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**The Economic and Political Development of the P'uhrépecha
Women of the XXI Century**

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MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS THESIS

OF

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The Economic and Political Development of the P'uhrépecha Women of the XXI Century

Linette Quanrūd

Master of Arts in International Affairs

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Abstract

Today, the *P'uhrépecha* woman of Michoacán, Mexico faces unprecedented difficulties daily. Historical and patriarchal colonial antecedents have assisted in shaping the indigenous traditional paradigm. In the past, indigenous women were perceived as inconsequential to the economic and political development of the tribal region. Macro-social and economic factors have given rise to participation and visibility within the confines of what continues to be regarded as a traditionally male-dominated community. Within the recent decade these women have made progressive and persistent strides in creating solidarity toward a common goal, thus achieving increased freedom of economic choice and nascent political participation. Social and religious beliefs have been challenged. Traditional paradigms have been questioned. There is measured achievement in reinventing economic choice, thus permitting the *P'uhrépecha* woman to strive for political visibility and legislative change.

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INTRODUCTION:

The smell of damp mortar permeates the recently constructed room at the rear of the garden courtyard where the meeting is in progress. Heavy wooden chairs, borrowed for the event from other women in the group line the walls of the brick room with tile flooring. The recent addition to the home of *Rosario* was built with state funding. *Rosario*, a twenty-eight year old indigenous *P'uhrépecha* mother of three dresses in traditional attire and has difficulty speaking the Spanish language. Her husband *Antonio* is visiting friends for the day in the neighboring village, thus allowing *Rosario* time to host the meeting, instead of preparing food. As a member of a local, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) for indigenous, *P'uhrépecha* women, *Rosario* was asked if this room could be used for the monthly meeting.¹ To *Rosario*, this room represents one of the opportunities provided through solidarity within the group.

Rainy season prevented the customary meeting from being held outside in the church courtyard of the village of *Urapeti*. Thirty indigenous women, many of whom are monolingual *P'uhrépecha* speakers discuss recent financial questions and political developments, which are directly affecting their daily lives. Several of the women, as was the case with *Rosario*, were recipients of recent financial allocations for indigenous economic development, issued by the western central state government of *Michoacán de Ocampo*, in Mexico. Literacy and economic capacity-building training sessions for indigenous women offered through a local NGO have complemented the

¹ The NGO known as *Uuarhi* was founded in 1998 by *María Guadalupe Hernández Dimas*, an indigenous *P'uhrépecha* woman. In 2005, then-President *Vicente Fox Quezada* awarded her the nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

effort, thus increasing financial stability within the community. With the available funds, these women have launched small businesses within the confines of their homes. Some women have converted their homes into hostels, while others into small family-owned restaurants or ceramic businesses.

In the twenty-first century, indigenous *P'uhрэpecha* women in the highlands of the state of *Michoacán de Ocampo* are experiencing momentous change. Their increasing contribution in the past twenty years has given aperture to nascent political awareness and recent solidarity. Though religious thought is an integral part of their social, economic and political life, these values have been directly affected by the contemporary economic restructuring experienced by the community in the last decade. Their traditional existence has been threatened by contemporary religious and social upheavals. Western models of governance have proven to be inefficient and unsuitable in managing the recent economic and political developments. Few references or studies have been made about the marginalizing economic or political patterns which affect the lives of the indigenous woman.²

Based upon my empirical research, in addition to theories and academic studies performed by other scholars in the fields of socio-cultural anthropology, economics and politics I will demonstrate how traditional ideology and practices of the *P'uhрэpecha* woman are being modified by external causal factors, thus ushering in new concepts of economic and political participation. These economic developments have become a vehicle to propel the women into local and state political forums. Due

² Beals, Ralph Larson. *Cherán : Un pueblo de la sierra tarasca. (Cherán: A Village in the Tarascan Sierra)* A. J. Zavala. (trans.) (Morelia: Instituto Michoacano de Cultura), (1992) (1945).

to safety concerns for the women I interviewed and reasons later apparent in the thesis, I have changed the names of persons and villages.

The scope of previous research conducted by other scholars has focused on pre-Colombian, colonial or mid- twentieth century social, economic and political patterns expressed within the community. Renown archeologists and anthropologists Ralph Larson Beals, George M. Foster and Helen Perlstein Pollard are highly regarded for their research within the contexts of *P'uhrépecha* religious, social and economic patterns. In the mid-twentieth century Foster conducted anthropological and archeological research in the *P'uhrépecha* region, however contemporary, economic and political issues of gender were not fully addressed, as the community was still quite insular. As a foremost anthropologist, Beals researched and documented issues facing the general community in the mid-to late twentieth century however, at that time *P'uhrépecha* women had not yet begun to develop solidarity and a unified voice. Perlstein Pollard has contributed documentation regarding the role of the *P'uhrépecha* woman in pre-Colombian history and the mid-twentieth century. The most contemporary research has focused on communal issues involving both genders, as adherence to cultural and social conventions often dissuade *P'uhrépecha* women from interacting with outsiders without the presence of a male relative.

Existing theory coupled with my extensive empirical field research provide the architectural framework to substantiate my case study analysis. In conducting research within this region throughout the past eleven years I became a participant-

observer, in which a built-in bias exists.³ I speak native Spanish and rudimentary *P'uhrépecha*, having lived in and around the region since childhood.⁴ After years of investigation and field research, in 2001

I published an honors thesis entitled: *The Syncretic Cultural and Religious Beliefs of the P'uhrépecha*.⁵ My research revealed how religion and traditional cultural practices affected development of social capital, as implemented through a non-western frame of reference. However, in the past decade external macro forces have caused shifts in these foundations creating an aperture for change. During a six week period in 2004 I gathered additional empirical evidence, which will also be included.

During the summer of 2008 I received a field-research grant. In the spring of 2009 I returned to conduct additional research. I interviewed and documented economic and political issues occurring among indigenous *P'uhrépecha* women, Mexican federal and state officials, sociologists, psychologists, political analysts and economists. I conducted parallel research at academic institutions and government ministries within the state of Michoacán and at academic locations in Paris, France. This provided the basis for my theoretical information.

Five villages, *Hapunda*, *Tsimani*, *Urapeti*, *Angatapu* and *Huatsapi* are the basis for my comparative research within the *P'uhrépecha* region. Though close in proximity, women within these villages hold diverging views and practices of tradition. The villages of *Hapunda* and *Tsimani* have experienced extensive migration,

³ The eleven year research period extended from 1998 to 2009, in which I conducted field research for a total period of one and a half years.

⁴ In 2004 I was bestowed a tribal name, *Tzitziki Urapeti* translated as, White Flower.

⁵ Quanrūd-Wallace, Linette. *El sincretismo cultural y las creencias religiosas de los P'uhrépecha* (*The Syncretic Cultural and Religious Beliefs of the P'uhrépecha*) (Tempe: Arizona State University, 2001).

creating a more progressive environment, yet unlike *Hapunda*, the village of *Tsimani* has experienced the ills of narco-trafficking. Traditional indigenous values remain central to politics in the village of *Urapeti*. Numerous women in *Angatapu* and *Huatsapi* experience less autonomy than their counterparts in surrounding villages, as the communities are more remote and embrace a more conservative outlook. Within each of these villages I conducted interviews individually and in groups.

In *Hapunda* the group included ten women who were participants in a GONGO (Government-Organized, Non-Governmental Organization). Their ages ranged from eighteen to forty and eight of the ten were married. All had children. One was single and the other was a widow. The spouses or partners of all but one had been or at the time were in a relationship with a migrant worker in the United States. Women in *Tsimani* were cautious in speaking to anyone outside their immediate circle of influence, as recent perpetrators of narco-trafficking violence had frightened women in the village of negative consequences, should they speak with outsiders. Therefore, I was only able to speak with three women individually. All were married and had children. Two of the three were spouses of migrants who no longer lived in the area.

A group in *Urapeti* included fifty women participants in a GONGO. This group ranged in ages from eighteen to fifty-five. All but five were either married or widowed and the majority had children. The five were younger women in a serious relationship. Only one third of the group was in a relationship with a migrant partner who did not live in the area. On another occasion in *Urapeti* I interviewed a group of twenty women gathered for a meeting of a regional NGO, operating since 1997. They

had arrived from five different villages. All were married with children. Five of the women were spouses of migrants who no longer lived in the area.

I interviewed three women from *Angatapu*, as few women there were willing to dialogue with a non-*P'uhрэpecha* person. Three had spouses and were participants in a GONGO. They each had children, but were reluctant to give much information. In *Huatsapi* I interviewed seven women. Only two were involved in regional NGOs. They ranged in ages from twenty-eight to sixty. All either were at present or had been partners or spouses of a migrant worker and had children. Though reticent to speak to a non-*P'uhрэpecha* person, three women were quite willing to participate in interviews.⁶ In the past decade external macro forces have caused shifts in these foundations creating an aperture for change.

Increased efforts by NGOs and GONGOs in capacity-building and literacy for women and girls are creating new avenues of opportunity which could lead to increased economic growth within a framework of “social responsibility”. The “capability perspective,” such as described by economist Amartya Sen, in which accessible economic choice improves social capital of civil society, provides the stability and increased freedoms these women are experiencing. This “perspective” into account the freedom of choice based upon the qualitative capacity allotted an individual given the adequate means, not simply a quantitative freedom.⁷

A pragmatic, westernized view of communal economics has become increasingly prevalent among some of the women interviewed. These individuals

⁶ Quanrūd, Linette. Research and Interviews, Summer 2008 and Spring 2009. Michoacán, Mexico.

⁷ In *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), Amartya Sen presents culturally sensitive economic themes from the western and non-western perspectives.

have migrant spouses or have migrated for a period of time away from the tribal community, usually to the United States. This westernized paradigm is measured by a value placed on the functional relevancy of a particular economic choice, rather than the non-western approach of economic choice. The westernized paradigm is contrary to the non-western multi-dimensional perspective, as implemented by the *P'uhrépecha*. Their non-western economic choices involve the value based upon social and religious contexts.

Political analyst Pierre Bourdieu refers to this non-western approach as “multifunctional”.⁸ In a westernized “traditional economy”, as described by Bourdieu the law of (westernized) economics defeats other laws or traditions, including social and religious norms, thus enabling a western system to function. Bourdieu further attests that in the non-western paradigm, this “traditional economy” is considered an erroneous assumption.

