate withholding of information to the general population. In the following section I will discuss the principal views held by the Huichol concerning the NPDIP's projects in the region.

### Tuxpan de Bolaños

Tuxpan de Bolaños (called Tutxipa in the Wixárika language) and neighboring Guadalupe Ocotán are the Huichol annex communities which have had the most contact with outsiders. It is important to mention that Tutxipa will not be affected by the same project as Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán for it already has roads and electricity. However, it is still subject to future intervention and its inhabitants have valuable insight about the benefits and consequences of governmental development projects. Despite its many traditional vestiges, Tutxipa physically resembles a small *mestizo* village. Entering Tutxipa, one sees the usual school, health clinic and dispersed *tiendas* (stores) that are visible in most other Huichol *cabeceras*. What distinguishes Tutxipa from other Huichol communities is the presence of a Western style concrete plaza with lights and a kiosk where the god's houses previously stood, a considerable amount of trash (namely soda cans, candy wrappers and potato chip bags), light posts that line the dirt roads and are kept on throughout the night, and during the evening, the sound of a few televisions. There is also a little restaurant that serves *mestizo* food most obviously for the tourists and merchants that pass through this town.

I arrived to Tutxipa the night after the PRI closed its campaign for the municipal elections in the nearby *mestizo* town of Bolaños. A large number of Huicholes left the community to attend this closing ceremony and to lend their support to the PRI party and show their opposition to the PAN which they accused of being too closely linked with the logging companies anxious to clear cut the region's forests. This strong presence of Huicholes in the PRI's municipal campaign could definitely be seen as proving the CDI's belief that the development of infrastructure in indigenous communities is accompanied by their increasing participation in the dominant political discourse (i.e. participation in the electoral process). However, my conversations with several community members including a teacher, a farmer, a *maraakate* and a store owner show that this participation is "pure appearance", as there is an underlying disapproval of the way in which the political system operates.

Roberto Torres is a teacher of mixed Huichol and *mestizo* background who has lived for the past four years in Tutxipa and has witnessed many changes such as the electrification by posts and cables and the construction of the plaza. For Roberto, these changes have mostly brought benefits to the community such as a few people's purchase of refrigerators, stoves and televisions. The concrete plaza has become a place where people go to talk and partake in festivities; this however is not any different from the previous social space given by the god's houses. These development projects are first

brought up in communal assemblies and if approved, a request is subsequently made to the government. Nevertheless, Roberto noted that not all requested projects are actually executed; something he believes has to do with the government's own criteria of what is and what is not needed in the community. One of the main objections Roberto and other people in Tutxipa have is that the government had promised the community that they would have potable water slightly after the completion of the electric posts and cables in 1997. As of my visit in July of 2003 there were no signs of a project for potable water. The need for water has become even more crucial as the *cabecera's* population has grown due to the Huicholes who have moved there from their *rancherías* with hopes of receiving electricity. Roberto stated that "There are times that the government does not determine what it has projected. For example, now the potable water was supposed to be completed in six months but the federal government closed the project and the project was not finished...they stall it. That is what happens in this *pueblo*." The reason Roberto gives for the incompleteness of this project is that the government spent the allocated money, whether this is due to corruption or miscalculation was left unsaid.

Other problems Roberto feels the government has overlooked are the increasing *mestizo* land encroachments, the accumulation of trash that has resulted from the sale of packaged products, and the lack of job opportunities. General opinion in Tutxipa is that the politicians are good at making promises but rarely live up to them. Although there currently is strong support for the PRI party, most of the people I spoke with were not very clear on the party's political and economic platform which indicates that the elections, whether municipal, state-wide or national, are not a legitimate reflection of the political sentiments of indigenous communities. All of the people with whom I spoke indicated that a great percentage of the community is easily fooled by the politicians because they lack the proper education provided by "conscious teachers" who can explain the complexity of the political economic system and encourage active participation in it.

Patricio Ávila is an older man who belongs to the Consejo de Ancianos (Council of the Elders) and feels that the greatest obstacle faced is the community's failure to take advantage of the local natural resources. This in turn leaves an open door for outsiders, particularly lumber companies, who enter the region to exploit these same resources. According to Patricio, these companies clear cut the healthy wood "without leaving a cent" for the locals. Governmental institutions such as the INI have given contracts to logging companies to go into the community lending technical support for local saw mills paid by government credit.<sup>93</sup> At the end of the day, the companies have taken off with the parts from the saw mill leaving the community indebted to the government. Patricio stated that the company leaders pocket the money while manipulating the locals into working for them. He also affirmed that this problem can only be solved by having "conscious teachers" who equip the youth with the proper know how to create their own small industries and not be fooled by greedy outsiders. Patricio believes that this would be useful to the entire community for it would create local jobs and allow for the proper sustainable use of local resources.

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<sup>93</sup> See chapter VII regarding the Niembro logging contract.



One final problem of great importance in Tutxipa is that of malnutrition which mostly affects the younger population. This is specifically linked to the decrease in farming as the community's increasing population diminishes the land available for each household. Simultaneously, small *tiendas* have sprung up that sell processed maize for *tortillas* (namely the Maseca brand), soda, beer, junk food and a few canned goods. These *tiendas* are established either by government credit or by individual savings. When asked about the most pressing problems faced in his community, Pedro Carrillo, the son of a *maraakame* and an organic farmer, said that it was difficult to say because "these are modern times and right now the businessmen from here are very strong. For me it [the direction that the community is taking] is not very viable".

Pedro spent eight months in Willits, California, obtaining his certification in bio-intensive agriculture with Ecology Action's John Jeavons and is anxious to apply the mixture of traditional and sustainable modern agricultural knowledge in Tutxipa in order to solve nutritional problems. "Right now this community has the problem of nutrition because of lack of vegetables. Right now the greatest problem is that *all* children in fasting-like conditions are eating chips, Sabritas [Mexican chip brand], soda, Maruchan [instant soups]. Those are not food stuffs, they are *quita hambres* [hunger removers]. That's what I call it, *alimento viajero* [passenger food]. That's all." Pedro cites the origin of the agricultural and nutritional problem to be the government's agreement to comply with fertilizer, insecticide and the seed companies that market genetically modified organisms which require high technological inputs. The result is that "the subsoil is getting destroyed so that we become slaves to the government and the banks of all the corporate producers of herbicides, insecticides and *semilleros* [seed marketers] and continue receiving credit from the government and accumulate debt...it is the vicious cycle". Pedro feels that unemployment, scarcity of food and a general deterioration of the living conditions has resulted in a lack of self-worth for many people. Amongst the male population, Pedro states that there has been a sharp turn towards alcoholism in order to cope with these many emerging issues.

### Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán

Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán is considered to be the community that has most upheld Huichol tradition. As it faces the NPDIP's recent development projects, the community has nevertheless witnessed a series of divisions between those who would rather be linked to the national and global economy no matter the social or environmental costs, and those who prefer the implementation of locally managed sustainable technologies that favor Huichol tradition. Although these communal divisions are nothing new, the NPDIP presents the largest of all outside interventions Santa Catarina has ever seen. While some people initially see these projects as positive changes for their community, they are skeptical as to the possible cultural and environmental consequences they may bring. Others are thoroughly opposed to the NPDIP because they believe that it presents the most serious threat ever seen to the integrity of Huichol territory, culture, political and economic self-sufficiency.

In March of 2002, slightly after the inauguration in Mesa del Nayar, Antonio Muníz of Conservación Humana, A.C. interviewed several Huicholes in Santa Catarina about their initial thoughts on the governmental project. José de los Altos affirmed that from his point of view there was no need for electricity by posts and cables when there were viable alternatives such as solar panels. In fact, he already owned solar equipment in his household for several years and enjoyed the independence it offered. Furthermore, José stated that Santa Catarina was the only community that was opposed to the electrification by posts and cables and because of this the community had the right to demand funding for solar panels.

A young Huichol named Florencio seconded this desire for more solar panels, saying that only a few Huicholes had been able to acquire a solar system and that many desired that all households have one. Although uncertain of the possible long term consequences, he felt that it was partly out of this unmet desire for solar panels that many were now hopeful of the government's promise of electricity. Florencio was aware that the ecological and economic costs of electrification by posts and cables and the road were perhaps greater than the possible benefits they would bring to the community. He also pointed towards the store owners for pushing people in the community to blindly support the project: "The [stance] that they take is 'we are going to build the road', the store owners from Pueblo Nuevo say 'even if you don't want it, in a little while it will reach the community'. And even if we don't want it, they already want to hire us to build the road." The possibility of temporary work for Huicholes fomented a degree of support, albeit ambiguous, for the governmental project. According to Florencio, the store owners (also referred to as the 'modern ones') only think about making money and disregard traditional *cargos* [posts]. If the government promises money they will take it no matter the negative consequences: "You see that when the people start getting some money, they want something like electricity. They don't think about whether it brings effects, consequences and problems. They don't think."

In late March of 2002, I spoke with several people in the ceremonial center of Pochotita, all of whom rejected the governmental plans and were frustrated because their repeated petitions for solar panels had been ignored by the government. Consequently, they believed that the government's sudden push for electrification in the zone had little to do with benefiting the Huicholes and more to do with a strategic plan to exploit human and natural resources. According to the elders in Pochotita, it was the opportunistic store owners and *caciques* who were manipulating less informed community members into supporting the projects.<sup>94</sup> The store owners also worked to silence and intimidate those who showed opposition as was shown in the local assembly held in February of 2002 in Pueblo Nuevo where skeptics and opponents of the projects were not allowed to speak.

During this same visit, I spoke with Aníbal Cortés, a store owner and former teacher from Pueblo Nuevo who has shown consistent support for the NPDIP's projects. According to Aníbal, the great majority showed initial support for development projects in the region but began complaining once the government announced its plans. He

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<sup>94</sup> In fact, several store owners are also bilingual teachers who have frequently acted as government middlemen and own the few functioning trucks in the Sierra highlands.

acknowledged that while he was a proponent of Westernized development, he had not anticipated the vastness of the projects: “Either way, the project is already in the hands of the federal government and it is going to happen regardless, even if the people don’t want it, it is going to happen.” Anibal affirmed that the community voted in favor of the NPDIP’s projects. When asked if people had sufficient knowledge of the projects to cast an informed vote, Anibal stated that he had been in charge of getting them all the necessary information. This draws serious concern as it confirms many Huicholes’ statements that it is a few store owners and *caciques* who have managed to control what people know about the projects.

When I returned to Santa Catarina in July of 2003, the road and electric posts already reached the *cabecera* and ceremonial center of the same name; the only thing left to complete the project was the placement of electric cables. Many of the people who were opposed to the projects felt helpless as they watched and heard the bulldozing in the region. Divisions between supporters and opponents of the projects also seemed to be more pronounced, particularly because many had now given into the idea of having a road and electricity and were even attempting to move closer to the affected areas. In the ceremonial center of Las Latas, many expressed despair as the project supporters grew more intimidating in an attempt to “scare” the community into accepting what they deemed inevitable. While many still favored solar panels over posts and cables, people’s attention was much more focused on the road which was heading near the spiritual core of the Sierra, *Teakata*. During this first week of July, one could hear the dynamite being used in the distance to explode the mountains and make way for ‘development’. There was no mistaking that the Huicholes formed no part in the formation and execution of the project as was promised by the CDI; if anything, they worked as laborers exploiting their own territory for meager pay. Rather than being active participants in the process, as stated in the CDI’s documents, the Huicholes have been marginalized from both the planning as well as execution of the project.

In an attempt to expose the ongoing inequality with which the State has related to the Huicholes, a document addressed to Dr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the United Nation’s Special Reporter on the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was drafted and signed by Santa Catarina’s authorities on June 10 of 2003. The document focuses on five different but equally important areas: culture, land and territory; autonomy and self-determination; application of justice; and governmental projects. In the introduction of the document, the reason for its drafting is stated as follows:

Precisely, the authorities of this community want to underline a series of reflections of the times we are living. Where our word joins with those words of the ancient ones of all times, and with the rest of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and of the world. In this sense, we have been affected and threatened with our culture, land and territory; education; autonomy; application of justice and health; where the governmental projects are the ones that inflict pressure when there is no consultation with the indigenous communities.

This communiqué begins with clear mention of the government’s continued breach of the right of indigenous people to exert control over their own territory. Furthermore, it

exposes the State's false rhetoric of cooperation with these populations. In the section entitled "Culture, Land and Territory", the electrification by posts and cables is declared illegal due to the absence of the required environmental impact studies:

The modes of communication are precarious and at the same time, break with the ecological spaces and soil by not being designed with the adequate ecological impact studies. As is the case of the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE), which recently began to operate in this community.

This section of the document concludes by stating that:

The governmental projects of electrification, expropriation of natural goods, commercial ground routes, territorial demarcation; do not respect the convened in Article 6 of Convention 169 of the ILO<sup>95</sup>. Human rights and the autonomy of indigenous peoples continue to be violated.

This communiqué, signed by all the appropriate communal authorities of Santa Catarina demonstrates that the government continues to violate the rights of indigenous people and their territory despite both national and international law. This document was personally handed by the Huichol to Dr. Stavenhagen and other possible national and international allies. In addition, I obtained an original copy from José de los Altos and helped bring it to the attention of the SEMARNAT, the INAH and members of the International Labour Office (ILO). Nonetheless, there has been no serious follow up by the majority of these entities and the projects continue at an irreversible pace.

