

Staging indigeneity, expressing *mestizaje*

Dress and identity in Nayarit, Mexico

Sara Alejandra Manzanares Monter



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Abstract

This thesis explores how cultural elements associated with one indigenous group are deployed and incorporated into the imaginaries of identity of various actors and groups. It does so through the study of the use of the traditional costume of the Huichol indigenous people in Tepic, a small *mestizo* (non-indigenous) city, in West Mexico.

This costume, the main visible sign of Huichol identity, has recently become important in how the city of Tepic presents itself to the outside. Through the exploration of the use of the Huichol costume in three particular contexts, we learn that it is not only used by the Huichol, to whom the dress originally “belongs”, but by other non-Huichol actors who have appropriated the dress and given it a new use and meaning. My aim is to show how the Huichol costume encodes a varied range of messages that depend not only on the actors, but also on the context of its use; to explore how the Huichol costume becomes a carrier of meaning beyond “Huicholness” and becomes an important element in the construction of two different imaginaries of identity: one indigenous, one *mestizo*.

I suggest that the indigenous item of dress, the quintessential visual signifier of Huichol identity, becomes a metonymic symbol for the indigenous as a whole in the *mestizo* context, and plays an important role not only in the expression of the indigenous, but in the political and religious expressions of the imaginary of the *mestizo* Nayarita.

Keywords: Huichol (Wixarika), dress, identity, mestizo, indigeneity, Mexico

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General notes

All interviews were held in Spanish.

All translations from Spanish and Huichol are mine.

All words in Spanish are shown in *italics*.

All words in Huichol are underlined. I use the Huichol writing/phonetic system developed by the Centro de Investigaciones de Lenguas Indígenas of the University of Guadalajara, Mexico. Sounds are graphed in the following way:

‘ – Glottal stop

a, e, i, u – Vowels. Same pronunciation as in Spanish

ü – Closed central vowel (in between “i” and “u” in Spanish)

aa – Example of long vowel.

a’a- Example of a vowel with glottal stop.

k, m, n, p, s, t – Consonants. Same pronunciation as in English

r – Retroflex consonant, sounds sometimes as “l”

ts – Consonants with a sound equivalent to “ch” in English

x – Consonant with a sound equivalent to “rr” in Spanish

w, h, y – Consonants with the same pronunciation as in English

All illustrations are of my elaboration.

In respect for their privacy, I have changed the names of my informants. The only persons whose names have not been changed are the artists Ramón Medina, José Benítez and Santos de la Torre, as they all are public persons.

Throughout the thesis, I use the term “Huichol” over the term “Wixarika” to refer to the indigenous group I have done research among, as it is the most commonly used term within anthropological literature. I am aware that the indigenous group itself prefers to be referred to as Wixarika (plural Wixaritari). I attempted to write the thesis using Wixarika/Wixaritari, but I had to give up as it made the text much more complex to follow, since most of my bibliographical and oral sources used the term Huichol. I apologize in advance to any readers that might find this offensive/incorrect.

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1. Introduction

Definition of the research problem

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the various ways in which an indigenous item of dress is used and endowed with meaning within an overall *mestizo* (non-indigenous) context. My study follows the use and meanings of the Huichol indigenous costume¹ in the city of Tepic, Nayarit, in West Mexico. Tepic, a small *mestizo* city, is one of the main migration centers for Huichol indigenous people, and has the particularity of housing a Huichol indigenous settlement within the city, the Zitakua neighborhood.

My study is in line with Durham (1999), who studied how the same item of dress had a polyvalence of meanings among the Herero in Botswana. However, more than being interested in the different meanings of dress within a particular ethnic group, like Durham does, I wish to focus on the diversity of meanings around the Huichol costume in the broader context of a *mestizo* city. In Tepic, this particular costume is not only used by the Huichol, to whom the dress originally “belongs”, but by other non-Huichol actors that have appropriated the dress and given it a new use and meaning. My aim is to show how the Huichol costume encodes a varied range of messages that depend not only on the actors, but also on the context of its use; to explore how the Huichol costume becomes a carrier of meaning beyond “Huicholness” and becomes an important element in the construction of two different imaginaries of identity: one indigenous, one *mestizo*.

I use, as a point of departure, the idea of dress as a social artifact that not only communicates, but also *signifies*. “Like language, dress simultaneously defines who shares a communicative code and who stands outside it. Because of this communicative function, dress can stand on its own and signify in the absence of a person embodying it” (Jonsson and Taylor, 2003:160). The communicative properties of dress are symbolic, rather than those of a sign (Leach, 1970). There is no intrinsic relationship between dress and what it communicates, as the same item of dress can encode different messages

¹ I use the term Huichol costume to include not only clothing but also jewelry and other body adornments. The term is used as a synonym for dress and should not be understood as costume in a theatrical/masquerade way.

depending of the context of its use. I focus primarily on the “use” of the costume, as I believe that meaning; the content of the signification, arises from its use.

This is not a study of identity, ethnicity or ethnic relations as such. Neither is it a study of dress per se. It is an exploration into the ways indigenous cultural elements are deployed and appropriated by different actors in a city that is primarily non-indigenous. The focus on the Huichol traditional costume takes us from the local context of the indigenous community to the wider *mestizo* context of the city and the state, and shows how indigenous elements, in this case an item of dress considered the quintessential symbol of Huichol indigeneity, are also used to express the political and religious imaginary of identity of the *mestizo* of Nayarit. This thesis suggests that items of dress can have different levels of signification, among different groups of users, and even be part of the identity of opposite groups. Dress has a considerable semiotic value in the expression of social statuses and socio-political relations. Dress is critical in the representation and reproduction of society and forms a crucial link between social groups across space and time (Wickramasinghe, 2003:3).

Anthropological approaches to dress/costume

Anthropological research on clothing has followed the main paradigms in anthropological theory, but has also incorporated many frameworks and concerns from other disciplines that also study the dressed body. For a long time, clothing just received passing attention, as the reigning theoretical paradigms made clothes an accessory in symbolic, structural or semiotics explanations. Since the late 1980's there has been a new focus on clothes, related to agency and practice, with the body at a center stage (Hansen, 2004: 370).

Within anthropology, dress has often been studied in relation to identity, as an unambiguous, straightforward icon of identity. Unique forms of dress are attached to particular groups, be they racial/ethnic, religious, national, sub-cultural, or occupational. Dress standards insulate and differentiate group members from outsiders and also create feelings of solidarity and collective identity among members (Huisman, 2005:46). But dress also affects the individual. As Turner states in his notion of the social skin, dress has a two-sided quality that enables both individual and collectives identities (1993

[1980]). “Dress readily becomes a flash point of conflicting values, fueling contests in historical encounters, in interactions across class, between genders and generations, and in recent global cultural and economic exchanges” (Hansen, 2004:372).

Dress is simultaneously a static icon of cultural identity and also a dynamic enactment of so-called transnational cultural flows. It is a physical impediment and restricts social movement; it is also a practical medium through which mobility and social connectedness are experienced; it is representative of dirtiness and backwardness and also strength and growth. The dress is a burdensome constraint and also a sensible source of agentive autonomy (Durham, 1999:390).