[trans.] “ancient societies, ... pre-capitalist societies ... and other universal societies such as religion, art and science ... observe a polysemic and a multifunctionalism (a word used by Durkheim ...) ...that can be interpreted as [functioning] religious, economic, esthetic, etc., at the same time”.⁹

At the core of the non-western *P'uhrépecha* perspective is a syncretism existent since the pre-Colombian period, allowing for religious, social, economic and political ambits to function “at the same time”, as stated by Bourdieu. In recent years, this method of survival has been challenged by outside elements, which have

⁸ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Raisons Pratiques Sur la Théorie de l'Action*. (Practical Reasoning on The Theory of Action)(Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1994) pp. 158-159.

⁹ Ibid.

attempted to modify ancient patterns of behavior to reflect the surrounding nation that looks to the west.

“A new path has been initiated, a new form of conceiving ‘community,’ creating and living a new societal relationship, where indigenous women are no longer so dependent upon so much past historic and present-day conditioning factors; [instead] they become aware that they are actors in determining the constructs of a new society.”

María Guadalupe Hernández

Dimas¹⁰

CHAPTER 1: Embedded Factors Affecting Change

Certain cultural and religious factors that are deeply entrenched in the conscience of the indigenous *P'uhrépecha* affect the present economic and political posture of the tribal community as it interacts with the westernized *mestizo* citizenry. Tribal reasoning is oftentimes based upon prior negative colonial situations, causing a strained rapport. By identifying these embedded factors, it becomes somewhat less difficult to understand how these modifications to the traditional paradigm directly affect the *P'uhrépecha* woman.

During the pre-Colombian period, the *P'uhrépecha* kingdom then known as *Mechuacán*, “was the largest political unit in Mexico ... next to the Aztec Empire”.¹¹

¹⁰ In 1998, a *P'uhrépecha* woman, María Guadalupe Hernández Dimas also initiated a peaceful resolution to a territorial dispute which had turned violent. *Vendetta*-style killings had become commonplace between two villages and the state government refused to intervene, as it was viewed as an indigenous problem. After dozens of group meetings facilitated by Hernández Dimas in an indigenous setting, concessions were agreed to by both parties, with the assistance of the parish priest. The armed-conflict was resolved several months later and a document signed by both parties in the fields where the murders had occurred, followed in the traditional indigenous custom, with religious blessings and food brought by both villages. The conflict has not resurfaced. In 1999, the non-governmental organization *Uarhi*, (meaning Woman in the *P'uhrépecha* language) was founded by Hernández Dimas. *Uarhi* has financial donors in Spain and regional supporters providing economic, health and capacity-building seminars. Hernández Dimas and assistants teach capacity-building seminars and provide insight into issues involving the indigenous political life of the region and the state. Awarded the Mexican Nobel Prize Nominee in 2005, by then President Vicente Fox Quesada, Hernández Dimas has become more involved in political indigenous efforts, specifically focusing on women. She has also worked in the Secretary of Indigenous Affairs for the state of Michoacán, as senior assessor. She is widely respected in state and federal political circles.

¹¹ Foster, George M. *Empire's Children: The People of Tzintzuntzan*. (México D.F.: Imprenta Nuevo Mundo, S.A., 1948) p. 6.

They were one of the few tribes never to have been conquered during the Aztec ascension to power. The kingdom boasted a prestigious array of warriors, skilled copper artisans and priests of both genders.¹² Counting on a robust economy and cunning political strategies, the *P'uhrépecha* kingdom preserved their culture and lands for millennia.¹³

The codex *Relación de Michoacán* cites a bloodless political transition of governance and ensuing conversions to Catholicism, upon the arrival of the first *conquistadors* and continued without bloodshed for eight years. Though the external perception of the *P'uhrépecha* was one of compliance, throughout the territory of Michoacán a parallel indigenous government and religion was overtly present.¹⁴ This coexistence was first disrupted by another Spanish emissary for the court of Charles the V. *Nuño de Guzmán*, who became known throughout the territories for his ruthless domination.¹⁵ In the *P'uhrépecha* region he proceeded to execute male and female members of the royal family and was removed from power by the Spanish King, Charles the V. This massacre would shape future reactions of the *P'uhrépecha* toward outside influences for centuries. Today, over three-hundred years later the *P'uhrépecha* community continues to pay homage to the martyred King and his legacy, which is a source of tribal and civic pride.

The ensuing authority, to whom credit is given for lasting economic development within the region was a Spanish lawyer who was later appointed by the King of Spain,

¹² Ibid. p.10-16.

¹³ <http://www.mexconnect.com/.../225-the-tarasco-culture-and-empire>

¹⁴ (See Addendum I).

¹⁵ The Spanish term *oidor* refers to a judge and *audiencia* refers to the court in which hearings were held and legislation executed.

Charles V as Bishop of this region, *Don Vasco de Quiroga*. He ushered in westernized forms of healthcare and re-structured economic development, adjusting his religious views to include non-western indigenous religious frames of reference.¹⁶ *Vasco de Quiroga* formed various guilds, open to the male population within the community, thus intensifying the process of economic re-structuring and increasing productivity among villages within the *P'uhрэpecha* region. As natural resources and indigenous labor were abundant, economic and market development increased. Spain in particular, was the greatest consumers of these goods. However, though guarded confidence developed with *Vasco de Quiroga*, the political executions of *P'uhрэpecha* royalty had created acute distrust of the newly-formed colonial, *mestizo* government. The result was tribal social and political isolationism.

After independence from Spain, anti-colonial sentiment increased nationalism among the *mestizo* society within Mexico, yet indigenous segments of society became further repressed economically and politically. Tribal social and economic patterns continued functioning in a non-western paradigm. These patterns are still held firmly within the community and are as dissimilar to the culture of the Mexican, *mestizo* citizen, as they are to other western cultures. Rarely are their views accessible to anyone outside the tribe.¹⁷

¹⁶ The description used by Foster of the "hospitals" built by *Don Vasco de Quiroga* in villages throughout the *P'uhрэpecha* region were multi-functional facilities which functioned as a "center of religion, of politics, and of the humanity of the Indian". *Don Vasco de Quiroga* was born in 1471, in the town of *Madrigal de las Altas Torres* in Spain and became a lawyer. Already in his forties, he began his career in New Spain, as the second governor in the province of *Michoacán* in 1531. By 1540, he was appointed Bishop of the region. He founded a lake-side village and constructed the only rudimentary hospital in the region, next to the village Catholic Church. This village is still a major political center for the *P'uhрэpecha* community today, with an active congregation. He facilitated an economic recovery within the indigenous region, which had been decimated by *Nuño de Guzmán*s.

¹⁷ During research conducted in October of 2004, I observed syncretic religious rituals held during the entire night in various homes, throughout the village of *Urapeti*. Family and friends of the deceased participated in ritualistic

a) Historical Antecedents of P'uhrépecha Women

The *P'uhrépecha* tribal community possesses a proud and complex, patriarchal colonial history, in which the female gender has rarely, if ever been granted access to education, economic opportunities or a political voice within the tribal decision-making processes. Until recent years, any external effort by the Mexican federal or state governments to forcibly modify tribal traditions has repeatedly been thwarted by the community. Well-defined, gender roles have relegated women to a subservient position in domestic life, without the possibility of economic or political participation within the colonial, patriarchal hierarchy.

The only bifurcation existing to gender marginalization, during and after the colonial period has occurred in the pre-Colombian, shamanic tradition, wherein well-respected, female shamans live among local tribal communities.¹⁸ Adherence to a non-western frame of reference based upon ancient religious values has increased dependence upon local tribal elders and female shamans. Though female shamans have occupied an important position of authority in religious indigenous practices and community affairs since the pre-Colombian era, after independence from Spain the

chants and songs in *P'uhrépecha* and Spanish, lead by female elders and respected tribal leaders. Women carried the home-baked breads and fruit brought to each dwelling. These were placed on temporary, floor to ceiling floral altars that occupied an entire room. An icon of the Virgin Mary was placed in the center of the altar. *Pozole*, which is a hominy-based soup and *atole*, a chocolate and corn-based drink were consumed at each home and served by the female of the household.

¹⁸ According to a study in the village of *Cherán*, conducted by archeologist Dr. Beals, shamanic powers are transferred through parentage. The women shamans in *Cherán* as in surrounding villages were known throughout the region for their witchcraft. In the summer of 2008, I interviewed a retired indigenous professor and author from *Caltzontzin*, a nearby village, who confirmed accounts of shamanic practices by women still occurring today.

P'uhrépecha woman became less valuable to the *mestizo* government. Male artisans within tribal communities generated the economic strength.¹⁹

Though there are not many pre-Colombian written accounts of female participation in ancient *P'uhrépecha* society, the *Relación de Michoacán* states that “women held all the positions [of authority] within the king’s palace”, as they were respected and treated with dignity.²⁰ According to anthropologist Helen Perlstein Pollard, some communities were,

“ruled by women ... [as] elite women could become political leaders, a role later denied them ... femaleness in general, occupied a relatively high status ... two of the three major deities were female and large numbers of elite women were among their ritual specialists ... women as wives, aunts and daughters occupy prominent roles in the legendary history of the state.”²¹

The majority of indigenous villages in the region continue to practice a syncretic form of ancient, pagan belief coupled with Christianity.²² In these rituals, which are either condemned by the local Catholic priests or their existence is denied, the female gender has remained a dominating force.²³

¹⁹ Beals, Ralph Larson. *Cherán : Un pueblo de la sierra tarasca. (Cherán: A Village in the Tarascan Sierra)* A. J. Zavala. (trans.) (Morelia: Instituto Michoacano de Cultura, 1992) (1945).

²⁰ In 1522, the first Spanish *conquistador*, *Cristóbal de Olid* entered the *P'uhrépecha* kingdom. The *Relación de Michoacán* (Narrative of Michoacán) otherwise known as *Relación de las ceremonias y ritos y población y gobernación de los indios de la provincia de Michoacán* (Narrative of the Ceremonies and Rituals and Population and Governance of the Indians of the Province of Michoacán) has provided anthropologists and archeologists with insight into the pre-Colombian life and history of the *P'uhrépecha* kingdom. This reliable source of 140 pages was most possibly written by Spanish Friar *Jerónimo de Alcalá* between 1531 and 1545.