As mentioned earlier, José de los Altos is a Huichol teacher and member of the Comisión Nacional Indigenista (National Indigenist Commission) or CNI, as a result, he has had extensive interaction with the Mexican government and International institutions such as the ILO. Unlike most other Huicholes, he has more mobility due to the work he performs; this becomes an advantage as he possesses a more critical understanding of the State's mechanisms to ensure dominion over natural and human resources. Nevertheless, José's mobility is also a disadvantage as it distances him from many people in his community who see his dissent towards governmental political and economic intervention as politically motivated. José's position in the community of Santa Catarina is that of a teacher, he has no political or spiritual *cargo* that would allow him a bigger voice in the community. While he might serve on the CNI, within the community he can only cast a vote like everyone else. Despite his controversial position both outside and inside of the community, José eloquently states many of the opinions and concerns that others in Santa Catarina share. His testimony is therefore extremely useful both for this study as well as for actual attempts to stall further unwelcome governmental intervention in the area.

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<sup>95</sup> Convention 169 "concerning Indigenous and Tribal peoples in Independent countries" was established by the Governing Body of the ILO in Geneva on June 7, 1989 in order to secure and recognize "the aspirations of these peoples to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development and to maintain and develop their identities, languages and religions, within the framework of the States in which they live..."

Our taped conversation, which took place in his ranch on July 10, 2003, began with the news of *maquiladoras* in the region. José pointed out that most people, indigenous or not, seem happy with the *maquiladoras* as they offer the possibility of employment in the context of a depressed agricultural economy. However, this happiness is based on the myopic view he feels people have concerning the mechanisms of the global economy: “But if we have here, to say it in this way, products that read “Made in Washington”. Listen, what is going on?! We ourselves are to blame. We prefer to buy gringo jeans than buy a Mexican product.” In effect, many individuals in the community chose to support a project without fully understanding the long term consequences it might have in their regional economy. This view parallels that expressed by Patricio Ávila in Tutxipa: local communities are not taking advantage of the resources they have and are instead allowing outsiders to exploit both their resources and their labor. Consequently, people’s disinterest in the workings of the economic and political system gives a green light to the government and private corporations’ long list of projects. According to José, there are a myriad of extractive projects already designed that are only waiting for a lucrative offer from any number of foreign companies, namely Japanese and American. The electrification by posts and cables and the road are a way for them to get their foot in the door and sooner than later execute these projects.

José has been consistently involved in fighting the current State development projects in Huichol territory. In this process, he has routinely witnessed the State’s violation of legal norms concerning the rights of indigenous people and their land. One such example is when Dr. Stavenhagen paid a visit to Huichol territory to listen to the concerns people had regarding the electrification and other important matters. According to José, this type of reunion between affected peoples and human rights advocates prohibits the presence of any governmental representative or institution because they might intimidate people from voicing their opinions. Nevertheless, Rosa Rojas of the CDI was covertly present in the meeting with Stavenhagen; José and others did not notice Rojas until the end. Although José is himself on the consulting board of the CDI, the decisions are ultimately made by Gálvez (the current director) and other top officials who represent the dominant political class. So while indigenous governmental representatives have created several of their own projects, they are rarely taken seriously by the State and are either changed to better suit the interest of the status quo or are thrown out all together. In this sense, José’s presence as well as that of other indigenous representatives in the government is merely a façade, as there is no sincere effort to place the decision making process in the hands of indigenous communities themselves. Once again, CDI’s claim of fomenting a “new relation” between the State and indigenous people solely exists in the field of rhetoric and not of action.

At the conclusion of my interview with José, he remained hopeful that the above mentioned communiqué would somehow serve as a tool to stop, at least temporarily, the government’s rapid moving projects in the zone. In the mean time, many Huicholes remain vigilant of the unfolding of CDI’s project as well as of other outside interventions. Although the international and national allies concerned with the current situation in the Sierra have achieved very little to stall the intrusions, there exists the possibility of

Huichol resistance, both passive and direct, as seen in the recent blockades members of the three communities carried out to stall unwanted logging.

## **VII. Local Alternatives to the Dominant Developmentalist Trends**

The dilemma is, I believe, the classic dilemma of the poor; a choice between death and death. Either we enter a global economic system we know we cannot survive, or, we refuse, and face death by slow starvation. With choices like these the urgency of finding a third way is clear. We must find some room to maneuver, some open space simply to survive. We must lift ourselves up off the morgue table and tell the experts we are not yet dead.

-Jean-Bertrand Aristide-<sup>96</sup>

In previous sections, we have seen how the dominant discourse and policies aimed towards indigenous people have remained fundamentally rooted in notions of the economic, cultural and political superiority of the West. In this light, little has changed from the times of the Spanish Conquest, but rather the stakes have been raised under the current neo-liberal model being pushed forth from the Global North, and being senselessly incorporated by the governments of the Global South. For many, it is common knowledge that neo-liberal policies favor the owners of capital, thereby contributing to the rising unequal distribution of income and resources, as well as forcing the assimilation of outside technologies that further exacerbate the dependence of the South on the North. The immediate and long term social and environmental effects of this model have been disastrous; in Latin America alone, poverty has significantly increased both in rural and urban areas in the past twenty years.<sup>97</sup> While many economists consider Mexico a ‘successful’ example of a “Third World” nation that has integrated itself into the global market system, poverty and environmental degradation are core problems that are not addressed by the government. Miguel Altieri and Omar Masera point that “Despite the fact that in some countries such as Argentina, Chile and Mexico the model appears successful at the macroeconomic level, deforestation, soil erosion, industrial pollution, pesticide contamination and loss of biodiversity (including genetic erosion) proceed at alarming rates and are not reflected in the economic indicators.”<sup>98</sup> Through its developmentalist policies in indigenous communities, the Mexican State continues to try to broaden the specter of the global market by transforming historically self-sufficient entities into ones dependent on the current unchecked cycle of overproduction and consumption.

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<sup>96</sup> Aristide, Jean-Bertrand. *Eyes of the Heart: Seeking a Path for the Poor in the Age of Globalization*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2000, pp. 16-17.

<sup>97</sup> Garrett, James L. “Challenges to the 2020 Vision for Latin America: Food and Agriculture Since 1970” in *Food, Agriculture, and the Environment Discussion Paper 21*. International Food Policy Research Institute, p. 5.

<sup>98</sup> Altieri, Miguel and Omar Masera. “Sustainable rural development in Latin America: building from the bottom-up” in *Ecological Economics*, No. 7, 1993, p. 94.