Clothing matters differently across the world’s major regions because regional scholarship differs in emphasis. The work on dress in Latin America has focused on “traditional indigenous dress/costume” and its transformations, and goes from the study of the changing dynamics of the indigenous dress in the Andes (Root, 2004), to its centrality in the definition of indigenous identity in Guatemala (Hendrickson, 1995), to its role as a complex ethnic marker in Bolivia (Zorn, 2004a), or as a cultural strategy related to tourism (Crain, 1996; Zorn, 2004b). Much focus has been placed on weaving and locally produced garments as an expression of identity in Guatemala, Ecuador and the Andes (Rowe, 1998; Schneider, 1987).

There have not been any specific studies on dress among the Huichol. The closest has been Schaefer’s work on weaving techniques (Schaefer, 1990). Though the Huichol dress has drawn a lot of attention for its complexity and fineness, it has only been mentioned as part of the paraphernalia during rituals (Gutiérrez del Ángel, 2002), or as an example of Huichol art production (Mata Torres, 1980). The Huichol dress as such has not, to my knowledge, been subject to research.

Introduction to the people and the places

The Huichol

The Huichol, also known as Wixarika or Wixaritari, is one of the 63 officially recognized indigenous groups in Mexico. The total number of Huichol is estimated to be 43,929 persons² (INEGI, 2000). Most adult men are bilingual, and speak both Huichol and Spanish. Fewer women are bilingual (Neurath, 2003:7).

The Huichol territory³ extends through four different states: Jalisco, Nayarit, Zacatecas and Durango. It is divided into five districts, all of them with a head community with the same name⁴: San Andrés Cohamiata (Tateikie), Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitán (Tuapurie), San Sebastián Teponahuastlán (Wautüa), Tuxpan de Bolaños (Tutsipa) and Guadalupe Ocotán (Xatsitsarie). These communities are officially recognized as the “traditional Huichol communities” or *comunidades tradicionales Huicholas*. They are difficult to access and relatively isolated, hidden in the canyons and plateaus of the Western Sierra Madre mountain chain.

The 2nd article of the Mexican Constitution states that indigenous groups in Mexico have the freedom to choose their own ways of governing and living. Each Huichol district has its own indigenous government that makes economic, political and religious decisions. This government is referred to as the traditional authorities (*autoridades tradicionales*), and is headed by the traditional governor (*gobernador tradicional*) or Tatuwani, whom is aided by a group of civil authorities (*autoridades civiles*), or Itsukate, and counseled by a group of elders (*consejo de ancianos*) called Kawiterutsiri. The Tatuwani and the Itsukate are elected every year. The traditional authorities reside in the head communities.

The head communities have influence over several smaller settlements (ranches) made up of bilateral families headed by elders (local Kawiterutsiri). An elder is usually the eldest male in a family and is in charge of making/approving all the political, economical and religious decisions concerning the family. His age gives him the wisdom and respect to guide the family. In these ranches one family member is usually a shaman,

² Based on the total number of individuals living in homes where Huichol language is spoken.

³ The geographic are officially recognized as Huichol.

⁴ The name in parenthesis is the Huichol name of the district/head community.

or mará'akame. He/she tends to the physical and spiritual needs of the family. It is not uncommon for the elders to also be the shamans.

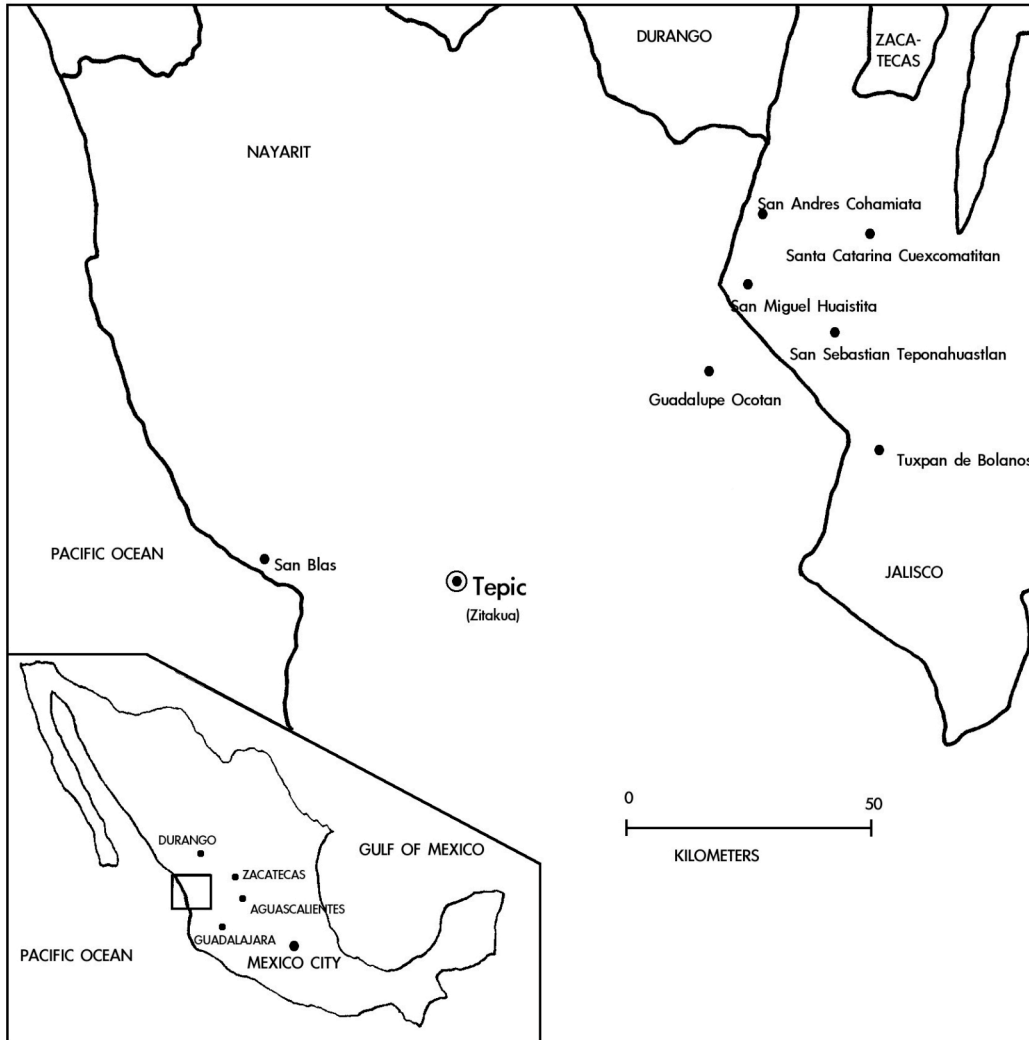


Figure 1. Map of the Huichol Region. Adapted from Schaefer (1990:25).

Within each district, ranch groups are clustered into temple districts located around a ceremonial center, or tukipa. All ceremonial life revolves around these structures. In San Andrés Cohamiata, for example, there are eight tukite⁵. Each tukipa has its own group of religious authorities, called Xukurikate, which are in charge of

⁵ Tukite: plural of tukipa.

performing the ceremonies and pilgrimages that compose the annual religious cycle. Each member of the Xukurikate personifies a deity in the Huichol pantheon. The head authorities of these groups are usually shamans. Religion permeates all aspects of Huichol life (Schaefer, 1990).