<http://bibliotecadigital.ilce.edu.mx/sites/fondo2000/vol1/relacion/html/indice.html>

²¹ Perlstein Pollard, Helen. *Tariacuri's Legacy: The Prehispanic Tarascan State*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993) pp. 178-180. She is a renown researcher and associate professor of anthropology at Michigan State University, in “ethno-historic documentation, ecological data and archeological research” and has established anthropological advancements within the *P'uhrépecha* region.

²² (see Addendum II).

²³ In the spring of 2009 I was invited by *P'uhrépecha* representatives to attend the Day of the Indigenous Person, in which federal, state and local authorities celebrated the four tribes living throughout the region. At this official gathering, a female indigenous shaman accompanied by four indigenous male assistants celebrated an ancient ritual blessing of the event.

Within the Catholic Church the indigenous woman has been an integral fixture, yet subservient domestic behavior has also been encouraged. Without having a voice in the decision-making process of religious, social or economic functions, the *P'uhrépecha* woman has become further removed from any economic or political participation.

Today, macro-external factors are forcing change in traditional domestic and economic patterns in tribal communities. These factors include a lack of education and healthcare, narco-trafficking and increased migration. Oftentimes, educational marginalization and racism prevents indigenous persons from becoming a fully-integrated member of the *mestizo* civil society. Regardless, today a number of female tribal members have begun to radically transform the traditional paradigm, as they are creating links of communication between the *mestizo* authorities and the indigenous community.

Within this contemporary framework, *P'uhrépecha* women have endeavored to adjust and function differently from their traditional social model. In prior decades, the male head of household provided economic stability for the family through agricultural sustenance and artisanship. However, economic stressors are emerging that have never before been experienced on such a large scale. These stressors are proportionately related to the disruption of traditional indigenous domestic and communal support systems of civil society. They place at risk the stability and security commonly provided within the community.

b) Educational and Healthcare System Stressors

Lack of education and healthcare are causal factors inhibiting progress among the female gender in rural areas of the *P'uhрэpecha* region. Though it is not customary for children to complete basic education, the female gender falls well below the educational average for the area.²⁴ Young girls are rarely allowed to complete their primary education and according to INEGI (National Institute of Statistics and Geography), the literacy percentage in the State of Michoacán is one of the lowest in Mexico. According to the latest INEGI census, there are 3,966,073 persons living within the state and 2,073,696 persons are female.²⁵ The *P'uhрэpecha* tribe outnumbers *Náhua* and *Otomí* tribes, which rank second and third, respectively. A majority of *mestizos* in *Michoacán* have *P'uhрэpecha* heritage.²⁶ According to INEGI, a total of 132,442 indigenous persons are *P'uhрэpecha* and may understand or speak Spanish. The majority of indigenous *P'uhрэpecha* women today have difficulty communicating in Spanish and have not completed primary education. Many are still illiterate.²⁷

²⁴ This link provides the most current statistics about Mexico, written in Spanish, by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, <http://www.inegi.gob.mx>.

²⁵ INEGI statistics for 2005 are the latest figures available. Disclaimers on the site attest to some inconsistencies found in figures gathered for the census and actual numbers.

²⁶ In earlier centuries after the Conquest of New Spain a *mestizo* meant an individual of European and indigenous heritage. Today, the term may include persons who are also of indigenous, European, Asian or African heritages. <http://www.nacionmulticultural.unam.mx>

²⁷ In the last decade, approval of legislation favoring indigenous persons has assisted the continued struggle of access to freedoms and capacity-building, in which choice is at the forefront. Bi-lingual education has become a right and indigenous languages are to be respected. According to authors Benjamín Pérez González and Martha E. Villavievecio Enríquez. "Officially, [Mexico] recognized itself as a multicultural and pluri-lingual State ... Article 2 of the Constitution [states] that the nation has a pluri-cultural framework sustained originally in its indigenous peoples." Other directives in the legislation of Article 7, IV, and 38 of the current Mexican constitution establish the respect for the rights of indigenous languages to be spoken and linguistic plurality in educational institutions including Primary, Secondary and Preparatory. However, though the laws have been ratified, the ability to follow-through to completion is still to be discovered.

Though regional and national NGOs and GONGOs (Government-Operated, Non-Governmental Organizations) stress the importance of participation in education and future financial contributions to the well-being and welfare of indigenous families, the widespread tribal view continues to place young girls and women solely in a domestic category within the social paradigm. Additional incentives by GONGOs and NGOs are given to families whose young girls attend school. Each family receives an additional financial supplement.²⁸ However, the traditional mindset which considers a young girl a 'burden to the family' is still present.²⁹

Accessibility in rural villages of a quality basic, primary education is a goal which has not yet been reached. There are few teachers who will endure the low-paying positions in remote areas, which are fraught with complexities and oftentimes perilous to personal safety. there is lack of infrastructure.³⁰ Unions demand the presence of statewide faculty during strikes which are repeatedly held in the capital city. Occasionally the strikes last several weeks without resolution, thus placing the children's education at risk.³¹ Low wages deter many to more profitable and uncomplicated teaching positions within city schools.

²⁸ (See Addendum II).

²⁹ Interviews on numerous occasions with María Guadalupe Hernández Dimas highlighted the fact that there still are unresolved issues pertaining to indigenous women's rights. The *P'uhrépecha* woman continues to suffer from marginalization.

Hernández Dimas observes that many families refuse to send their daughters to school after attending primary education, as daughters repeatedly are told that they were born to marry and have children. Hernández Dimas published "*La Mujer P'uhrépecha: Una mirada desde la pobreza de las comunidades (The P'uhrépecha Woman: An Outlook, as Viewed from the Poverty of the Communities)*", in which there is empirical evidence of contemporary social and economic marginalization suffered by the *P'uhrépecha* woman. I am currently translating this book into English.

³⁰ During interviews I conducted in the spring of 2009 with state university faculty and personnel of regional NGOs and GONGOs, a consistent pattern emerged. There is a lack of basic infrastructure, such as roads and schools. The recent perils of narco-trafficking in the region make traveling unsafe.

³¹ In the spring of 2009, the teachers were on strike in the capital city of Morelia, blocking traffic by constructing tents and eventually wooden huts in the historic center street of the city. This disrupted traffic and business for four weeks. During this time, classes were suspended until the government and the union reached an agreement.

Another educational issue emerged during the interviews. Bilingual teachers are needed, as mono-lingual, Spanish speaking teachers cannot fully communicate either with primary *P'uhrépecha*-speaking students or with parents, thus teaching is routinely reduced to an inferior quality of instruction.³² A majority of *P'uhrépecha* mothers speak minimal Spanish and operate with rudimentary educational skills or are simply unable to assist in the educational growth at home. According to the most recent INEGI statistics, the majority of parents with children who attend first grade through preparatory school may only have a third or fourth grade level of education, if at all.³³

Both in my research in the villages, as well as investigations conducted by psychologist and professor Dr. Coeto Mateos and her assistant, Vitalina Remigio Gallardo, young girls approaching five years of age are told that they must learn domestic chores by seven, as in the early teenage years they are to marry and begin a family.³⁴ Therefore, among many indigenous communities, education for girls is

Union repercussions, such as alienation or marginalization from the group follow the teachers who refuse to attend these strikes.

³² In my interviews with grade-school and secondary-age students of rural communities, they expressed frustration at the increased level of teacher-turnover, lack of interest by the teacher in the students and subjects taught in school to be culturally irrelevant. It is not uncommon for students to receive demands to complete work in a classroom without explanation of how to accomplish the task. Teachers have also been known to leave the classroom for the day, after an assigned task has been given.

³³ In 2000, most indigenous communities had only a third-grade level of primary education. The rate of illiteracy of persons fifteen years of age and above was just under 25 percent. It is not uncommon for adolescent young girls to be held back from continuing their education, as domestic chores and marriage are considered more imperative and valuable than education and learning the Spanish language. My interviews and observations in the villages showed that these factors greatly contribute to the primary drop-out rate. The drop-out rate for girls of ten to twelve years of age was greater than for the boys of the same age.

³⁴ I interviewed Dr. Coeto Mateos in Morelia in the spring of 2009. As a practicing psychologist and Professor at the state university of Michoacán, she had completed research on contemporary education and societal issues facing the indigenous *P'uhrépecha* female gender. Traditional custom demands that young girls learn domestic chores in preparation for marriage, which still occurs around thirteen years of age. Access to secondary education is only possible if the child can commute to a larger town or live with a relative during that educational period. Families of young adults who wish to pursue tertiary education must also have additional economic means to survive in a city, and knowledge of the educational system, which is a complex process and unfamiliar to many in rural

considered unimportant. Failure to continue their primary education is viewed as insignificant. This paradigm produces flawed and untenable consequences rather than building a progressive, self-sustaining civil society. Few studies have considered how the marginalized educational process affects economic or political patterns in the lives of the indigenous woman.

c. Land Reallocation and Migration

Though the Mexican Constitution of 1917 was considered by political analysts to be one of the most liberal for its era, lands were reallocated to the indigenous communities throughout the country in an attempt to increase economic sustainability among indigenous populations.³⁵ However, in the twentieth century migration intensified the stressors of poverty. The migration of indigenous and *mestizo* males to the United States from various states throughout Mexico, known as the “*Bracero Program*” was born after World War II until 1964, and included around 4.5 million workers.³⁶ Many rural, migrant male workers temporarily relocated to the United States to obtain agricultural employment, as an increased earning potential was offered. However, many women and children left behind continued to labor arable plots of family land surrounding the villages.³⁷ Within Mexico’s neoliberal

regions.

³⁵ In this link the Mexican Constitution of 1917 can be read in its entirety

<http://pdba.georgetown.edu/constitutions/mexico/mexico1917.html>.

³⁶ Gammage, Sara and John Schmitt. ‘*Los inmigrantes mexicanos, salvadoreños y dominicanos en el mercado laboral estadounidense: las brechas de género en los años 1990 y 2000. Serie estudios y perspectivas. Sede subregional de la CEPAL en México. Unidad de Desarrollo Social.* (‘*The Mexican, Salvadorean and Dominican Immigrants in the Liberal Market of the United States: The Breach of Gender in the years 1990 and 2000*’, in Series of Studies and Perspectives. Subregional Seat of CEPAL in Mexico. Unit of Social Development (Mexico D.F.: CEPAL, 2004).

³⁷ Corn is the primary food-source, which is planted and harvested.

ideology, the economic calculations of the region did not include the financial contribution of the indigenous woman.