As can be appreciated in the above quote by Aristide, the current crisis being faced by ‘marginalized’ communities requires a solution outside of the paradigms set by the dominant governing institutions. William Roseberry suggests that resistance to the dominant ideology thus requires a counter-ideology, a negation of hegemony that qualifies local autonomous thought and organization, and that requires an agreement of solidarity amongst marginalized peoples.<sup>99</sup> Returning to the Huichol Sierra, one can value a counter-ideology that is deeply rooted in the peoples’ long history of self-sufficiency, autonomous organization and resistance to outside impositions. Consequently, there is no need for the formulation of a counter-ideology as it already exists in the very fact that these indigenous communities continue to exist and recreate themselves with a clear understanding of the worth of their own institutions. The various approaches used by indigenous communities to resist unwanted intrusions and execute their own changes from within include the continuation of pre-colonial organizational structures as well as the use of more modern strategies that are created in opposition to the State’s politics.

As we have seen from the first section of this work, the majority of Huichol communities have consistently survived the imposition of outside forces seeking social and territorial control over their region. The strategies used by the Huichol have been complex and sometimes even paradoxical as they have sometimes allied themselves with unexpected people or movements (as can be seen with the rebellion of Manuel Lozada and the Cristiada). As a result of their resistance, the Huicholes continue today as one of Mexico’s most culturally and politically intact indigenous groups. In the last year alone, the Huicholes have supported the neighboring Tepehuanos’ successful struggle to regain land granted to *mestizos* by the Mexican government in Bernalejo, Durango, and all three of the Sierra communities have participated in a long standoff with loggers in Bancos de Calítique, also in the state of Durango. More importantly, the Huicholes of Santa Catarina have continued to oppose the government’s electricity by posts and cables. Although the electrification was inaugurated by President Fox on November 12, 2003, the *cabecera* of Santa Catarina has not approved of it and the posts and cables sit unused. This last point is fundamentally important to understand the resistance the government’s projects face in the Huichol Sierra’s most traditional communities. While many were sure that once the posts and cables were present there would be no opposition, the actual communal stance shows the contrary.

So despite the fact that the threat of the current National Plan for the Development of Indigenous People remains strong, the possibility of local sustainable alternatives to the dominant models of development are quite tangible. Nonetheless, the success of local alternatives relies on the solidarity between the Huichol communities and outside actors who are willing to partake on a reciprocal exchange of knowledge and action. In the following pages, I will outline some of the projects that have been carried out between Huicholes and non-Huicholes in order to safeguard the self-sufficiency and autonomy of these communities.

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<sup>99</sup> Roseberry, William. "La hegemonía y el lenguaje contencioso" translation by Joseph, Gilbert and Daniel Nugent, *Everyday Forms of State Formation--Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, p. 147.

As the INI and the Mexican government increasingly prove their inability to assist indigenous communities, the presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has become much more prevalent. In fact, the government pushed more of the burden on to these organizations during the 1980's in order to rid itself of some of its heavy bureaucracy. However, the State has only supported those organizations that follow a similar line of thought regarding development in indigenous communities. Accordingly, while many NGOs have done some very positive work, others have mirrored the same policies and dynamics of the State, namely by pushing their pre-established agendas onto indigenous communities. James Petras argues that because of this, many NGOs fail to criticize the neo-liberal policies that are directly responsible for much of the human and environmental abuses in the communities they claim to assist. Petras states that this is due to the fact that many of these organizations are financed by State and neo-liberal institutions that use them to co-opt socio-political movements. However, the role of NGOs, especially those whose programs are not compromised by their financial backers, has been extremely important in Mexico's rural communities. Although there are relatively few NGOs operating within the Huichol Sierra, some have been very successful due to the reciprocal relationships they cultivate with the communities. In addition, these particular organizations, namely ADESMO and AJAGI, are based on a profound respect for the Huicholes' territorial, political, economic and cultural institutions.

#### ADESMO:

Founded in 1986, the Asociación para el Desarrollo Ecológico de la Sierra Madre Occidental (Association for the Ecological Development of the Western Sierra Madre), or ADESMO, has become one of the most well know non-profit foundations to have operated in the Huichol mountains. Directed by Juan and Yvonne Negrín, ADESMO was able to put in place one weaving and two carpentry workshops in the communities of Santa Catarina and San Andrés, while at the same time preventing the continuation of logging within these same communities. However, ADESMO also dedicated itself to the fomentation of the Huicholes' traditional medicine and the preservation of organic agriculture at a time that the Mexican government was introducing agrochemicals on a wide scale. Juan Negrín was introduced to the Huichol via his own interest in art and religion in 1970. He quickly gained respect for the Huicholes' spiritual sensibilities as reflected through their aesthetics. By 1972, Negrín began to promote five Huichol artists as not mere craftsman, but "true contemporary artists". These same artists took Negrín to the Sierra for the first time, thereby intimately introducing him to their various communities. After organizing several art exhibits in Europe, the United States and Mexico, Negrín and three *marakate*, Yauxali, Matsuwa and Uxa Yucauye, founded the Fundación para la Preservación del Arte Sagrado Tradicional Huichol (Foundation for the Preservation of Sacred Traditional Huichol Art) in 1980. Yet, while Negrín continued his study of Huichol art and cosmogony, he also became more involved in the political and ecological problems facing the Huichol as a result of the INI's policies.



In 1977, the communities of Santa Catarina and San Andrés asked Negrín to act as an adviser for the Council of Communal Goods regarding the problems of logging and territorial disputes. Later in 1979, Juan was asked to return as an adviser for the community of Santa Catarina and helped to prove to the Secretary of Agrarian Reform the legitimacy of 12,000 hectares of land which would otherwise go to *mestizos* or be left to logging companies. Based on this initial work, Negrín, Rocío Echevarría and Patricia Díaz Romo (all non-Huicholes living in Guadalajara) founded the Asociación para la Investigación, Capacitación y Asistencia Wixárika (Association for the Investigation, Training and Assistance of the Wixárika) in 1984. This organization was responsible for the establishment of the Casa de la Salud (House of Health), a hospital in Guadalajara for Huicholes, Coras and other local indigenous people who face discrimination in urban hospitals and clinics. But because the Casa de la Salud began to depend more on the government's assistance, Juan and Yvonne Negrín set out to create yet another NGO, this time to specifically focus on the issues of land invasions and logging in the Huichol Sierra. Thus emerged the idea of ADESMO.