Huichol life revolves around the agricultural calendar, which is divided into dry and rainy seasons. In the rainy season (June-September), all efforts are directed towards producing healthy crops. During the dry season (October-May), the Huichol perform the majority of their religious ceremonies, including the pilgrimages to sacred places beyond the Huichol territory. It is also a time when some Huichol migrate to the coast to work as seasonal workers or to sell handicraft in the nearby urban centers. The traditional Huichol economy is based on subsistence agriculture, supplemented by earnings from seasonal work, cattle, artwork/handicraft, and in some areas, fishing.

The Huichol are highly mobile. In addition to the annual pilgrimages to sacred places, there is temporary migration of people from the traditional communities to other regions, where they work as seasonal agricultural workers or sell handicraft. There has also been migration to urban areas with a more permanent character, due to access to formal education, or simply, due to the search for better life conditions. The main migration destinies are urban centers such as Guadalajara, Tepic, Zacatecas, Monterrey and Mexico City. The settlement in Tepic, Zitakua, is the most important Huichol urban settlement, something I will describe further below.

Since the late 19th century, when anthropologists such as Carl Lumholtz, Léon Diguët and Robert Zingg, started to document Huichol culture, Huichol artwork has captured the attention of researchers and general public alike. This is due to the sophistication and fineness of their handwork, which portrays a complex belief system and a wide pantheon of deities. But it was not until 1954 that Huichol handicraft began to be mass-produced for sale (Knab, n.d.). Production boomed during the 1970's, with the support of the then first lady of Mexico, Esther Zuno de Echeverría, wife of President Luis Echeverría and several governmental and non-governmental programs that promoted Huichol handicraft production (Durin, 2008). During this period, the amount of Huichol artisans increased considerably. Handicraft-production became an alternative income and many migrated permanently and semi-permanently to the cities (mainly to

Tepic, Guadalajara and Mexico City), to focus on handicraft making and selling. The main customers were governmental agencies such the National Indigenist Institute (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista* - INI), the National Fund for Arts and Popular Industry⁶ (*Fondo Nacional para las Artes e Industrias Populares* - Fonart) and the Museum of Popular Arts (*Museo de Artes Populares*). For example, during the 1970's, half of the total handicraft production by the Huichol settled in Mexico City was purchased by such governmental agencies. The rest was destined to tourists or sold through personal relations (Knab, 1981: 237). Nowadays, handicraft making and selling is an important supplementary economic activity for the Huichol living in the traditional communities. The production of handicraft represents a supplementary income and a practical way to finance the pilgrimages to Huichol sacred sites (Schaefer, 1990: 218). Among those established more permanently way in the cities, handicraft production has become the main economic activity, in a way that it is uncommon to find Huichol men and women working as maids, cleaning personnel or construction workers, as is the case of other indigenous groups that migrate to the cities (Durin, 2008: 308-309).

The handicraft produced by the Huichol is extraordinarily varied in both items and materials used. Among the different items I can name the following:

- Woven and embroidered items, mainly handbags and belts. The handbags are called *kütsiuri* and are of two types, woven and embroidered. Woven handbags are made either in wool or in acrylan (synthetic wool made from acryl). They are very colorful. Embroidered handbags are made on cotton canvas and embroidered in cross-stitch. Both types of handbags portray symmetric patterns and images inspired from elements of Huichol mythology, such as peyote, deer, maize, scorpions, eagles, etc (see figure 2). The belts are woven on the same materials as the handbags and also follow symmetric patterns.
- Beaded jewelry: accessories such as earrings, necklaces, rings and wristbands made with tiny beads, called *chaquira* in Spanish (see figure 5).
- Beaded figures: Wooden figures and gourds (bowls) coated with beeswax and completely covered with *chaquira*. The figures can be anything from animals

⁶ Called nowadays National Fund for the Promotion of Handicraft (*Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías*).

(iguanas, owls, jaguar heads, lizards, deer) to jewelry boxes to picture frames. As in the handbags and the jewelry, the designs on these figures represent elements from Huichol mythology (see figure 3).

- Yarn figures: Similar to the beaded figures, but instead of using *chaquira* to completely cover the figures and create the patterns, they use yarn made from wool or acrylan.
- Yarn paintings: Wooden boards coated with beeswax and completely covered with a yarn design, which portrays Huichol history and mythology and express the *peyote*⁷-induced visions through which the Huichol shamans communicate with the deities. Yarn paintings were pioneered by the Huichol artisan Ramón Medina Silva in the 1960's and have become an icon of the Huichol art (see figure 4).
- Beaded paintings: Similar to yarn paintings, but made from *chaquira* instead of yarn.

Among the artisans, some have really stood out and their work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. Nowadays, the most renowned yarn painter is José Benítez, a former student of Ramón Medina Silva. The work of Benítez has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and is included in the Huichol ethnographic section of the Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City and the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History in California, USA (Neurath, 2005). Another renowned Huichol artist is Santos de la Torre. One of his beaded paintings is displayed in the Palais Royal – Musée de Louvre metro station in Paris, France (Durin, 2008: 312).

⁷ *Peyote (lohophora williamsii)*, also known as hikuri, is a hallucinogenic cactus that grows in desert areas in Mexico.



Figure 2. Left: Woven handbag. Right: Embroidered handbag



Figure 3. Beaded figures



Figure 4. Yarn painting



Figure 5. Beaded jewelry

The mysticism surrounding the Huichol religious beliefs and persona, in addition to the fineness of their artwork and clothing have earned them a lot of attention and made the Huichol popular not only as an object of study within social sciences, but also among tourists, alternative movements and even media. There is a considerable amount of anthropological and non-anthropological literature focusing on Huichol mythology, religion, rituals and art⁸. The use of *peyote* and other hallucinogenic plants in their religious celebrations has attracted a lot of New Age “travelers” to both urban and rural communities, in search of alternative experiences, inspired by books such as *The Teachings of Don Juan* by Carlos Castaneda (1968). They are one of the few indigenous group that have been portrayed in a soap opera in Mexico⁹ and “Kusinela” a song by the Huichol musical band Venado Azul, was one of the most requested songs in bars and nightclubs in Mexico in 2007. The Huichol are one of the most known indigenous groups of Mexico.

The state of Nayarit and the city of Tepic

The state of **Nayarit** is located in west-central coastal Mexico. It borders with the states of Durango, Sinaloa, and Zacatecas to the north/northeast and with Jalisco to the south/east. The Pacific Ocean lies to the west. It has a surface of 28,874 km² and is divided into 20 *municipios*. Nayarit has a total population of 949,684 inhabitants, out of which 57,910 define themselves as indigenous (6.1%). The rest of the population (93.9%) defines itself as *mestizo* (of mixed-origin; non-indigenous). There are four officially recognized indigenous in the state: Huichol (44% of the total indigenous population of the state), Cora (38%), Tepehuán (6.5%) and Mexicanero (2.6%). There has been migration of indigenous groups indigenous from other states, and they represent 9.2% of the indigenous population in the state (INEGI, 2005).