In the Mexican federal restructuring and reallocation of arable, indigenous land in the late 1970s, under then-President Luis Echeverría Álvarez, sizeable indigenous family plots, known as *ejidos* were reduced and re-apportioned as community land, in an attempt to accommodate the expanding indigenous communities nationwide.³⁸ Systemic domestic financial instability emerged in rural regions as reduced family *ejidos* were not large enough to create self-sustainability. During this restructuring, a promise to increase the socio-economic position of the indigenous population had an adverse effect on the broader community, thus producing long-term, deconstructive effects.

Federal legislation still bars the sale or bartering of agricultural land without the consent of the entire community, as property surrounding the indigenous villages is considered an integral part of the village. Today, many communal lands lay fallow. Tractors that were supplied to the communities have rusted unused, as indigenous migration of males within the region has escalated. Disputes over cultivation logistics and harvesting of corn by the indigenous males remaining in the villages impeded the

³⁸ According to <http://www.mexicolaw.com>, the Agrarian Reform Ministry allocated lands to impoverished farmers, generally of indigenous heritage, for the purpose of communal farming on individual parcels. Another section is communal. These are known as “*ejidos*”. The parcels are able to be unincorporated, so long as all members agree.

much-needed progress.³⁹ This caveat has led to increased disruption of social capital within the region and oftentimes violent armed conflict.⁴⁰

According to the former neo-liberal Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, NAFTA only accelerated migration from rural regions. Migration, which he contends had already been occurring, increased from 19 percent in 1994, to 30 percent in 2002. During ten a period of ten years of the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) Treaty, consumption of corn increased by 11.6 million tons, yet only 5.8 million tons were produced within the Mexican borders.⁴¹ Imported agricultural staples within the region supplanted the local market supply, thus contributing to the reversal of the economic stability within the region.

Though acknowledging the validity of the facts and figures cited by former President Salinas de Gortari, what appears omitted is the causal factor of the migration. Assumption that heavy investment of capital and industry would simply thrust the Mexican economy into a progressive leap forward, did not achieve the desired results. In *Michoacán*, profit-making positions taken by management of transnational corporations from the United States and China, as well as overseas manufacturing competition have been additional factors that have helped shape the current migration issue and heightened concern of small to medium-sized indigenous

³⁹ During the interview of one of the leaders in *Urapeti*, in July of 2008, he stated that the cultivation and harvesting was divided equally among the families of the males who labored in the fields and those who had migrated. This was the specific point of tribal dissention.

⁴⁰ In my research of 2008, I spoke with leaders in the town of *Urapeti*, where much of the community land is left untilled. A larger, mostly *mestizo* village bordering the village of *Urapeti* required land for expansion and usurped properties lying fallow. Armed conflict ensued causing several deaths, before the dispute was resolved. These contemporary issues have caused divisions among tribal members and affected social and economic progress. Within the last five years, certain tribal resolutions have helped ameliorate the situation and there has been a reduction in *vendetta*-style deaths.

⁴¹ As a neo-liberalist, former Mexican President, Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988 – 1994) presents his version of the failure of the neoliberalist party in years following his presidency.

businesses. These corporations have established a presence in small towns and have caused local industries to suffer from an inability to compete.

Most of the small businesses are owned and operated by women who are barely literate and spouses of migrants abroad. A majority are single parents and heads of households. The hours of support and potential economic force of the indigenous woman was not factored into the equation of economic funding and growth when the transnational projects were launched. According to authors Sarah A. Radcliffe, Nina Laurie and Robert Andolina, "... in Central America and Mexico, projects were designed without the bank's current policy on gender relations and inequalities in developments".⁴² Frustrated neoliberal efforts by former Mexican presidencies to mainstream the indigenous population into *mestizo* society may not have taken into account the level of importance that is given to the traditional paradigm in the indigenous community.

In 2004, INEGI, in coordination of efforts with the Post-Graduate College of Agricultural Sciences presented research results in which 70 percent of migrants are rural. In Michoacán, 48 percent are considered extremely poor (lacking basic nutrition, healthcare and education) and 20 percent of household incomes are based upon remittances from the United States. Since the recent crisis, demographic statistics show that there has been an increase in female gender migration. This increase in migratory flight has been the result of a minimal presence of capacity-

⁴² Radcliffe, Sarah A., Nina Laurie and Robert Andolina. 'The Transnationalization of Gender and Reimagining Andean Indigenous Development', in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 29, Number 2. Lionnet F., O. Nnaemeka, S. H. Perry, C. Schenck (eds.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2004) p. 401.

building and re-training infrastructure to assist those who no longer work in agriculture, as traditional methods of sustenance are no longer efficient.

An increasing number of indigenous women have begun to learn artisanal craftsmanship, either by being self-taught or learning from a male family member willing to provide instruction. This process is still viewed with skepticism by the community at large and many female spouses of migrants are marginalized, as they do not follow the traditional model of remaining at home.⁴³

A majority of women interviewed in the villages of *Hapunda* and *Urapeti*, were either a current spouse of a migrant worker or had been in the past. Two scenarios were most common. First, the remittances were either withheld or redistributed intermittently to the migrant's spouse and children by the mother of the migrant worker. Second, the remittances ceased, as the migrant worker either died abroad or chose to create another family and simply disappeared from the lives of those left behind.

According to B. Figueroa Sandoval, director of the *Colegio de pos-graduados de ciencias agrícolas* (Post-Graduate College of Agricultural Sciences), over 70 percent of the migrants are from depressed rural areas. The 'dream' of earning more capital and improving livelihood in the United States, known as *El Norte* has been the reason for much of the migrant flight and willingness to risk possible death during the crossing. Remittances have provided for improved housing and nourishment for

43 I conducted interviews with five indigenous women whose spouses had become migrant workers. Self-sustainability was no longer possible in the small village consequently each of the women had chosen to provide additional income by either embroidering cloth or harvesting and selling bags of chopped wild cactus. One woman had secretly observed her father and uncles carve wood, as it was considered male work and he refused to mentor her. She eventually became proficient, began selling her own carvings and has become a sculptor of renown.

many indigenous families.⁴⁴ Entire communities have been affected by relying on remittances from migrant spouses abroad. Recent UNAM *Universidad Autónoma de México* (Autonomous University of Mexico) statistics now show the percentage of women migrants from the state of *Michoacán de Ocampo* as one of the highest in the nation. According to UNAM (the National Autonomous University in Mexico) in 2006, 28 percent of women were migrating from Mexico. In 2007, the figure increased to 38 percent, out of which 70 percent of the migrants were under the age of 30. The most common reason was to reunite with a spouse.

The chief of staff of SEDECO, Mexico's Department of Economic Development stated, "... *la migración [debe ser] solamente una decisión, y no una necesidad*" ("... migration [should only] be a decision [that includes several options], and not a necessity)." Arguably, for many it is a difficult decision, however in some cases the allure of the temporary narco-trafficking riches appears too difficult to resist.

d. Corruption and Narco-Trafficking

During my research in the village of *Hapunda*, I observed a large segment of the residents were elderly or young adults. The face of the village has begun to change, owing to elevated levels of migration and remittances.⁴⁵ Teenagers and young adults who live with relatives and whose migrant parents send remittances have more

⁴⁴ The homes built by remittances of migrants are one or two room, brick houses, many may not have plumbing. Prior housing consisted of corrugated, creosote-covered cardboard rooms with wooden beams and thatched roofing.

⁴⁵ A large refurbished church stands in the center of the village. The priest, once revered, is now only allowed to come on festival days. Four-wheel-drive trucks abound on poorly constructed cobble-stone or dirt streets. Many of the small brick dwellings built with remittances do not have running water, as there is a lack of infrastructure. Several young women wear western clothing such as halter-tops, which have been purchased in the United States, combined with large, traditional *P'uhrépecha* skirts. Some young women have tattooed their shoulders. The baring of shoulders and backs has been a cultural taboo among indigenous women. In other villages this behavior is still considered scandalous.

disposable income than those whose parents have remained in the village. This issue has two aspects. Though remittances have improved certain tangibles within the community, there is less supervision of the youth and many become involved in narco-trafficking as this provides an additional means of revenue. By securing a bond with narco-traffickers their circle of influence increases beyond the confines of the village. Fragmented families, pre-teens and young adults struggle between structured tribal society and western influences.

Recently an influx of narco-trafficking violence besieged the village. An example of this violence was recently experienced as two indigenous women who were walking on the well-known pathway to the neighboring village were abducted and beheaded by narco-traffickers in a cartel *vendetta*. Violent personal *vendettas* have known to occur for decades, yet wide-scale violence had not reached the point where spill-over would occur in neighboring regions, attacking innocent civilians, rather only those directly involved. On numerous occasions individuals or communities would fight over land rights or other personal matters, but these violent means have been uncommon in this region, until recently.

In this rural area where *machetes* are commonplace, both as an agricultural tool and as a weapon, additional arms have been added to the cadre. As the recent narcotics conflict has become more manifest, AK-47s, rifles, sub-machine guns, grenades and other ordnance purchased by the cartels has been found distributed to narco-traffickers and their security forces, within the area. In November 2008 a

massive cache of ordnance was confiscated by military and police raids on warehouse facilities and regional villages.⁴⁶

Corruption is not uncommon within local and state governments, as officials vie for political positioning. Justice and safety in the community has diminished. Throughout the decades, personal enrichment has been known to occur with public funding, but recent disbursements of massive quantities of dollars by narco-traffickers have resulted in an elevated level of corruption, as government salaries pale in comparison. Financial competition is impossible.

An infusion of narco-terror among the indigenous community at large has become a daily threat. In the past, innocent persons were rarely targeted. The indigenous family structure and social networks were kept strong through traditional kinship and social bonds. Women and children were not targeted in *vendettas*. There have been periods of civil unrest within the region for decades, however this new dimension of widespread violence places previously unknown stressors on women and children whom already experience anxiety due to migratory issues. It terrifies communities at large.⁴⁷

Authorities and military personnel have been targets by narco-trafficking cartels pressing for freedom of movement within the state, which is now an important

⁴⁶ *Cambio de* Michoacán, a daily newspaper in hard copy and online, stated that as of early December 2008, using high-technology equipment, military personnel discovered one ton of drugs, a large cache of weapons and ammunition in an indigenous village. An additional 45 kilos of marijuana seeds were also confiscated. However according to the report, authorities were allegedly unable to locate and apprehend the suspects.