By the mid to late 1970's, several outsiders became interested in the Huichol Sierra as it presented one of the last fully intact forests of Mexico. As discussed earlier, the construction of roads in the area allowed for loggers to enter the deeper regions of the Sierra. Indeed, some Huicholes felt that because many of the outsiders were stealing the lumber, they might as well sell it; as a result many lumber companies entered the Sierra to offer the Huicholes contracts that would effectively open up the path to massive clear cutting. While most Huicholes were not convinced by these individuals and companies, some in fact partnered up with them for a small profit. One of the most infamous cases is that of Enrique Niembro's lumber company, Productos y Derivados Forestales, S.R.L. (Forest Products and Derivatives) whose presence starting in the 1970's intensified the deforestation in the San Sebastián and Tuxpan de Bolaños area (in fact, Niembro convinced the community of San Sebastián to build the first road connecting them with the *mestizo* town of Villa Guerrero). Niembro used the argument that his company was only cutting down those trees infected with mistletoe or that had been struck by lightning, when in fact they were cutting down the healthiest trees.<sup>100</sup> In order to legitimize his company's presence, in March of 1992 Niembro declared that San Sebastián's communal assembly had approved a contract that would pay the community thirty pesos (three dollars) for every cubic meter of exploited land. However, it was discovered that the community had never approved the contract and was largely opposed to the presence of the loggers (furthermore, the actual price per cubic meter was officially evaluated at two-hundred and fifty pesos, or twenty five dollars, per cubic meter<sup>101</sup>). By this time, the INI had paired up with Niembro to build a saw-mill in Tuxpan de Bolaños which caused devastating deforestation. Currently this saw-mill is shut down but the community continues to pay off the debt amounted from it. For many more years, Niembro's company attempted to convince the other Huichol communities of signing similar contracts, but because of communal opposition and ADESMO's own presence in supporting the Huicholes in the fight against loggers, Niembro eventually abandoned his plans to extract timber from the Huichol Sierra.

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<sup>100</sup> Torres Contreras. Op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

Knowing that there were some Huichol who were actually allowing for several hectares of land to be clear cut, ADESMO developed a forestry program that would allow for the communities to dry wood with solar ovens and produce finished wood products instead of simply selling the logs as raw material. The idea behind ADESMO's carpentry workshops in Santa Catarina, San Andrés and Guadalupe Ocotán was to foment a clearer understanding of the worth of the timber through a sustained production of finished wood products such as bed frames, doors and tables that could be sold locally and to neighboring *mestizo* communities. These carpentry workshops were a coordinated effort between members of the community and a few outsiders who helped train young Huicholes in carpentry. Most of all, the carpentry workshops created local jobs that emphasized the ecological use of local resources. Several years after the establishment of these workshops Yvonne Negrín believes that they are as necessary today as they were in the 1980's:

I think that it was a very well planned program because, number one, it built the first solar kiln in the world for drying wood that had been cut into boards. And [number two] the carpenters learned skills, to make doors, desks, tables, chairs, things that were needed by their Mexican neighbors, *mestizos* that lived near by...And also things that were needed in the Sierra, desks and chairs for schools, and people would order doors for their houses.<sup>102</sup>

Along with the creation of carpentry workshops came the construction of two weaving workshops, one in Santa Catarina and the other in San Andrés. In fact, the carpenters built the entire equipment for the weaving workshops, the only materials that the Huicholes needed from outside of the Sierra were the metal combs for the looms. In this way, if a piece of the machinery broke, the weavers could go to the carpenters just a short distance away and order that a replacement piece be made.

The idea for the weaving workshops originated with the problem the Huicholes faced in order to obtain well made cotton fabric to embroider on (the Huicholes wear very elaborately embroidered clothes). When the Bellavista cotton mills in Tepic shut down in the late 1970's the Huicholes no longer had access to good quality cotton and were left having to purchase *cuadrillé*, a thinner poorly woven cotton fabric. But with the weaving workshops, the Huichol were able to produce cotton fabric that was even better than that produced by the Bellavista mills. Most importantly, the Huicholes generated a local market that kept the money within the community. With this, no longer did the Huicholes have to leave their communities, paying bus fare, food and lodging to obtain low quality cotton fabric produced outside of their communities.<sup>103</sup>

Through the carpentry and weaving workshops as well as the fomentation of the preservation of traditional medicine and agricultural practices, ADESMO essentially worked to preserve Huichol knowledge and self-sufficiency. The emphasis therefore was placed on addressing local needs with local solutions. Unfortunately, the INI and the local *caciques* opposed ADESMO's presence in the Huichol region as it countered their

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Yvonne Negrín, March 2, 2004.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem.

own projects that emphasized the introduction of market structures into the communities. In 1993, the INI installed, without the support of the community, a large and unfunctional U.S. made saw-mill just a few miles away from Santa Catarina's carpentry workshop and prohibited ADESMO and the community from cutting trees and therefore continuing their work. Although the INI stated that this sawmill was a project to help the Huicholes combat logging, it did just the opposite as its objective was the sale of wooden boards at low prices, and not finished products that yielded the community more revenue. As with other INI projects, the saw-mill was built on the basis of credit that the Huicholes are still paying off to date, whereas ADESMO's workshops were built for the communities free of charge. After several years of the Mexican government and its Huichol *cacique* allies threatening ADESMO and its members, the workshops were forced to shut down. Fortunately the infrastructure of these workshops has been somewhat maintained by the communities of Santa Catarina and San Andrés.

Presently ADESMO has become the Wixárika Research Center and is working, among other things, to obtain funds to revive the workshops. In a communal assembly held in the ceremonial center of Las Latas on July 7, 2003, the community asked Juan Negrín to help them restart the carpentry and weaving work. Alluding to the closing of the workshops in 1995, Pascual Pinedo, one of the leading communal leaders of Santa Catarina, stated that "the house already fell, let it be reconstructed and let it be strengthened for the entire community." Outside of the workshops, Juan and Yvonne Negrín look to continue their investigation of the Huicholes' cultural, artistic, spiritual and political foundations along with both young and elder Huicholes. Juan stresses the necessity of the schools in the Huichol Sierra to be fully bi-cultural, not superficially bilingual, so that "they be given time as youth to absorb their own culture and not just the outside culture" and learn through full participation in their traditions. With bi-cultural education, Juan believes that the Huichol youth can learn how intrinsic their communities are for all of Mexico and that they are the only ones who can carry on their traditions. Yvonne also hopes to work with the young Huicholes who are obtaining a higher education in order for them to return to their communities as leaders who can support sustainable programs and the continuation of their peoples' traditions.

#### AJAGI:

Carlos Chávez, one of ADESMO's previous members, established the Asociación Jalisciense de Apoyo a Grupos Indígenas (Jaliscoan Association for the Support of Indigenous Groups) or AJAGI in 1990. This NGO has continually worked for the past ten years to solve land disputes between Huicholes and *mestizo* land encroachers. Like ADESMO, AJAGI is one of the most important organizations to have operated in the Huichol Sierra. Because of its focus on bringing often deadly land disputes to the courts and to the press, AJAGI has won itself many friends as well as many enemies. In fact, the defense and preservation of land has become the focal point for the Huicholes' struggle since the 1980's, the presence of AJAGI has thus helped maintain and increase the level of organizing within the three Huichol communities. In 1999, with the assistance of

AJAGI, the Huicholes recovered 10,320 hectares of land they had been dispossessed from.<sup>104</sup> To this date there are approximately 67,000 hectares that remain in dispute.