Tepic de Nervo (commonly known as Tepic) is the capital of the state of Nayarit. The city is located in the center of the state, at 915 meters above sea level, along the Mololoa River and the extinct Sangangüey Volcano. It was founded in 1542. It is

⁸ For a comprehensive list on the literature on the Huichol see Jáuregui (1996)

⁹ *María Isabel*, produced by Televisa, was the story of a poor Huichol indigenous woman who falls in love with a rich *mestizo* man.

considered to be one of the smallest cities in Mexico, with a population of 336,403 persons, out of which 8943 (2.6%) are of indigenous origin. The rest are defined as *mestizo*. The main indigenous groups that live in the city are the Huichol (61.7%), Cora (11.8%), Purépecha (2.1%), Tepehuan (1.7%), Mexicanero (1.6%), Mazahua (1.5%) and others/not-specified¹⁰ (19.6%) (INEGI, 2005). The main language spoken in Tepic is Spanish, followed by Huichol and Cora.

According to the 2000 census, the main religion is Catholicism, with 91.3% of the population. Other religions present in the state are: Protestantism and Evangelism: 3.7%, Atheism 2.5%, Biblical non-evangelic (Adventists, Mormons) 1.4%, Judaic .011%, other 0.14%, non-specified 0.7% (INEGI, 2000).

Tepic is the primary urban center of a rich agricultural area. The main economic activities in the city are commerce and industry, specializing in the manufacturing of food and beverages, fertilizers, and building material, in addition to the processing of tobacco and sugar cane.

As a capital city, it works as the political, industrial and economic center of the state of Nayarit. Both the city and the state governments are located in Tepic. The state's government is housed in the *Palacio de Gobierno*. The city's government is located in the *Ayuntamiento*. Both buildings lie in the city centre.

Zitakua – the Huichol community within the city

Zitakua is a neighborhood that lies at the outskirts of Tepic and was one of my central field sites. Its name means “the place of tender maize” in Huichol language. It has the particularity of being the only neighborhood in Tepic with inhabitants of only indigenous origin. The rest of the neighborhoods in Tepic have mixed population (both *mestizo* and indigenous). The majority of the inhabitants are of Huichol origin, with only one family being of Cora origin and another of Tepehuán origin (source: Huichol local authorities). It is located on the top of a small hill, on the eastern-edge of the city and has an extension of 5 hectares. According to the 2000 census, it has a population of 408 persons (212 men

¹⁰ Others/not-specified is the category used by INEGI.

and 196 women) divided in 75 families established on 111 lots of 8x6 m. each (CIESAS, n.d.).

Zitakua was established in 1989. The official Huichol version, as explained by José Benítez, the renowned artist and *mara'akame*, is that Zitakua was founded as the result of an agreement among four *mara'akate*¹¹ (himself included) and the Government of the state of Nayarit. The Huichol spiritual leaders had noticed that when indigenous people moved to the city, they, to a certain extent, “lost” their identity, as integration to *mestizo* city life implied a whole new set of rules and traditions that clashed with the indigenous ones. José Benítez requested land from the state government to create a place where only people of Huichol ethnicity could settle and where they would be allowed to follow their own way of life, perform their religious celebrations and have their own local traditional government. Zitakua would have the same political and symbolic importance as the traditional head communities of the Huichol territory, and would stand as a political and religious center for all the Huichol ranches and settlements in Nayarit (Kindl, 2005).

Another version, presented by Lourdes Pacheco Ladrón de Guevara (1999), is that the foundation of Zitakua is the result of three main causes, where the interests of the government flowed together with the interests of the Huichol. First, there were a certain amount of Huichol already settled in the city, scattered around different *mestizo* neighborhoods, who had migrated to Tepic in search of better life conditions. In accordance to Huichol religion, they were expected to return to their communities of origin to attend religious celebrations with regularity. This involved a lot of expenses and clashed with life in the city, which did not permit for such a degree of mobility. The need for a place where they could continue to follow their celebrations, without traveling and without cutting the ties with the city, prompted the Huichol to request the establishment of a Huichol settlement within Tepic. Second, the construction of the hydro electrical power plant of Aguamilpa in 1989 (located 45 minutes from Tepic) would flood an area inhabited by number of small Huichol settlements (around the Huaynamota River). Zitakua was seen as an alternative location for resettling those who lost their lands in the Aguamilpa area. Third, the Nayarit governor Celso H. Delgado (1987-1993) wanted to

¹¹ *Mara'akate*: plural of *mara'akame*

improve the image of the state government to the eyes of the indigenous population, an image deeply affected by the construction of the Aguamilpa hydroelectric plant. He therefore aided the Huichol in the establishment of an independent Huichol settlement in Tepic.

The neighborhood has a high degree of poverty and, until recently, has had little access to services like running water or asphalt road. It is a very particular place, as it maintains the characteristics of a traditional rural Huichol community, in the middle of the city. Like the rural communities, it has its own indigenous government that makes economic, political and religious decisions. As told by one of the shamans to journalist Jesús Nárvaez Robles:

The other day, a policeman came and tried to take away some men because they were drinking and threatened to close the ceremonial center. Nobody can close the center, the police cannot come in here; this is not the place of the Mayor [of Tepic]. The only ones who rule here are the (traditional) governor and the shaman. Just like we do not go to the Governor's Palace or the Mayor's house in Tepic and give orders, they cannot come here to rule us (Narvez Robles, 2006, my translation)¹².

However, this does not mean that Zitakua is in complete isolation from the jurisdiction of the city authorities. When it is a matter concerning the internal affairs of the community, for example, disturbances during a ceremony, drunken brawls or conflicts among neighbors, the city police has no power of intervention. Those problems will be resolved and/or sanctioned by the Huichol government. However, if it is a matter where *mestizos* are involved, the police can intervene. There is also a designated traditional Huichol authority in charge of mediating with the city and the state's government.

Like the rural communities, Zitakua has its own ceremonial center called *tukipa*, where the Huichol perform celebrations related to their annual ritual cycle. It also has its own bilingual school, where children are taught both in Huichol language and in Spanish.

¹² "El otro da vino la polica queriendo sacar a unos que porque aqui piteaban y amenazaron con cerrarnos (el centro ceremonial). Nadie nos lo puede cerrar, ni puede entrar la polica aqui; aqui al alcalde no le toca, aqui solo mandamos el gobernador (tradicional) y el chaman. Asi como nosotros no vamos al Palacio de Gobierno o al Ayuntamiento a querer mandar, asi ellos que no vengan aqui a mandarnos".



Figure 6. Tepic City Center (Zócalo)



Figure 7. Ceremonial center in Zitakua

The majority of the inhabitants of Zitakua are artisans. Some, especially men, work in the city as construction or factory workers. Others work as seasonal workers in the nearby tobacco and sugar cane plantations. A few women have jobs in the city as maids and cleaning personnel. Still, the main income comes from handicraft-production and selling. A considerable percentage of the handicraft produced by the artisans settled in the city is sold directly to the government. The local Commission for the Rights of Indigenous People (CDI) provides the artisans with material and pays in advance for the production. This is defined as "credits" to the artisans, who pay back with finished products. These products are later sold on fairs organized by CDI all around the country. This program was developed when the state government realized the importance of handicraft production and selling for the urban Huichol economy; as a way to keep Huichol economy going. However, the program has backlashed as it has resulted in an over-production of handicraft. As Durin found out, in 2005, the equivalent to two million pesos of handicraft were stored in the warehouse of the Tepic CDI waiting to be sold (Durin, 2008: 305).