⁴⁷ In late May 2009, I interviewed María, an indigenous young woman of eighteen who was selling chopped cactus from a pail, with a small child strapped to her back in the traditional *rebozo*. This is a shawl used to carry wood, children and food. It dates to the pre-Colombian period. She experienced daily fear of being assaulted on the mini-buses (public transportation), for the minimal amount of money she would earn, as violence is becoming more widespread or of being caught in a narco-trafficking crossfire, as she travels 40 kilometers daily to sell chopped, wild cactus from a pail to predominantly *mestizo* towns nearby.

corridor between Colombia and the United States. Recently, villages have seen an increase in innocent civilians suffering loss of life or severe, life-altering wounds, both physically and psychologically. Many of the indigenous youth have engaged in the consumption of recreational drugs, such as cocaine, which among the indigenous community had been a minimal detrimental factor, until the last decade. Incidences of theft have also increased. A few of the young adults have become small-time dealers. The profits resulting from the sale of drugs by indigenous persons has led to the purchase of large consumer items, such as SUVs and two-ton trucks with dark-tinted windows. These massive vehicles stand out in stark contrast to the pervasive poverty.

Gun battles between rival drug-gangs in the plazas of small towns are not uncommon. Indigenous persons have been caught in the crossfire and women have been attacked, raped and beheaded. Cyber-terror messages and warnings have been posted onto internet sites, which can be accessed through cybercafés in larger villages, as many do not own a computer.⁴⁸ Hacking of internet sites by the narco-trafficking cartels has occurred. Violence has now become a part of daily life.

While I conducted research in the region during the spring of 2009, seven men and women were tortured and executed in surrounding villages.⁴⁹ Their bodies were found in streets, alongside state highways and in vacant town lots. The deceased were individuals and relatives of those who had become affiliated with and run amok of the cartels. In the month of June 2009, the bodies of two more indigenous persons were

⁴⁸ In interviews I conducted within the highland region of Michoacán, in the summer of 2008, the internet café in one of the villages was known to be owned by the mayor's family.

⁴⁹ One of the prominent families in the village of *Urapeti* received a phone call demanding seventy-five dollars and threatening violence if it was not paid. The individual handling the call simply stated they did not have the money and hung up. Unfortunately, panic is caused by the repeated telephone harassment, as on occasion, villagers who refuse or are unable to contribute meet with physical violence and death.

found executed along the roadside near the town of *Angatapu*. The local news and authorities accused narco-traffickers of the killings, but authorities stated that investigations did not reveal any leads. Though a temporary means to economic success, terror and oftentimes death ensue for those involved in the narco-trafficking trade. This includes their families and close associations.⁵⁰

Many young adults find the narco-trafficking livelihood an easy exit from poverty, yet the newly-acquired lifestyle is impossible to prolong and can be fatal.⁵¹ As heads of households and mothers, women oftentimes face fear of retaliation by the narco-traffickers, as they attempt to dissuade their youth from earning revenues through trafficking drugs. According to a village official in *Angatapu*, due to migration over 60 percent of women are forced into the role as heads of households. In my interviews, women have found themselves ill-equipped to handle the young adults who become involved in narco-trafficking and rebel against traditional norms, as discipline has been consigned to the father figure. Unfortunately, for many indigenous women support outside the immediate family is inaccessible.

e. Societal Marginalization

As tribal communities have held a non-western insular approach to society, economics and politics, alienation by *mestizo* society and the state government in these arenas has not been rare. Indigenous economics have consisted of male

50 During my research in the spring of 2009, a village family who appeared to achieve enormous financial success within a period of a few months lost a young son of 10 years of age and an elderly person of 75. These family members were assassinated in their own homes by a hit-man from a cartel. It was later learned the family had become involved in the narco-trafficking trade, but concealed the involvement from the village and extended family members, as monies were laundered through the small, family-owned copper business, which had been operational for over 20 years.

51 Ravelo, Ricardo. *Los capos: las narco-rutas de México*. (The Druglords: the Narco-Routes of Mexico) (Mexico D.F.: Random House Mondadori, S. A. de C. V., 2005).

involvement in agricultural and artisanal production, enough to maintain self-sufficiency among the families in the villages, thus rejection of western perspectives and values has prevailed.⁵² However, with increased migration and current economic stressors, traditional values and self-perception by the indigenous women of themselves have shifted. Economic efforts by the women left behind by migrant spouses have led to a nascent political struggle. Indigenous women have experienced a lack of infrastructure, security and ethics by the state and federal governments where corruption is often rife from the local to the federal level.

According to psychologist Pérez Coeto Mateos, from the regional institute Colegio Michoacano, several groups of women have started experiencing a modified version of traditional domestic women's rights, which has empowered them in developing economic successes. As women within the indigenous villages become the economic stability as heads of households, disruption of tribal social patterns and fragmentation of traditional customs create suspicion within the extended family. Some community members still remain skeptical and marginalization of the female heads of households is all too frequent.⁵³

The long-established belief is that an indigenous female is incapable of making social and economic decisions within the family, therefore having a voice in community affairs can be denied. Prior to marriage, she is viewed as an hindrance

⁵² López Bárcenas, Francisco. *Autonomía y derechos indígenas en México (Autonomy and Indigenous Rights in Mexico)* Castillo, Clara Elizabeth (ed.) (México D.F.: Ediciones Coyoacán, S.A. de C.V, 2002).

⁵³ <http://www.inegi.gov.mx>

and an economic burden.⁵⁴ After marriage, she is once again marginalized, as she is moved into the home of the husband's parents, thus becoming disadvantaged as arduous chores are relegated to her.⁵⁵ If she does not immediately conceive, she may be accused of unfaithfulness or sterility, thus further alienating her.

Though within the last decade *mestizo* legislative bodies have ratified legislation protecting the indigenous woman, there is a deficiency in successful application of the law and measures that provide ease of legal access for protection. In interviews with local female villagers, María Guadalupe Hernández Dimas, herself an indigenous *P'urhépecha* woman, encountered repeated occurrences of repression and marginalization.⁵⁶

In spite of these odds, *P'urhépecha* women are achieving increased economic stability. Therefore the necessity of having a political voice has become all the more imperative.

f. New Paradigms and Methodology

Various patterns emerged, as I interviewed the indigenous women in the five villages. One of the many patterns I observed most common among the women who had become involved in *Uarhi* and capacity-building seminars was a desire for domestic tranquility and general contentment. Solidarity and an ability to choose

⁵⁴ Remigio Gallardo, Vitalina. 'Problemática de la mujer P'urhépecha', Memoria "1er Congreso Nacional de Políticas Públicas y Diversidad Cultural: Etnia y Género" ("Difficulties of the P'urhépecha Woman", in Memory "1st National Congress of Public Politics and Cultural Diversity: Ethnicity and Gender") Gómez Campos R. de M. (ed.) (Morelia: Instituto Michoacano de la Mujer, 2006) pp. 219–223.

⁵⁵ The majority of women I interviewed whose partners were migrants abroad stated that they had experienced some form of marginalization, by the families of their spouses.

⁵⁶ Interviews on numerous occasions with María Guadalupe Hernández Dimas highlighted the fact that there still are unresolved issues pertaining to indigenous women's rights. The *P'urhépecha* woman continues to suffer from marginalization. Hernández Dimas published "*La Mujer P'urhépecha: Una mirada desde la pobreza de las comunidades* (*The P'urhépecha Woman: An Outlook, as Viewed from the Poverty of the Communities*), in which there is empirical evidence of contemporary social and economic marginalization suffered by the *P'urhépecha* woman. I am currently translating this book into English.

either to work or pursue an education were primary concerns. The last topic of concern was the quantity of expendable income. Though several women were spouses of migrants, they had become involved in the political life of the community or artisans with their own small businesses. If the partner remained in the village and was willing to share the work and the financial gains equally, this was highly valued.

Within the domestic arena, certain aspects were considered unacceptable, such as exchanging western wear for traditional garments or males involved in food preparation. However, mutual assistance in firewood collection was important, as traditionally this arduous task was relegated to the newly married female living in the home of her spouse's family.

Having a political voice, respect of the law by the authorities and accessibility to apply the law were considered important but not yet entirely attainable. Notwithstanding, as the non-western paradigm and values are part of their frame of reference, having a complete disruption in the domestic and societal framework to adopt a westernized frame of reference, which is part of *mestizo* Mexico, is still soundly rejected.

Economic and capacity-building teamwork within the group has been crucial in developing solidarity and a political voice. This unity appears to propel the group. Numerous times relief and surprise were two feelings spoken about when interviewing the women. They believed that the capacity-building experiences aided them at achieving a level of comfort when interacting with indigenous and *mestizo* political functionaries without fear of social scrutiny and ridicule. Increased personal autonomy learned through capacity-building seminars has propelled them into

assuming more responsibilities within the organization and their communities. They are beginning to emerge as leaders within the circles of influence in their villages.⁵⁷

Within the new paradigm presented, mothers in this organization are urged to train their boys to assist their sisters, which is not customary. Girls are being allowed more freedom to choose their clothing.⁵⁸ Women in this group began involving husbands in the capacity-building information they had received, activating new level of partnership. During my research, varying levels of experience and empowerment emerged, as those who had participated in the diverse economic, health and capacity-building seminars and workshops, over a period of ten years exhibited less hesitancy in political involvement than their colleagues who had become recently involved in this process.⁵⁹ Improved economic revenues were cited, as both genders partner towards the same goal.

Upon interviewing the men whose wives were involved in *Uarhi*, a renewed self-respect and dignity emerged, culminating in a sense of partnership with their wives and improvement in domestic communication exchanges. Prior to the capacity-building workshops verbal exchanges had been minimal or non-existent based upon traditional customs. Men involved in this process alongside their spouses recently

⁵⁷ Based upon empirical experience, in the 1980s, women were rarely allowed to leave the confines of their homes and culturally forbidden to converse with strangers. Secondly, learning to partner and support other women, thus allowing the group to accomplish more relative to economic and political goals. Thirdly, I observed that parenting of the children changed. It is not uncommon for a young *P'uhrépecha* boy to be told not to touch kitchen items or to do domestic chores, as they are "girl things"; likewise, young girls are generally not allowed to attend school or play without wearing a skirt, consequently many cannot participate in physical education.

⁵⁸ Ibid. (89 – 97).