With AJAGI many Huicholes have learned to bring their demands not only to municipal, state and national courts but also to international entities such as the International Labor Organization. In fact, the Huicholes successfully brought before the ILO the very first world case pertaining to the recovery of indigenous land. AJAGI's legal strategy includes juridical, historical, topographical and anthropological arguments that relate the disputed land to the Huicholes' ancestral possession of it. According to Chávez and Ángeles Arcos, the Huicholes' struggle to regain and maintain their land is crucial if they are to conserve the integrity of their cultural, political and economic institutions:

The Huichol people's land struggle is becoming more complex, making it necessary for the efforts in defense of their habitat to generate organizing efforts that allow them to take ownership of their situation as a people; in other words, this struggle has brought them to the search for autonomy as a broad frame of reference. At the same time, they have acquired a growing command of their own rights, as the young people have become effective bearers of the elders' principles of struggle.<sup>105</sup>

As noted above, the current struggle over territorial sovereignty has led many in the younger generations to look to the knowledge of the *marakate* and *kawiterutsirri* (Council of Elders), one that is deeply conscious of their land as the irreplaceable foundation for the continuation of the Huicholes' spiritual and cultural traditions. This generational unification, albeit at times difficult, is vital for there to be a solid resistance to unwanted intrusions, particularly as outsiders and Huichol *caciques* attempt to divide the communities into different factions that disintegrate their organizational capabilities.

In January of 2003, Insurgent Sub-commander Marcos, the leading spokesman for the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or EZLN, drafted a beautiful communiqué dedicated to the Northern-Pacific region of Mexico.<sup>106</sup> In it, the Huicholes are revered as one of Mexico's most inspirational indigenous groups in their strategies of resistance. AJAGI is mentioned as a crucial element in the Huicholes' struggle as they are successfully helping some communities establish cooperative stores that sell outside products at lower prices than those offered by the private and State owned ones. Marcos also mentions AJAGI's innovative program to educate young people about how to care for their natural resources, prevent forest fires and logging, and other ecological initiatives. As mentioned earlier, these programs are a concerted effort to bring the elders and youth together to protect their land. So while the government continues to accuse indigenous people of spearheading the destruction of their natural resources, these coordinated initiatives between NGOs and the Huicholes show just the opposite, or as Marcos ironically states:

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<sup>104</sup> Arcos, Ángeles and Carlos Chávez. "The Wixaritari Today" in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Issue 23.1, (April 30, 1999).

<sup>105</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>106</sup> Marcos, Subcomandante Insurgente. "Agosto: Región Norte-Pacífico, la octava estela" in <http://www.nodo50.org/pchiapas/documentos/calenda/norte.html>.

One moment! So the indigenous people organize themselves to avoid fires, prohibit the logging of forests and protect natural resources? But if on television they say that the indigenous people are the ones that are destroying our ecology!<sup>107</sup>

In order to maintain dialogue between distinct members of the Huichol communities, AJAGI has helped create workshops where people can discuss “everything that benefits, everything that destroys, [and] everything that risks the conservation of a cultural identity.”<sup>108</sup> These workshops are the result of the collaboration between AJAGI’s members who arrange the meetings and the Huicholes who direct the workshops. According to José de los Altos from Santa Catarina, the first workshop emerged out of the eight year struggle to recuperate land in Tierra Blanca, San Andrés. One of the principle objectives of these workshops is to hear the concerns of the women and the youth regarding questions of identity and development. Often these take place in the communities that are facing the greatest challenges from outsiders and *caciques* and need larger communal support in order to resist, such as the recent cases of Tierra Blanca and Bancos de Calítique. De los Altos mentions that AJAGI has also organized workshops that bring together Huicholes and other indigenous communities from other areas, such as the Purepechas, Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Ceris and Tojolabales. From these workshops, the indigenous communities have forged a declaration calling for the preservation of native cultures and natural resources. De los Altos believes that the most difficult challenge is to get the wider national and international population to respect indigenous voices and work to put such declarations into action.

#### CHAC:

Conservación Humana, A.C. (Human Conservation) or CHAC is a smaller NGO that has operated largely out of Zacatecas and Mexico City under the leadership of John and Colette Lilly and Humberto Fernández Borja. As with ADESMO and AJAGI, CHAC also dedicates itself to the defense of Huichol culture and territory. Its most important accomplishment has been that of getting the desert region of Huiricuta (the Huicholes’ sacred territory east of the Sierra in the state of San Luis Potosí) declared a protected area and thus saved from being segmented by a major freeway. John Lilly’s major preoccupation is that notions of private property interfere with the Huicholes’ own notions of the use of space. In an interview carried out on the 13 of July, 2003, Lilly explained how the Huicholes’ yearly pilgrimage from the Sierra to the desert has been deeply altered by the erection of barbed wire fences that block their ancient path to the east. Today there exist thirty-three such fences and many Huicholes no longer go to Huiricuta by foot because of the difficulty of travel and the many tourists who instead take them in their trucks.

More recently, some members of CHAC have been very active around the CDI’s recent developments in the Huichol Sierra. In fact, CHAC was the first organization to alert both Huicholes and non-Huicholes about the government’s project to build roads, install electricity by posts and cables and subsequently search the area for profitable

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<sup>107</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with José de los Altos, July 10, 2004.

natural resources including minerals and water. Upon the news of these massive plans, members of CHAC attended communal assemblies and spoke with various representatives both inside and out of the Sierra regarding the impending dangers of the plans and possible ways to avert them. Without the use of alternative sustainable technologies, Lily worries that Mexico's most vital resources will be devastated:

“...the eagles are an endangered species. The same Royal Eagle is on the Mexican flag. And also the cactus where it [the eagle] is sitting in the flag is facing many problems, and the cactus grows from an island which is now buried below the concrete of Mexico City. The island is in a lake that no longer exists, that is now dry. And the eagle holds a snake that is also facing problems.”

Thanks to the investigations carried out by CHAC, the urgency to resist the Mexican government's development project through the CDI became much more apparent not only to the Huicholes but also to members of other NGOs, and individuals interested in the cultural and ecological conservation of the region.

The Mexican government's lack of support for the local and sustainable development projects developed and approved by the Huicholes has consequently fueled their distaste for the State's politics. Outside of the work completed in the region by NGOs such as ADESMO, AJAGI, and CHAC, individual Huicholes have taken various initiatives to create their own programs or in some cases join national indigenous organizations that have a larger political platform. As with the NGOs, funding for alternative, non-State sanctioned programs is scarce and as a result often impedes the consolidation of local programs. Also linked to the problem of funding for alternative programs is the Huicholes' own difficulty in finding committed allies outside of their communities. While there are many people who have a deep respect for the Huicholes' culture and territory, few have the capacity to follow through with promises to help them attain resources for programs. Consequently, important ideas and programs are unable to be carried out. Pedro Carrillo from Tutxipa is a case in point as he has indispensable knowledge regarding sustainable and organic agriculture that could help solve the nutritional and ecological problems facing his community.