A smaller percentage of the handicraft production is sold to tourist stores in the city, or in nearby tourist centers, such as San Blás or Puerto Vallarta. Tourist stores are not a popular choice among the artisans, as they claim that many storeowners "pay too little and earn too much". Zitakuans prefer direct sale, as they have a better control over the earnings¹³.

The three main spaces for direct sale in Tepic are the *Plaza de las Artesanías* (Handicraft Plaza) in the city center, the recently built selling area in the *Mirador* of Zitakua and the Huichol Pavilion in the annual *Feria de la Mexicanidad* (Mexicanity Fair). The selling spaces in the *Plaza de las Artesanías* and in Zitakua are permanent and used all year round. The *Feria de la Mexicanidad* is celebrated annually towards the end of March, and lasts one week. These spaces (though in Zitakua to a lesser degree) are

¹³ The products sold to each segment are different. The tourist stores buy objects of all sizes, but prefer the medium sized ones, as they are easier to carry for the tourist. The products sold to the CDI are also medium-sized yarn paintings and beaded figures. The objects sold through direct sale in stalls, fairs and markets consist mostly of small, non-expensive items, like beaded accessories or small yarn paintings and beaded figures.

controlled by the government of Tepic and are shared by cooperatives of artisans¹⁴. Each cooperative is entitled to a certain number of spaces and rotate their use among the different members of the cooperative. So, for example, the cooperative of Zitakua has one permanent stall in the *Plaza de las Artesanías* and is given one or two stalls every year in the *Feria de la Mexicanidad*.

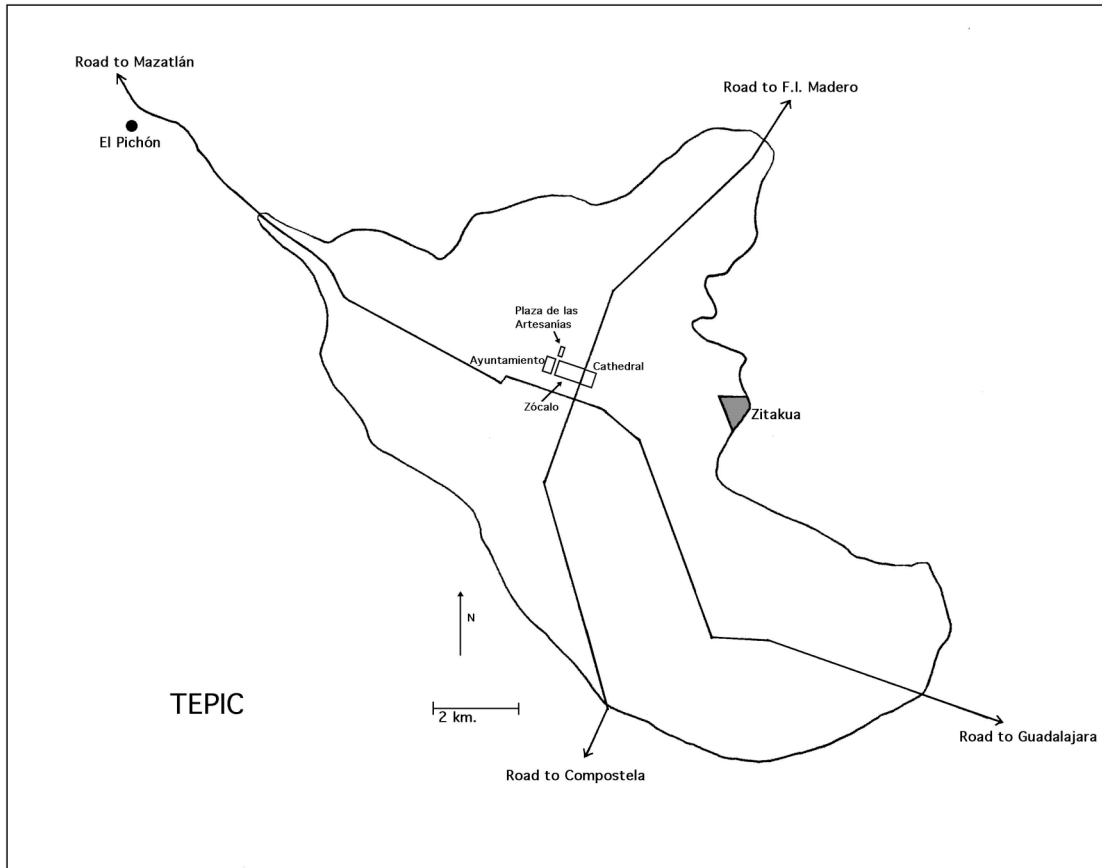


Figure 8. Map of Tepic

¹⁴ Zitakua's selling space is also controlled by the city government, although in an indirect way, as will be seen in Chapter 3.

Field experience and methodology

The first time I heard of Zitakua was in 2002, while doing fieldwork in the traditional head community of San Andrés Cohamiata for my Bachelor degree in Anthropology¹⁵. A fellow anthropologist, during the celebration of Easter, mentioned the existence of a Huichol neighborhood in Tepic, called Zitakua. He commented that the neighborhood even had a ceremonial center and that it tried to emulate the rural communities, by, for example, having its own traditional governor Tatuwani and performing ritual ceremonies. It sounded like a very interesting place, as it challenged the idea that indigenous people forget about their culture and become *mestizo* as soon as they establish in the cities.

On another occasion, I asked the family I was living with about Zitakua. The answer I received was surprising: “Those are not Huichol. Those only sell their culture¹⁶”.

“But they have a ceremonial center”, I argued.

“Yes, but it was built by the Nayarit governor so that his foreign friends could come and see the Huichol dance¹⁷. Those will dance whenever the governor asks for it, not when they really have to”¹⁸.

Weeks later, I took a trip to the nearest *mestizo* town to buy some food and reading material, among those, were a couple of gossip magazines that included pictures of the wedding of a famous Mexican painter and his wife. This couple, known for their eccentricity and love for Mexican traditions, had decided to get married in as many indigenous rituals as possible, one of them a Huichol marriage ceremony in Zitakua. The pictures showed the couple, dressed in Huichol traditional costume, doing different parts of the ritual, such as the man carrying wood to give to his wife, and the wife making

¹⁵ This fieldwork resulted in the Bachelor degree thesis *El sistema de cargos de los xukurikate: Parentesco y poder en una comunidad wixarika*, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Iztapalapa, July 2003.

¹⁶ “No, esos ya no son Huicholes. Esos nomás venden la cultura”

¹⁷ Dancing is an integral part of Huichol religious ceremonies. The main Huichol ceremonies are named Neixa (dance), for example: Tatei Neixa (The dance of our mothers), Hikuri Neixa (The dance of the peyote). To dance is thus a synonym of celebrating/performing a celebration.

¹⁸ “Si, pero ese kalihuey lo construyó el gobernador para que sus amigos pudieran venir a ver las danzas. Esos bailan cuando se los piden, no cuando deben”.