⁵⁹ Many indigenous villagers consider this group of participating women in the NGO known as *Uarhi* progressive thinkers. The reason appears two-fold. The level of notoriety achieved by the founder María Guadalupe Hernández Dimas presents a formidable presence among the state legislators. The continued persistence of the indigenous women has challenged the status quo, insisting on the respect of their rights to economic and political participation, amidst failed promises, rejection and apathy on the part of the authorities, whether they are local indigenous male governing bodies or state and federal entities.

show increased support in staying at home and caring for the children. On occasions when the female spouse is requested to attend a political meeting in the state capital, the men readily agree to have the women travel by themselves. They cited the positive improvement in infrastructure and political visibility that the women have brought about for the community.

CHAPTER 2: Economic and Political Theory and Constraints

When the *mestizo* Mexican federal government attempted to forcibly create change within the *P'urhépecha* community in the twentieth century, by utilizing a westernized paradigm, the result was an isolationist reaction. The preservation of their cultural identity became paramount, by applying religious and spiritual values to economic and political issues.

According to economist and author Amartya Sen, a corollary cultural reaction within the less dominant of two cultures in a given society is portrayed through the preservation of “the distinctiveness of one’s spiritual culture”, in an attempt to salvage what is perceived as a loss of identity. As time progresses, the chasm between the dominant and the secondary cultures widens resulting in an extreme asymmetry. As economic and political development by the dominant *mestizo* culture has increased over the centuries, the *P'urhépecha* have retreated into a reduced world-view, preferring to remain within a familiar domain of syncretic religious and social values, thus resulting in stunted economic development and a plethora of political challenges.

a) Applying Economic Theory to Contemporary Issues

According to Sen, today economists base structural references of general inequality on the writings of realist Adam Smith, considered by many as the “father of modern economy”. The focus is on “inequality of revenue ... rich and poor ... [as] addressed by Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, or Hugh Dalton”, which is a narrowed focus of assessing inequality. A broader “inequality of economy” might include health issues, quality of education, ease of access and so forth, which is rarely measured, yet may assist in providing qualitative results.⁶⁰

Non-western communal participation in freedom of choice is qualitative, such as access to a meaningful educational experience for young girls and women. Increased opportunities in the rural areas are provided through NGOs and GONGOs who partner to provide training and capacity-building for women and incentives based on health and education are given to families so that young girls remain enrolled in school through the third year of preparatory, which is the equivalent of the American twelfth grade.

The “capability perspective” takes into consideration the freedom of choice based upon the capacity allotted to the individual and given the adequate means to accomplish a task.⁶¹ This is not simply freedom “in principle”, as viewed from a western paradigm or “restricted, utilitarian approach”, in which a “utility metric” is used to assess the quantity of freedom a community receives, as stated by Sen. In this context, Sen reasons that freedom to choose contributes to the analysis of

60 Sen, Amartya. *Un nouveau modèle économique : Développement, justice, liberté* (A New Economic Model : Development, Justice, Liberty), Bessières, M. (trans.) (Paris : Éditions Odile Jacob, 2000) pp. 147–152.

61 In *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), Amartya Sen presents culturally sensitive economic themes from the western and non-western perspectives. pp. 6-7.

“methodological arguments of equality”, by assessing that these arguments use the more empathetic “capability perspective”. Martha C. Nussbaum addresses the “second generation rights (economic and social rights)” as being inclusive in the “capabilities perspective”.⁶² In this vein, as an integral part of human rights the capabilities provide new pathways to create an aperture to access economic growth. This comes within a framework of “social responsibility,” as described by Sen. Meaningful economic choices are slowly moving towards increased participation by the women and overall economic stability within this civil society, by providing “access to choice” and using the “capability perspective”.

In referencing communal participation and economic development, I am not solely implying the measurement of the industrial capacity or an existence of a specific educational infrastructure, but rather a liberty as described by Sen. This liberty represents qualitative measurements, such as those expressed in equal access for gender. This includes the freedom for indigenous women to address social issues openly without fear of violent repercussion, which then affords them accessibility into economic and political arenas.

In the last decade, a syncretic approach to freedoms using the “utilitarian”, westernized reference of property ownership and income has become intertwined with the non-western set of tribal values. This *mélange* has been put into practice by some migrant families within the indigenous community who have returned to the villages from having lived either in the United States or Canada. This is specifically

⁶² In her book, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, author Martha C. Nussbaum refers to the “capabilities ... relationship to human rights ... as understood in contemporary international discussions. The “first generation rights” are related to “political and civil liberties”, whereas the “second generation rights” involve economic and social factors. p 97.

important in indigenous the gender issues, as this blended approach permits women access to valuable commodities, resources, and rights, such as property ownership, working outside the home and a voice in civil issues in the community.⁶³ However, the inclusion of tribal forms of religion and social networking is not diminished by this blended approach, but it does permit the questioning of deficiencies both in the community and in *mestizo* society. Here again, Sen focuses on the freedom to act upon various options available to an individual,

“utility metrics ... contrasts with the focus on capabilities [which provide] a straightforward account of the lack of freedom of the deprived people to achieve those elementary functionings [not accounting for the traditional methodology of] ... class, gender, caste or community”

Sen outlines three forms of pragmatic capacity analysis, which varies when used in highly developed countries or in nations like Mexico, in which segments of society the nation are still in the process of development.⁶⁴ The first approach is direct, in which evaluations and comparisons of revenue received are calculated based upon the functioning and measureable vehicles of progress, such as longevity, literacy

⁶³ In April of 2009 I interviewed a woman who is emerging as a political mentor to many within her village of *Huapunda*. According to María, hers was a story of migration unification to the United States, where she joined her husband to work for a period of ten years. New ideologies of economic possibilities and political voice were forming. Having birthed two children there, ten years later they returned to the same village. She believed the act of migration and necessity of learning another way of life and language assisted in her choices upon return. Today, she represents her village in the nearby town council and has become a respected member within the indigenous political realm.

⁶⁴ Sen suggests the direct approach can be the most “straightforward” with which to measure revenues and consequently, “inequalities”, however due to an elevated level of choice available to those living within a highly developed country versus the limited choices of those living in a country experiencing developmental changes, Sen believes revenue must be viewed as a relative measurement of success.

or nutrition. This is a macro-view which is predominantly implemented by INEGI in western forms of quantitative measurement.

The second, complimentary approach includes active variables such as discrimination in the distribution of family wealth due to the gender of the individual, the rate of unemployment, inequality and poverty in the “comparative capacity of choice”. This has also been applied when measuring the financial assistance known to be handled by the males within the community, until recently. Female artisans or wage earners were rarely factored in the regional economic ratio of contribution and inequality of gender was not considered. Yet today, many indigenous women function as artisans, own small businesses and have received federal assistance more readily than their male counterparts.

This is also an example of the difference in the measured level of revenue earned across a broad spectrum of society within a highly functional, developed country versus a society which continues to suffer from the psychological and economic burdens of colonialism. In his book *Identity and Violence*, Amartya Sen aptly explains the process in which anti-colonial nationalism develops and an ideology is formed based upon the “material ... [usage of] science and technology” for its existence. Since the *mestizo* community does not have its own sovereignty, the tribal paradigm looks inward, basing its’ ideology upon religious and spiritual foundations. Sen refers to Partha Chatterjee when describing this process,

“Anti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society ... by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual.”

As the western paradigm of the European is not completely foreign to the *mestizo* frame of reference disparity between legal and political thought is minimal. The indigenous paradigm however still struggles with comprehension of the western paradigm and the effects of colonialism.

The third and indirect approach utilizes “adjusted revenues” to make an evaluation in “terms of capacity accomplishments” of illiterate as well as highly educated families. This approach is based upon “scales of equivalence”.⁶⁵ The indirect approach is most useful when specifically measuring the recent economic contributions by the indigenous women to their communities. Many of those I interviewed only function with oral skills in the *P’uhrépecha* language and do not read or write. They may be conversant in the Spanish language, but written skills elude them. An authentic evaluation of these women is based upon the capacity achieved within their ability, rather than measuring their level of westernized education. The “comparative capacity of choice” and the “scales of equivalence” are most effective if used as a measurement of the success achieved by these women.

The non-western approach to domestic and social issues negatively affects the indigenous woman who must interact with state and federal authorities operating from a western frame of reference.⁶⁶ Within this context, Sen approaches strategic

⁶⁵ Sen, Amartya. *Un nouveau modèle économique : Développement, justice, liberté* (A New Economic Model : Development, Justice, Liberty), Bessières, M. (trans.) (Paris : Éditions Odile Jacob, 2000) pp. 114–119.

⁶⁶ In July of 2008 I attended a political town meeting in the village of Huatsapi, where the state authorities and functionaries were tasking groups of village men to create infrastructure and political decisions for the village. No women were present, except for María Guadalupe Hernández Dimas, who had been invited to participate and me, as an observer. The federal *mestizo* cultural assessor believed women controlled men’s participation in issues relating to village life from their homes, thus participation of females in the general meeting was not important. As we exited the forum where the men were still deliberating issues, indigenous women crowded us to know what had occurred. Their voices were not heard in the decisions which would invariably affect them.

“pragmatism” when analyzing economic equality in public politics. However, the pragmatic perception of equality is proportionately relative to the utilitarian equality in a highly developed society. Greater capacity for “total choice” is relational to “employment, longevity [and] literacy”, within the confines of a developed country. In countries where there are varying degrees of economic and political development, such as Mexico, the parity of choice is also highly disparate.

b) Political Theory and a Non-Western Paradigm

The “comparative history in macro-social inquiry”, as presented by Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers is applied to a “broad coverage in the selection of cases” studied. This inquiry uses a “parallel demonstration theory ... to order evidence—when applied to a series of relevant historical trajectories”.⁶⁷ This is not simply a “homogenous logic of macro-social inquiry”, which focuses on one aspect of the issues questioned, rather it necessitates a heterogeneous approach to research. The current economic and political struggles affecting the *P’uhrépecha* woman reflect the macro-social issues that surround them. As non-western ideology is firmly present in their economic and political paradigms, there is a difficulty in adopting policies that can positively shape a relationship between this reference and the westernized view used by authorities and politicians.