As mentioned in the fifth section of this work, Tutxipa has become more densely populated since the installation of electric posts and cables, thus diminishing peoples' capacity to have their own orchards and increasing their dependency on outside food stuffs. Pedro emphasizes how genetically modified seeds and agrochemicals have led many in rural Mexico to enter a “vicious cycle” of dependency on the foreign corporations that supply these products. According to the International Forum on Globalization, in just the past few years two million Mexican indigenous and *mestizo* corn farmers have been put out of business and many of these have lost their land due to the dumping of heavily subsidized corn from the United States into Mexico.<sup>109</sup> In addition, although eighty percent of Latin America's farmers dedicate themselves to

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<sup>109</sup> “Special Poverty Issue” in *International Forum on Globalization Bulletin*, Volume 1, Issue 3, 2001.

subsistence and local production, they only own seven percent of the arable land.<sup>110</sup> The severity of the state of indigenous and *mestizo* small farmers has led many people to search for alternatives to the dominant agricultural system that is controlled by powerful corporate interests. In this context, Pedro's experience with Ecology Action is a wonderful testament of a personal initiative to create change.

Although the eight months that he spent in California were difficult as he was far away from his community and family, Pedro returned to Tutxipa with a very strong sense of the importance of fomenting sustainable agriculture. Much of Tutxipa's soil has become arid because of agrochemicals and other waste, however, Pedro knows of a traditional solution to improve it: a material left behind by red ants which functions as organic nitrogen. After this first step of restoring the soil to a fertile state, Pedro's idea is to teach people how to create highly productive family orchards on small tracts of land. Outside of the staples of native corn (currently endangered by genetically modified versions from the U.S.), beans and chili peppers, Pedro emphasizes the importance of vegetables such as carrots, chayote and lettuce which have many vitamins that are particularly good for the youth. A *mestizo* woman that is a cook at Tutxipa's primary level boarding school told me of the importance of such a project as the more productive orchards could supply her kitchen with the necessary vegetables instead of having to buy them from nearby *mestizo* towns. Once again, self-sufficiency is the major objective of these various projects.

As can be expected, Pedro's main obstacle is that of acquiring the resources to jump start his project in Tutxipa. Although he feels that many in his community do not currently engage in organic agriculture and family orchards, he believes that they would take interest once they saw a successful example. As of July of 2003, Pedro needed approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a hectare of land in order to start a model orchard for the community. Pedro is convinced that the majority of Huicholes would support the idea of reestablishing the community's self-sufficiency which would allow them to stop the recent dependency on the purchase of expensive vegetables, corn, beans and pesticides. Outside of obtaining the resources to start an orchard, Pedro is certain that the rest of the process is simple as Tutxipa's roots are still those of an agricultural and self-sufficient society.

The idea that people learn by example is very strong amongst all of the Huicholes I spoke with. John Lilly from CHAC states that in his last forty years of living and working in the indigenous sierras of southern and western Mexico, if a non-profit foundation or individual erects a successful project, often others will follow suit, including the government. As with Pedro's project for organic family orchards, proponents of solar panels follow a similar approach. As we now know, several Huicholes have purchased their own private solar systems. In addition to this, the electricity in schools, clinics and government houses throughout the Huichol Sierra operate on the basis of solar energy. Nevertheless, many Huicholes remain skeptical of

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<sup>110</sup> Nicholls, Clara Inés and Miguel Altieri. "Conventional agricultural development models and the persistence of the pesticide treadmill in Latin America" in *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*. 4 (1997), p. 93.

the overall superiority of solar panels when compared to the electricity supplied via posts and cables. Much of this is due to the state of disrepair of some of the systems and the lack of know-how to maintain them. However, most believe that this problem would easily be solved through maintenance training. De los Altos and others all agree that through successful examples of solar energy more people would make the effort to independently purchase their own panels and oppose electrical cables. In one interview with several Huicholes from Santa Catarina, emphasis was placed on the ability for solar panels to be easily moved by mule or donkey to various locations throughout the Sierra without cutting down trees for roads or harming the environment.

These various creative and innovative efforts coming from NGOs and Huicholes to preserve and strengthen traditional Huichol cultural, political, economic and territorial organization have been essential for the continuation of resistance to those development projects that look to reap profit from the region. Just as there have been many successes on behalf of the Huicholes, the Mexican government, its private cronies and the structures of the Global North continually threaten the region. Unfortunately, the latter tend to move more quickly as they have the monetary and bureaucratic power to push forth their plans regardless of the views of those whose lives will be altered by them. One possible way of counteracting the State's impositions for those communities in resistance is to broaden their base of support inside and out of their region in order to secure their own projects through concrete actions such as family orchards, use of alternative technology and locally created and managed workshops.

## **VIII. Conclusions**

Mexican ethno-ecologist, Víctor Manuel Toledo, points out that perhaps more than ever, today's population faces a global conflict between industrial societies and nature. Indigenous people and those in the Global South are fundamental actors in this conflict as many of them hold some of the most innovative answers to the problems we currently confront. With this in mind, those of us who wish to change the course humanity is taking under purely market oriented models, must construct an "alternative modernity" based on a combination of solutions from below that empower the average citizen and allow all of us to acquire a deeper social and ecological conscience about the processes that affect the daily lives of thousands of local communities throughout the world.<sup>111</sup> Or, as Roseberry would say, we need a theoretical and practical counter-ideology to the hegemonic systems and notions largely inculcated by the North. The need for such an "alternative modernity" or counter-ideology relies on urban and rural, indigenous and non-indigenous communities forging a pact as our needs become more interconnected, or as Armando Bartra also signals:

...What globalization is achieving is the recognition that exteriority no longer exists, that there are no zones of refuge, that the periphery is the center and vice-versa. The Third World is in Paris and in Los Angeles, the Chiapanecs are in the European

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<sup>111</sup> Toledo, Víctor Manuel. *La paz en Chiapas: ecología, luchas indígenas y modernidad alternativa*. México City: Ediciones Quinto Sol and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000, p. 9.



gourmet market of coffee and honey, and the geographic and biologically strategic zones are inhabited by Indians. One positive aspect of globalization consists in this rupture with exteriority, and in doing so, we are all contemporaries of each other.<sup>112</sup>

As Bartra mentions, indigenous people inhabit the world's most ecologically and culturally diverse regions, indicating the correlation between biodiversity and cultural diversity.<sup>113</sup>

Not only are indigenous and rural communities fundamental elements in our survival, but they represent the vanguard for alternative models of ecologically and culturally sustainable forms of development:

In summary, a fundamental axiom has been inexplicably ignored: in a world every time more globalized and integrated, where all spaces and social sectors of the planet become each time more (not each time less) interdependent, the rural actors, perceived as a backward segment, distant and of less importance, constitute strategic sectors for the survival of the urban and industrial conglomerates of all societies. And in Mexico, as we have seen, this sector finds itself dominated by social actors who come from an ancient cultural matrix that is different from Western civilization: Mesoamerica.<sup>114</sup>

This last quote allows us to return to the Huichol Sierra, where a culture that dates back approximately two thousand years not only retains the integrity of its spiritual and political traditions, but renovates itself in order to resist the current destruction that many of their neighboring communities are facing at the hands of neo-liberal models of development based on human and environmental exploitation. While the State has consistently delegitimized their methods of land tenancy, production and general world vision, many are now seeing that the Huicholes hold important and powerful strategies and solutions that could inspire other sectors of society. The appreciation of indigenous thought also allows us to step away from purely Western notions of world organization that have all too often led to the crises we now confront. As Arturo Escobar notes, this renewed appreciation also responds to the necessity of representing one's own needs and values outside of a Western perspective of history and allows local communities to reaffirm their right to an autonomous sphere of thought. It is worth quoting anthropologist Johannes Neurath who has studied the Huicholes and worked with some NGOs in the area for over a decade:

It was the same indigenous people who put into evidence how absurd it was to consider them mere "survivors" of "prehistoric" stages of humanity. Instead of disappearing before the "inevitable advance of modernization", as the experts forecast, during the entire Twentieth Century many ethnic groups demonstrated a great capacity for cultural self-affirmation: not only do they still exist, but they keep

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<sup>112</sup> Bartra, Armando cited in Víctor Toledo. Op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>113</sup> Toledo cites that 20 percent of the world's surface is under the control of indigenous people and that there are approximately 300-700 million indigenous people living in 75 of the 184 countries and in almost all of the world's biomes. Op. cit., pp. 48-52.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.

on reproducing their traditions and continue to develop with dignity, vibrancy and creativity.<sup>115</sup>

So while institutions such as the INI or CDI continue to design development programs from above that mirror values which are often foreign and detrimental to the communities they claim to represent, others are forging solutions to development from below, completely outside of the government's parameters. Like the Plan Huicot of the 1960's and 1970's, the current case of the National Plan for the Development of Indigenous People shows how the Mexican State has in fact not transformed its methods of relating to the nation's subaltern groups, namely its native population. Even the institutions which are set to safeguard the environmental and cultural survival of Mexicans, such as the SEMARNAT and the INAH, have been seriously obstructed by the State's machine. In the case of the SEMARNAT, the Fox Administration rapidly changed its leadership and bureaucracy in the summer of 2003 as they were considered to be too pro-environment and anti-development. Consequently, the SEMARNAT is now led by a group that is supportive of massive development projects regardless of their effects on the environment. Similarly, the Mexican government, particularly the INI, has been extremely ineffective at solving the problems of land tenancy; rather, the government has exacerbated the problem by allowing *mestizos* to invade indigenous land. So, in order for the Huichol communities to regain usurped land, they have had to take matters into their own hands through direct action and protest, or through legal avenues with the assistance of NGOs.

While there are many Huicholes who support the Mexican government and the introduction of market structures into their region, many more are disillusioned with the dominant political and economic system as it has not helped them improve the state of their communities. As a result, various people are becoming more politicized. One clear example of this can be seen with the communities displaced by the Aguamilpa Hydroelectric Dam. Silvina Carrillo for example, was relocated to a very infertile area driving her family to move to the outskirts of the city of Tepic, she mentioned that the government had no interest in the Mexican people as they only served the interest of the World Bank and the United States. In fact, several people are becoming aware of the global specter of development and the actors, such as the World Bank, that promote the projects that are leaving their communities in absolute poverty. Others, like José de los Altos, are learning to network with important outside allies such as NGOs and international human rights groups. The strategies used by these different people include political action, protest, sustainable and subsistence farming, new notions of education, carpentry and weaving workshops, and so on. In essence, the struggles to resist State imposed models are multifaceted and complex, just as they can appear to be moderate, they can also become radical. Partha Chaterjee's study on the art of resistance shows just this: resistance can be manifested through absenteeism, desertion, selective disobedience, sabotage, strikes, feigned ignorance and even satire.<sup>116</sup> So while the hegemonic system might hold the power of institutionalized violence and financial resources, local communities in resistance have the power of renewal and complex struggle.

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<sup>115</sup> Neurath. Op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>116</sup>Chaterjee. Op. cit., p. 209.

For this resistance to continue, Toledo states that it is fundamental that communities take control over their territory, ecology, culture, political, social and economic organization. Consequently, the defense of autonomy and self-sufficiency are the principal objectives of local resistance. In the past ten years, the Zapatista Movement has been a powerful force throughout Mexico and the world as it has brought the plight of Mexico's indigenous communities to the forefront of the global struggles against neo-liberalism. As seen with President Fox's appropriation of the Zapatista slogan during the inauguration of the electrical post in Mesa del Nayar, Mexican politicians are well aware of the power and resistance held by native peoples. More importantly, the Zapatista Movement has strengthened the opposition of other indigenous communities who face similar predicaments at the hands of the Mexican government and private development companies. Yet, the Huicholes have also influenced the Zapatistas and other indigenous groups as they remain headstrong in the defense of their land and culture:

In Jalisco and Nayarit, the Wixaritari are eager to continue winning legal trials against their invaders, but at the same time they look to strengthen the boundary of their territory, so that they do not get newly invaded. They resent the interference of the electric lights and the roads, of the possible contamination with transgenic maize, and they insist on having an education with their own content. Many are the concrete actions they are undertaking. On the one hand, the communal and traditional authorities...of San Sebastián and Santa Catarina...undertook during 15 days, each one on one side, but in agreement, a walk around their community, on the boundary line of their territory, passing over land invaded by *caciques*, drug traffickers, whomever, so that this time they *would* paint a line to affirm that from there nobody would remove them, and instead *they* would remove those who were invading them.<sup>117</sup>

Despite the resistance the Huicholes have historically put up against un-welcomed intrusions, the current government NPDIP is the most expansive and invasive project they have faced to date. The growing emphasis the State is now placing on the privatization of the country's industries further worries all Mexicans who do not wish to see their country's wealth fall into the hands of the very few. Surely some will continue to support the projects designed by the government and other interest groups, however, as these very projects move forward, many more people are realizing how they will largely bring the benefits to businessmen while the Huicholes and Mexican civil society as a whole will bear the high ecological and social costs. After five hundred years of Western imposition, the Huicholes are now confronted with yet another form of conquest which can be summarized as that of the free-market. Fortunately, the Huicholes have set an admirable precedent of resistance dating back to their establishment in the Western Sierra Madre. Today they continue this legacy as they fight for their right to exist as self-sufficient and vibrant communities.

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<sup>117</sup> Marcos, Subcomandante Insurgente. Op. cit.

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