*tortillas*¹⁹. I took the magazine back to San Andrés Cohamiata and showed the article to the family I lived with. The man in the family howled with laughter. He analyzed the different pictures, pointing out all the things that were done incorrectly: “See, the woman is wearing the clothes of a man”, “I doubt the man went and cut wood for the woman”, “for sure that woman does not know how to make *tortillas*”... He concluded that the painter must have paid well to get everything done. “Those in Zitakua will do anything for money”²⁰.

Zitakua stayed in the back of my mind during that fieldwork and the years after. When the opportunity to do fieldwork again arose, I chose to do fieldwork in Zitakua. The little literature written on the area showed that, despite the claims of “non-Huicholness” by the Huichol in the rural communities, the people in Zitakua were making an effort to emulate the political and religious structures of the traditional communities and were taking an active part in the preservation and continuation of their traditions and beliefs.

I originally intended to do a study on representations of gender, motherhood and fertility in Huichol mythology, based on questions raised during the fieldwork in San Andrés Cohamiata in 2002. However, many new questions were raised while in the field and little by little my focus changed, extending my field site from Zitakua to the wider city of Tepic and incorporating new dimensions (actors) to the research. In what follows, I will show how this came to be.

Fieldwork was divided into three stages: May-October 2007, December 2007 and March 2008. I arrived in Tepic towards the end of May 2007. I established in a *mestizo* neighborhood in Tepic, with the hope that I would later be given the chance to establish in Zitakua²¹. My first goal was to get in touch with the Tatuwani traditional governor of Zitakua, the political leader of the neighborhood, to ask permission to carry out research in their community. I wanted to make sure, from the very beginning, that people knew why was I there and what was I doing. I was also hoping that meeting the Tatuwani

¹⁹ The traditional Huichol marriage ritual is a celebration that lasts two days. The first night, the couple must sleep together inside the ceremonial center. The next day, the man must cut wood and bring it back to his wife, who then makes tortillas with that wood. It shows that the man can provide the woman and that the woman can take care of the man.

²⁰ “Mira, la mujer tiene ropas de hombre”, “El hombre ni a de haber ido a cortar la leña para la mujer”, “De seguro la mujer ni sabe tortear”. “Esos en Zitakua hacen cualquier cosa por dinero”.

²¹ In the end I did not move in to Zitakua, because as non-Huichol I was not allowed to settle there.

would help me to meet other people so I could begin with my work. It was not until my third visit that I managed to talk to the Tatuwani. He was very friendly and welcomed me to the neighborhood. He told me that people in the neighborhood were usually free in the afternoons and that I could just come and talk to them. In exchange, he asked if I could give some *cooperación* (money) for the ceremonial center of the neighborhood. I went home thinking a lot about his request. How much money would it be proper to give?

Unlike in San Andrés Cohamiata, where the authorities tell *mestizos* and foreigners how much money to give (you even get a receipt), here it was up to me. I did not want to give too little and I did not want to give too much, so as not to set a (too high) standard for other anthropologists or visitors that might work there after me. In addition, I was aware, from previous experience that having a role in the community would make it easier to justify my regular visits. I decided to offer my services as an English teacher to the community²², both as a way to give something back and to have an excuse to be there. Not that doing research was not in itself an excuse, but I believed that being a teacher was a less invasive role than being a researcher. It also felt ethically correct to give something in return, something that could be useful to them in the long run. Other anthropologists working with the Huichol have also used this strategy of giving something in return; of having a role in the community, with positive results. As Håkon Rokseth explains from his experience in a rural Huichol community:

The only possible way to be allowed to live in the community was to give something back. This is something that is very prominent in their culture, this idea of not getting something out of nothing. That I was there and gave something to the school and to the community was key in their acceptance of me²³ (2007:17-18, my translation).

I visited the Tatuwani again, proposing the English classes and he agreed²⁴. I also gave a small amount of money for the ceremonial center. The next task was to organize the English groups. The traditional governor suggested having a general meeting to inform people about the lessons, but after two failed attempts, where people would

²² I also worked as an English teacher during my first fieldwork.

²³ “De eneste mulige måten for å få oppholdstillatelse var å yte noe i gjengjeld. Det er noe som er veldig fremtredende i deres kultur dette med at en ikke får noe fra ingenting, og at jeg var der og gav noe til skolen og til La comunidad [the community] var en nøkkel inn i deres aksept av meg”.

²⁴ Their main interest on learning English was to be able to sell handicraft to foreign tourists.

simply not show up, I was unsure about what to do. Quite by chance, on one of those occasions in which I sat on the main plaza of the neighborhood waiting for the people, I met the woman who became my main informant. She approached me and began to chat. She was very interested in taking English lessons and suggested me to go talk to a group of women that were selling handicraft not so far away from where we sat. She thought they would be interested in learning English too. I spoke with the handicraft sellers and agreed to give them English lessons 3-4 times a week. The classes would be given right there at their selling stalls, as they had to be there all day in case customers came. This group of female artisans/ handicraft sellers later became pivotal to my research, as they became first, my students, then my informants, and last, but not least, my friends.

I began with the English course right away, with the hope that it would help me get to know people. Unfortunately, the classes were not as successful as I expected. The women often forgot or had something else to do. It did not help either that there were different women every week. It turned out that there were three groups of women selling handicraft, not one, and that they changed groups every week. The first three weeks I had to present the course, the project, and myself again and again. It was hard to keep continuity. Some were friendly and very interested, others were indifferent, others were interested, but shy. The process of getting to know people and doing interviews directly related to my research was going very slowly.

July arrived, and with it, school summer vacation. During the summer, the three groups of handicraft sellers joined together into one big group, as this was “high-season” and more tourists came to visit the neighborhood and buy handicraft. The husbands of the women joined in and helped their wives to sell. The classes were not really going forward, but I did not mind too much, as it still gave me a reason to be there. It was at this point that a group of children, sons and daughters of the handicraft sellers, approached me and asked if I could also give them English lessons during the summer. Since I was not really progressing with the classes to the adults, I agreed. The children were more committed students than the adults. They were fast learners. The adults, seeing the progress I was doing with the children, showed interest again and I agreed to prepare a written course for them, focused on the necessary language to sell handicraft (at their

request). They would be able to study at home, at their own pace, instead of having to attend the course.