The western political thought has been based upon the concept that as political structures are in place it is possible then to construct a strong economy which can

⁶⁷ Skocpol, Theda and Margaret Somers. ‘*The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry*’, in *Methods of Historical Sociology*. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1979).

generate opportunities in which civil society functions.⁶⁸ Religion then follows as part of the social equation of civil society. In my empirical research of the non-western approach to political scenarios as implemented by the *P'uhrépecha*, specifically, in the observation of the women's frame of reference, I have drawn different conclusions. The pattern of religious and social norms has functioned relatively unchanged for centuries, as a stable cohesive factor, until external forces obliged women to approach their reality differently. Many found themselves alone, with a migrant husband abroad, having to nurture and clothe children. Their focus became the need of an economic source of survival. This caused a shift in the patterns of behavior previously experienced by the women, thus ushering in economic change. As economic achievements became more frequent an obstacle emerged, which was lack of political support. Access to legislation and political voice became imperative.

As the force of domestic economic revenues has increased, so has an awareness that systemic political change was required. Women were experiencing political obstacles in achieving economic success. I observed a breakdown in the dialogue between authorities and indigenous women. Bourdieu expresses this as a "pre-determined set of discourses and actions ... so called "objective" truth, i.e. that of the observer ... [in which] the agents practice an irreversible a sequence of actions that the observer constitutes as reversible". This irreversibility exists only if the "agents" performing the dialogue choose to negate progressive action.⁶⁹ Though Mexican

⁶⁸ Almond, Gabriel A., G. Bingham Powell, Jr., Russell J. Dalton, and Kaare Strøm. *Comparative Politics Today: A World View*. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2003) p. 4.

⁶⁹ In more traditional villages such as *Urapeti*, an ongoing dialogue over the last decade between the indigenous village women and authorities to implement economic change appears to be at a standstill. Upon learning of this issue, I attended dialogues that were held. It appeared that change was inevitable and believed actions would shift.

legislation allowed for the respect of the rights of the Mexican citizen, a lack of ability to speak or understand Spanish and unfamiliar, westernized frames of reference have escaped the indigenous women.

c) Legislation and Political Constraints

Legislation that alluding to the protection of indigenous women against domestic violence, poverty, marginalization and a lack of education have been viewed as having minimal social significance by the regional political functionaries.⁷⁰ The women themselves are often unaware of available protection, should they require it.

On 26 May of 1994 the International Labor Organization, known as ILO developed a Treaty of Indigenous and Tribal Communities in Independent Countries which was approved in Mexico. It was developed as a tool to protect the indigenous woman against domestic violence and adopted by the Mexican Congress in Mexico City and ratified 25 March of 1995. This was the first of its kind in Mexico. This Treaty was again modified on 25 April 2001.⁷¹ Accessibility to this legislation is minimal, as execution is difficult since there is a lack of infrastructure to provide follow-through. Costs of accessing legal advice can be prohibitive and language barriers loom as insurmountable obstacles.

Token political interaction by the *mestizo* federal and state governments to address this deficiency and minimal participation by the local authorities have also made an indelible mark on the female indigenous psyche. Western political

However, later I discovered authorities (referred to as agents by Bourdieu) continue to choose to dialogue about change, yet ignore pressing issues.

⁷⁰ Interview with María Laura Flores Arroyo, Coordinator of Public Policy for Secretaría de la Mujer (Department for Women's Issues) in the capital city of Morelia, Michoacán. July 2008.

⁷¹ For further research on the 17 Indigenous Women, which cites the Treaty of Indigenous and Tribal Communities in Independent Countries, view, <http://www.idb.int/sds/ind/ley/docs/ME-17.htm>.

philosophy, as adopted by the *mestizo* government in the region of Michoacán has created a framework which is foreign to the indigenous person. This has resulted in alienation from political influence. Though a steady increase in female voices within the political structure is occurring, they have not yet achieved a level of parity with their male counterparts, as one politician stated [trans.] “historical triple discrimination suffered [by the indigenous woman] has been due to being a woman, having a different language and culture, and for being poor”.⁷²

The Mexican federal government adopted the term “*indianismo*” in its legislation after the Declaration of Barbados, on 30 January 1971. This would create a benchmark with far-reaching negative social and political connotations. This became a failed attempt by the federal government to mainstream indigenous communities into the *mestizo* society, by attempting to close the increasing chasm between the indigenous and *mestizo* political and social life. However, the consequences would demonstrate a further marginalization of indigenous communities, especially women who became considered objects of fascination, as only certain aspects of their culture were accepted within *mestizo* society. The principal objective was to denounce the deplorable conditions suffered by the indigenous communities in Latin America.⁷³

According to author Felipe Orlando Aragón Andrade, “capitalist, socialist, and western paradigms” were rejected as, (trans.) “insufficient, foreign or simply contradictory”.⁷⁴ Cultural relativism and pluralism were championed as problem

⁷² http://www.cdi.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=121

⁷³ www.un.org/documents/ga/.../aconf167-9.htm

⁷⁴ Aragón Andrade, Felipe Orlando. ‘El Indianismo y los derechos humanos, ¿Dos estrategias discursivas en contradicción?’, Memoria “1er Congreso Nacional de Políticas Públicas y Diversidad Cultural: Etnia y Género” (‘Indianism and Human Rights, Two Strategy Discourses in Contradiction?’: in, Memory “1st National Congress of

solving mechanisms by the *mestizo* political machine. Archetypal models of western political paradigms were discarded in an attempt to favor indigenous self-governance. Both the indigenous and *mestizo* governments were unaware as to how the future would require federal and state governments to cooperate with the local indigenous community to achieve success.⁷⁵

Anna Pi i Murugó comments on this far-reaching political trend which flourished among the *mestizo* community in the late twentieth century. She cites authors, Henri Favre and Héctor Díaz-Polanco, late twentieth century political authors, well known for their outspoken belief in the negative repercussions of “*indianismo*”.

“The indigenous movement is not the expression of the indigenous [person], rather a *creole* and *mestizo* notion of the Indian. It presents itself as such, without assuming it speaks for the indigenous community. This does not prohibit the formulation of decisions about their [the indigenous people] destiny in their own places, according to the greater interest of the nation, conceived by the ‘indigenists’ ... developed during the decade of the 1970s, which attempts to exist as the expression of aspirations and authentic Indian revindication”.⁷⁶

This social upheaval spilled over into economic issues, as failed attempts to restructure and integrate indigenous society only increased stressors of migration, family fragmentation and engendered further mistrust of the government.

Public Politics and Cultural Diversity: Ethnicity and Gender) Gómez Campos R. de M. (ed.) (Morelia: Instituto Michoacano de la Mujer, 2006) pp. 84–85.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ I provided the translation for the following text by Anna Pi i Murugó, who wrote on Indianism and Indigenous Peoples, for the October 1998 edition of the Mexican magazine *Memoria, Revista mensual de política y cultura*, (Memory, Monthly Magazine of Politics and Culture) for the *Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero y Socialista* (Center for Studies of the Worker and Socialist Movement). "El movimiento indigenista no es la manifestación de un pensamiento indígena, sino una reflexión criolla y mestiza sobre el indio. De hecho se presenta como tal, sin pretender en absoluto hablar en nombre de la población indígena. Esto no impide que tome decisiones acerca de su destino en sus propios lugares, según los intereses superiores de la nación tal y como son concebidos por los indigenistas ... desarrollado a partir del decenio de 1970, el cual pretende ser la expresión de aspiraciones y reivindicaciones auténticamente indias".

Political author, Hannah Arendt addresses this issue when referring to the cynicism that is developed by an “absolute refusal to believe in the truth of anything, no matter how well this truth may be established”, due to continued “falsehoods” and “substitutions” of what is politically promised and left either undone, changed or incomplete. She maintains that “the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world ... truth vs. falsehood ... is being destroyed”.⁷⁷ The indigenous women have distrust in the validity of the political process and oftentimes have experienced fear and frustration when they seek to establish a rapport with local and state politicians, yet they are determined in having a voice and being recognized as an emerging force for change.⁷⁸

In an analysis of the framework within which the indigenous women approach their political involvement, what Max Weber referred to as “values” emerges as a primary concern.⁷⁹ The women’s values of respect and domestic tranquility are consistent when compared with each other, as their historical trajectories have been similar. However, due to recent developments in the exponential increase of narco-trafficking in the region, distorted values have restricted mobility and stunted social networks in villages such as Tsimani.

James S. Coleman describes “social capital” as actors who have access to “resources that they can use to achieve their interests”.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. (Orlando: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1970).

⁷⁸ Interviews with women in villages Urapeti and Huatsapi, July 2008.

⁷⁹ <http://www.criticism.com/md/weber1.html>

⁸⁰ Coleman, James S. ‘Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital.’ Vol. 94, Supplement S95-S120. *American Journal of Sociology*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988).

The interests achieved by narco-traffickers using the available “social capital” within the indigenous region is developed through “obligations [to], expectations [of], and trustworthiness of structures”, as they are exceptionally generous in their financial rewards toward anyone willing to cooperate. However the reverse presents itself with fatal and violent consequences for anyone placing an obstacle in their course of action, thus severely hampering the expansion of social capital and distorting political obligations to social development.

In her book *On Violence*, words used by Arendt are hauntingly appropriate in describing the situation today, in the state of Michoacán. “Nowhere is the self-defeating factor in the victory of violence over power more evident than in the use of terror to maintain domination ... terror is not the same as violence; it is, rather, the form of government that comes in being when violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control.” As government officials oftentimes have been bribed financially by the narco-trafficking cartels, to allow access between the supplier and the buyer, occasionally the violence has gone unchecked. In news feeds and journals alleged incidences of violence have also been perpetrated by authorities themselves.

CONCLUSION:

With few exceptions, *P'uhrépecha* women in all areas visited during my research believed the current economic situation necessitates a representative, political voice to interface with local, indigenous tribal authorities and the *mestizo* Mexican state and federal governments. Today, macro-factors affecting the social and

economic changes occurring within this traditional tribal group have given way to construct the framework for current nascent political participation. If the community is to adopt significant change, it is then critical to acknowledge historical antecedents and willingness by both the indigenous and *mestizo* societies to recognize the validity of different frames of reference in order to progress with economic growth, especially among indigenous women. When the macro-political framework considers meaningful the voice of the *P'uhrépecha* women, then sustainable economic development can be secured and a significant political future can be attainable.

According to Maribel Aguilera Cháirez, in writing for the 1st National Artistic and Cultural Encounter on Ecofeminism, Ethnicity and Transgender Nutrition, political legislation formulated for the rural areas is oftentimes passed without consultation with indigenous persons, whom it will affect.⁸¹ Fortunately for the community, this political marginalization is gradually experiencing inroads by indigenous women who, by uniting their efforts towards a common goal, have begun confronting obstacles and obtaining results. This process has not been easily achieved, nor have they leapt into immediate equality of gender and choice however, persistence and consistency have permitted the realization of small triumphs.