I taught English to the children during July and August. I used the time before and after class to chat with the adults and observe the dynamics among them and with the tourists. I managed to organize a couple more formal interviews. By then I began to notice that my original research question was not as relevant as I thought. It did not fit with the reality I was seeing. At the same time, I must admit that I had a bit of trouble understanding “these Huichol”. I had a set of references of what “being Huichol” was from my previous fieldwork in San Andrés Cohamiata. The parameters from my previous fieldwork were useful to a certain extent, but not enough to understand the people from Zitakua. Some of the things that caught my attention and that confused me were, for example that:

1. Unlike rural Huichol, who live in relatively closed-communities, to a degree isolated from mestizos and urban life, the Huichol in Zitakua lived in a settlement that, on the one hand, emulates the rural communities, and on the other hand, is part of a bigger *mestizo* city. As such, Zitakuans were subject to two different sets of codes, customs, and ways of living.
2. Unlike the rural Huichol I had worked with on my previous fieldwork, Zitakuans were somehow open to non-indigenous people, both tourists and *vecinos* (“neighbors”; inhabitants of the nearby *mestizo* neighborhoods). Rural Huichol were usually harsh with *mestizos* and did not trust outsiders.
3. Zitakuans hardly used the word Huichol to define themselves and never used it in opposition to non-indigenous, as was the custom in the rural setting. In San Andrés Cohamiata, everything was defined in the opposition Huichol-*mestizo*, while in Zitakua that opposition was never mentioned. Even when speaking Huichol, I never heard the word *teiwari* (*fuereño*, outsider) used to define a non-Huichol (while it was the first word I learnt in the rural town). On the other hand, the word “Huichol” was, in fact, used with pejorative sense more than once, for example in the expression: “*no seas Huichol*” which translates literally as “do not be Huichol”, but means “do not be shy/ignorant/quiet/rude”.

4. The Tepic city government, through the Tourist Secretary, runs a tourist bus that visits certain sites of interest around the city. One of them is Zitakua. Tourists can experience the “real Huichol”, and see them wearing their traditional clothes, and making and selling handicraft. They are also allowed to see the Huichol ceremonial center. While teaching the English course in the selling area, I got to observe not only the interaction between the Huichol and the tourists, but also the interaction between the sellers and the people that run the bus. I learnt, for example, that the city government had a set of requirements on how Zitakua and the Huichol should present themselves to the tourists and how they could be penalized if they did not fulfill these requirements (see next point).
5. In the rural town, all inhabitants used Huichol clothing. The use of *mestizo* clothes was harshly criticized. In Zitakua, Huichol clothing was used only while selling handicraft or during celebrations. For everyday life, they used *mestizo* clothing. That, in itself could be understood as a process of adaptation to life in the city. What I found confusing was that, as mentioned before, the Tourist Secretary was requesting the sellers to look a certain way by wearing their traditional dress while selling, up to the point of penalizing if they did not do so. Countless times I saw the women changing clothes as soon as they heard the tourist bus coming. What was the norm in the rural area was the exception in the city, to the degree that the city authorities had a say.

So far, I had taken for granted that I knew what defined “Huicholness and what “being Huichol” meant, from previous fieldwork experiences and existing literature. My observations and interviews lead me to realize that things were much more complex than I thought, and prompted me to question how they define themselves and how external agents, such as the city government, play a role in this definition. I decided then, with the support from my supervisor, to change my focus to exploring the different discourses and representations of Huichol identity around the city; not only how the Huichol define and represent themselves, but how others were defining and representing them. As Bartolomé’s definition of indigenous suggests, to be indigenous is not just to belong to a group, but also to be placed and defined as such by others external to the group; to be

indigenous is an attributed identity (Bartolomé, 2006: 56). Following this argument, the category “Huichol” itself would also subject to definitions by both internal and external actors. It is constructed by those “who belong”, like the people from Zitakua or the other Huichol in Tepic, but also by those who “do not belong”, such as the city government, the tourists and the *mestizos*.

With a new focus in hand, I continued with my teaching and research. Not living in Zitakua had the advantage of allowing me to interact with a lot of non-indigenous people in Tepic. Through both formal and informal chats and discussions with my neighbors, taxi and bus drivers, shop-owners, medical staff, etc. I obtained various ideas and opinions about the Huichol, and gathered information on their discourses on the indigenous.

September arrived and the children went back to school. In Zitakua, the handicraft sellers divided into three groups again. I was only teaching the children during the weekends and visiting the women during the week. I believe that it was through the children, and not through the course, that people finally opened up to me. It was then that they trusted me, when they saw I related well to their children. During this period I had many nice chats with the women, where I got to learn more about life in the neighborhood, the city, the relationship with the neighboring *colonias*, the relationship amongst themselves and the celebration of certain rituals. I also got to talk to a mara’akame (shaman) and a nun that works as a catechist in the area. In addition, I visited one of the sacred places for the Huichol: San Blás or Haramara, on the Pacific coast.

I finished this first stage of fieldwork in the beginning of October. A couple of days after my departure from Tepic to Mexico City, the Tatuwani invited me to a celebration related to fertility that I really wanted to attend, so I went back to Tepic for some days. This celebration was very similar to those I had seen during my previous fieldwork in the rural community. The celebration allowed me to see the dynamics of the neighborhood in a different light, as power relations and family conflicts were unveiled during the celebration. For example, the frictions between the two main shamans of the neighborhood were made evident.

After this event, I returned to Mexico City, to do some library research, until December, when I went back to Tepic to observe and attend the celebrations of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This last visit brought lots of interesting information and many new questions, as it allowed me to see the Huichol of Zitakua in the broader context of the city, in contrast to the previous celebration, which showed them in the smaller context of the neighborhood. The 12th of December, the city of Tepic organizes a pilgrimage to the nearby chapel of El Pichón. It is an event that both *mestizo* and Huichol attend. I did the pilgrimage together with a family from Zitakua. One of the things I found most striking was to see that the *mestizos* participating in the pilgrimage were wearing the Huichol costume. The *mestizos*, who in general have a negative discourse around the Huichol and the indigenous, were in this occasion dressing themselves up as Huichol!

In March 2008, I went back to Tepic to attend the Holy Week celebrations in Zitakua. During that last visit, I had the opportunity to see how the *Secretaría de Turismo* (Tourist Bureau) presented Zitakua, and the Huichol, by taking the tourist bus. I also interviewed the tourist guide and some of my fellow tourists. I also had the luck to meet, quite by chance, the family I had lived with during my first fieldwork in San Andrés Cohamiata. They had migrated to Tepic and sold handicraft in the city center. I had then the opportunity to gather information on the Huichol that live in the city but do not live in Zitakua. I got to know more about the handicraft sellers in other areas of the city. I also learnt about the requisites the city government has on the handicraft sellers in public spaces.

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How is it then that I ended up focusing on the use of the Huichol costume? At the time of writing, I had already isolated three significant discourses about the Huichol in Tepic. These were: the governmental discourse, the *mestizo* discourse and the indigenous discourse. I realized that the Huichol costume was not only present, but also being deployed in these three contexts. It was not only a connecting thread, but also a viable point of departure in order to shed light on the discourses about the indigenous people in an urban *mestizo* setting. The costume as a social artifact has a meaning, though this

meaning is situational depending on the user and the context. The Huichol, both Zitakuans and non-Zitakuans, used it both as a visual identity marker and as a handicraft-selling strategy. The city government used the costume to stage an image of the indigenous in the city through tourism. And last, the *mestizo* used the costume to honor a religious figure during the pilgrimage to the Virgin of Guadalupe. By focusing on the use of the dress in these three contexts/cases, I would be able to show how a single item of dress is appropriated and given different meanings by different actors within a city. Through the costume, I could also explore how local indigenous and regional *mestizo* imaginaries of identity are created. The Huichol costume pulled together these three contexts and became the vehicle to a broader understanding of the dynamics surrounding the indigenous in the city.