The tragedy of the continued marginalization and abuse suffered by *P'uhrépecha* women in particular is a result of the alienation that has been an ongoing factor from *mestizo* society for centuries. Difficulties with issues of integration and

⁸¹ Aguilera Cháirez, Maribel. 'La pobreza de las mujeres indígenas y su relación con el desarrollo sustentable', *Memoria, 1er Encuentro Nacional Artístico-Cultural: Ecofeminismo, etnias y alimentación transgénica* ('Poverty of Indigenous Women and its' Relation to Sustainable Development', in *Memories, 1st National Artistic-Cultural Encounter: Ecofeminism, Ethnicities and Genetically-Altered Foods*) pp. 89-91.

diminished growth in civil society reduce opportunities involving choice. Capacity-building within a non-western frame of reference, such as given by *Uarhi*, provides a vehicle by which she can have a set of highly functioning skills with which to operate.

NGOs, in addition to state and federal authorities attempt to establish a sense of community vision for the future, yet find the path fraught with complication.

Government promises to improve infrastructure and education have oftentimes resulted in rhetoric without action, thus engendering cynicism and distrust.

Corruption, abuses and violations of human rights by authorities does not improve the tenuous situation. Other social ills difficult to quantify, such as increased participation by local villagers and government officials in the narco-trafficking trade create insecurity and heighten levels of fear. What is not easily measured is the disintegration of non-western values which have provided the foundation for a strong social network and civil society.

A replacement of these values with a westernized form of consumerism emerges at a high price, which the region has begun to experience. Direct measurements of increased revenue within the community appear to be a positive sign, however the analysis is incomplete. This does not provide insight into the more pressing issues of security, freedoms of choice, ease of access or the lack of educational opportunities. With an increase in migration by young women from the villages to join their spouses abroad, children and young adults are left in the care of

elderly grandparents or without supervision in villages which lack basic educational enforcement. The villages provide minimal opportunities.⁸²

Consumerism becomes a priority and educational drop-out rates increase, as the traditional tribal paradigm of working for a certain sum has slowly begun to alter. Obtaining rapid cash is possible through dealing narcotics, adding stressors to an already socially complex situation. Additionally, the lack of ethics and security by authorities becomes paramount. Narco-traffickers have exploited this weakness which is developing within the tribal community and have staged increased violence. Fear has become a part of the daily existence, which when coupled with the current issues facing an indigenous female it appears to be an insurmountable obstacle.

Legislation such as the recent addendums and abrogation by then-President Vicente Fox Quesada, of the Laws of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples published 21 May 2003 fail to address issues specifically relating to indigenous women. Nevertheless, it provided a foundation of support and funding for the indigenous communities throughout Mexico, which can be used as a building block for the future, not solely for the P'ührépecha, but comprising the 56 tribes nationwide.⁸³

Access to the laws and enforcement protecting women from violence, marginalization and extreme poverty have yet to find authorities who are willing to enforce the legislation. Oftentimes, these women are subjugated to a corrupted

⁸² Herrera Torres, Hugo. 'Los jóvenes migrantes: atención de la problemática', *Memoria, 1er Encuentro Nacional Artístico-Cultural: Ecofeminismo, etnias y alimentación transgénica* ('Migrant Youth: Focus on the Issues', in *Memories, 1st National Artistic-Cultural Encounter: Ecofeminism, Ethnicities and Genetically-Altered Food*) Gómez Campos R. de M. (ed.) (Morelia: Instituto Michoacano de la Mujer, 2007) pp. 263-264.

⁸³ <http://www.cddhcu.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/261.pdf>.

system where *machismo* surfaces. Lack of funding and infrastructure are issues which remain partially addressed.⁸⁴ According to the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous People (CDI), school books place indigenous females in menial careers, as in “domestic chores, secretaries or possibly laboratory specialists”, thus narrowing the perception in the freedom of choice of an indigenous child.⁸⁵ Factors such as this one contribute to stunting capacity-building efforts and vision in the indigenous child.

However, for most indigenous women freedom of choice is still a constant struggle. Accessing change through a position of power is yet viewed as a future goal.

Author and Nobel Nominee Hernández Dimas explains,

[trans.] “In the communal [indigenous] assemblies where the highest [level of] power [within the community] is exercised, ... the man directs ... but in the task of completion, it is the woman [who must] accomplish it.”

NGOs and GONGOs, such as *Uarhi* and *Oportunidades* respectively, have supported capacity-building and training of the indigenous *P'uhrépecha* woman to increase their participation in the economic and political life of the community. Cautious economic progress is being made through the capacity-building efforts. Support for the advancement of education for children, especially rewarding those families who send girls to school has proven to be a lengthy process, yet there is certain advancement.

If legislation, which has already been ratified by the Mexican Congress can be upheld and enforced by the *mestizo* authorities, then the political participation by the

⁸⁴ To ameliorate the plight of young indigenous women in the northern state of Baja California, in 2008 the CDI embarked on an innovative path by inaugurating an indigenous women’s shelter. Prior to this development the center had been a general clinic. According to the CDI, this shelter begins a process to fulfill a promise the Mexican government pledged to the indigenous woman. Prior to renaming the shelter, the House for the Indigenous Women, the center was known as a House for Women’s Health.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

indigenous woman in local, state and federal will become a reality. Through the women's tenacious efforts, the last decade has proved that by utilizing learned capabilities, the entire community benefits socially and economically from the increased level of indigenous female participation.⁸⁶ Political strength can be achieved as freedoms of choice are further developed, thus passing on to the next generation a more rewarding and respected life.

Current *mestizo* government in Michoacán wrestles with what has become one of the most difficult periods of insecurity in post-colonial history, new developments occur with regularity. It is a region which is currently confronted with narco-trafficking issues and has become a focal point in Mexico for economic and political questions regarding indigenous women. Additional follow-up studies of the effects these stressors are having on the capabilities model used by the women could be insightful. The traditional paradigm is changing, yet additional studies are needed to determine what adjustments continue to appear in the lives of these indigenous women, as this new paradigm is being developed.

⁸⁶ (See Addendum III).

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Addendum:

I. The religious beliefs have been integrally merged in daily social patterns of behavior. The pre-Colombian perspective of the *P'urhépecha* in which every day conduct and social fabric was intricately woven with the female divine, continues today. In Dr. Ralph Larson Beal's research, the cosmology included lesser gods of nature, the moon and human fertility, which was overseen and created by the overarching powerful god, *Curicaveri*, represented by fire and symbolized as a stylized butterfly or a hummingbird.

With the arrival of the Spanish and the process of Christianization, the *P'urhépecha* associated the Christ figure in *Curicaveri*, the highly venerated, most powerful divine being and Mary as *Cuehrohperi*, the most important goddess of fertility and the moon. During my research I heard prayers in the *P'urhépecha* language, to *Curicaveri* and Christ, as well as Mary and *Cuehrohperi*, in Catholic Churches.

Local parish priests I interviewed, who are monolingual Spanish speakers, stated that the pagan and ancient beliefs no longer are a contemporary issue, as they firmly thought the *P'urhépecha* community had replaced them entirely with Christian beliefs. Yet in interviews I conducted with 10 *P'urhépecha* women over the ages of twenty-five, 80 percent felt misunderstood by the Catholic Church, though all were very devoted and considered religion to be an integral part of every aspect of their lives. Each of the women stated *Cuehrohperi* and Mary were the most important divine figures and interchangeable.

II. I interviewed regional officials from *Oportunidades*, a GONGO (Government-Operated Non-Governmental Group). They provide federal funding for textbooks and uniforms from first grade through the Mexican equivalent of the twelfth grade and additional funds for the family. Distribution is based upon an obligatory monthly regular health check-up and nutritional aid for indigenous women and children. In tandem with the cooperation of school teachers, they document the progress of children enrolled in basic education. A doctor's signature is required on the document, after the check-up.

Without this monthly proof of attendance to the available clinics, financial aid is suspended and the child is not able to attend school. If these sessions are not attended for two consecutive months, the financial assistance for the child is discontinued. Failure to participate is detrimental to the education of the child, as children are oftentimes kept at home to conduct domestic chores. After three times of having a rejected status, the family is no longer able to receive assistance. In one session of financial distribution I observed over 200 women from three impoverished villages assembled to receive the bi-monthly financial aid package. It was rare to see a woman without the proper documentation.

Though progress is being made with teacher cooperation, many children still are undocumented and not able to attend school. Luis G., the director of the regional offices of *Oportunidades*, confirmed that staff trains the teachers to assure that a child has not missed more than three days during a monthly period. This activates and maintains the bi-monthly financial assistance and provision for uniforms, which are considered customary apparel for children in public education throughout Mexico. Though it has taken five years to begin to see results, increased numbers of teachers are willing to participate. The difficulty has been the added layer of bureaucratic complexity and paperwork necessary, as the teaching position is poorly paid and many teachers are reluctant to work additional hours.

Health and capacity-building seminars are given by regional NGO's and *Oportunidades*. These are supported by state clinics throughout the region. Discussion of a woman's body and issues relating to her health and sexuality is rare and considered unmentionable, however through this process women are learning how to care for their bodies.

III. I documented one such experience, which occurred in the summer of 2008. After numerous petitions for a meeting with an official handling indigenous affairs in Morelia, the capital city of Michoacán, representatives from *Uarhi* were asked to be present at a 1 o'clock meeting the next day. The topic of financial assistance that had been requested months earlier had finally received a political approval, however officials cited further issues needed clarification. Together, each from different villages, they cooperated with what monies each one had available to pay for travel in a mini-bus, (the most inexpensive means of transportation) to the capital city; family arrangements were made for their departure, which was to last an afternoon. After arrival in the capital they were ushered into a corridor and told to sit and wait. Hours passed, as they were told the official was called away on an "important meeting" and did not know when he would return.

Undeterred, they remained at the state office until the official appeared at 7 o'clock in the evening, excusing himself for the delay. The monies for the economic development requested were agreed to be disbursed to the women in the following days. Upon their return one hour later, the minibus malfunctioned, stranding everyone. That night, the women stayed on the floor of an empty home owned by a relative of one of the group, as they could not return home until the following day. The delay caused unneeded stressors, yet is another example of the difficulties and marginalization through which they endure on a regular basis.