The structure of the thesis

The chapters are organized as follows: Chapter 2, “Strategies of huicholness: The Huichol costume and its role in the visual representation of Identity”, describes Huichol clothing, its use in rural and urban communities and its meanings to those settled in the city. It illustrates how the Huichol costume is used when one’s identity as Huichol should be stated visually, either to show belonging, claim authenticity or as an economic strategy when selling handicraft.

Chapter 3, “Huichol representations, the State and the Nayarita (*mestizo*) imaginary” follows the appropriation of the Huichol costume by the local government in public spaces destined to tourism. In these spaces, the Huichol (and their costume) stand as an element that not only represents the indigenous in the city, but that supports and gives meaning to the regional construction of the Nayarita *mestizo* imaginary. I suggest that the Huichol costume, through the representations of indigeneity of the State, becomes a metonymic symbol that ends up encompassing and representing the indigenous in the region as a whole.

Chapter 4, “*Las Lupitas y los Juanes*: The Huichol and the religion expression of the Nayarita imaginary”, describes, on the one hand, the *mestizo* discourses around the Huichol in Tepic. On the other hand, it explores the use of the Huichol traditional costume by the non-indigenous population of the city, the *mestizos*, during the Catholic

celebration of the pilgrimage to the Guadalupan chapel of El Pichón. The costume plays a role in the local performance of one of the biggest symbols of *mestizaje* of the Mexican nation. I argue that, during this celebration, the Huichol costume is, once again, once used as a metonymic symbol that stands for the indigenous as a whole, in a way reminiscent of the state's imaginary of the Nayarita *mestizo*.

Chapter 5, the conclusions, recapitulates the three main chapters, with focus on the place of the indigenous in the creation of imaginaries of identity. It also discusses further points of reflection around the urban indigenous settlements in the city, authenticity and the effects of ethnic tourism.

2. Strategies of Huicholness: The Huichol costume and its role in the visual representation of identity.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the elements that compose Huichol clothing in both rural traditional communities and urban settings. I will describe and illustrate the different styles or categories used by the Huichol to refer to their way of dressing and the contexts in which each style is used (and/or not used). I will then focus the attention to the use of Huichol clothing in the context of the city, and explore how Huichol clothing serves different purposes to the wearer, all related to the visual marking of one's identity as Huichol. Special attention will be given to the use of the Huichol costume when selling handicraft, as an example of the strategic use of the costume, that goes beyond the visual marking of identity and gives an added value to the handicraft.

General description of the Huichol clothing

The following sections will describe the styles and elements that constitute what I have referred to as Huichol clothing. These descriptions are based mainly on data from my fieldwork in Tepic, and are complemented with data from my previous fieldwork in the traditional community of San Andrés Cohamiata and the smaller rural settlements of El Colorín and El Ciruelar, in Aguamilpa, Nayarit (see Manzanares Monter, 2003).

I identified three main categories or styles of clothing among the Huichol: everyday dress (*traje de diario*), the traditional costume (*traje tradicional* or *traje bordado*) and *mestizo* clothing (*vestir de mestizo*). The reader should note that these categories are not static, and more often than not, elements from the different styles are combined. But the Huichol themselves use these categories to describe the clothes they wear, and as such, I follow their own categorizations in my descriptions. When referring to Huichol clothing in this thesis, I refer mainly to clothes that belong to the first two categories, as these styles of clothing are considered to be “exclusive” to the Huichol, in the sense that they are not used by other indigenous or non-indigenous groups²⁵. *Mestizo-*

²⁵ It does not mean that others cannot wear them. See the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Chapter 4.

style clothes, on the contrary, are used by other indigenous and non-indigenous groups and are not exclusive to the Huichol.

Everyday dress

By everyday dress I refer to the garments worn by Huichol men and women during their everyday activities and which are not connected to particular events or celebrations. This style is mostly used in the traditional rural communities and, occasionally, inside the domestic spheres among those established in the city.

Women:

The main elements of the female everyday dress are the blouse and the skirt. The blouse, called kutuni, is a long-sleeved, round neck blouse made in cotton poplin and decorated with bias tape²⁶ on the hems of the arms and waist (figure 9). The skirt, called iwi, is a gathered long skirt. It usually goes down to the shins, and, as the blouse, it is commonly made in cotton poplin. It is also decorated with bias tape on the hems and on the middle of the skirt. A small woven belt, called kuxira, is used to hold the skirt in place.

Alternatively, the kuxira has been replaced by an elastic band sewn into the skirt. Women always wear a *fondo* (undergarment) to avoid showing the stomach, as it is considered improper.

The everyday dress is very colorful, and women like to play with different color combinations on the fabrics and bias tape. The fabrics on both the skirt and blouse can be plain or printed. If they are printed, those with patterns in the bottom part of the skirt (*con cenefa*) are preferred. The costume is complemented with the following accessories:

- *Paño* or xikuri: a large, colorfully patterned, square-shaped handkerchief. It is decorated with bias tape around the edges. The xikuri is used to cover the hair while cooking, to avoid it from getting dirty from the smoke of the wood-ovens. It is also used when working in the fields, to avoid that the hair catches dirt. Some women wear it also as a kind of poncho, to cover the shoulders, back and chest when it is cold.
- Jewelry made of plastic beads (earrings, necklaces, wristbands).
- Embroidered or woven handbag called kütsiuri.

²⁶ A narrow strip of cloth, similar to a ribbon, but folded, and used for finishing or decorating clothing.

- Shoes: leather sandals with a thick rubber sole, called kaikai. They do not use socks.

Men:

The everyday clothes for men also have two main elements: the trousers and the shirt. The trousers, called xaweruxi, are wide-legged and made in cotton poplin or cotton canvas. They are usually white, although trousers in plain colors can also be found (figure 10). They are decorated with bias tape along the hems. The shirt, called kamixa²⁷, is long-sleeved, and tunic-like. It has a v-shaped neckline and the sides remain open. It is also made in cotton poplin or cotton canvas and it is usually white or in plain colors. As the everyday costume of women, it is decorated with bias tape on the hems of the sleeves.

The accessories that complement the everyday costume of a man are:

- Kuxira: Like the women, men use a small woven belt to hold the trousers in place. Some have replaced it with an elastic band sewn into the waist of the trousers.
- In addition to the kuxira, men use a much longer woven belt called huyame, which is worn outside the shirt and its function is to keep the shirt from opening. The huyame is only be worn by men. It is usually very colorful.
- Bandana to cover the neck (usually red).
- Cowboy hat, alternatively a cap.
- Beaded jewelry (usually wristbands).
- Embroidered or woven handbag or kütsiuri.
- Shoes: leather sandals, cowboy boots, sneakers. Some men use socks.

I identified regional variations in the design of the everyday dress, especially in the traditional communities. For example, both in Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitán and San Sebastián Teponahuastlán the blouses and skirts of the women tend to be much wider and longer, almost down to the ankles. They use a lot more fabric and both the skirts and blouses are more flowing. They use less bias tape as decoration, usually just in certain areas of the blouse and the hems of both the blouses and skirts. Among men, the shirts tend to be much more colorful in the named communities. While in San Andrés

²⁷ From the Spanish word for shirt: *camisa*.

Cohamiata men prefer to use white shirts, in Santa Catarina and San Sebastian shirts can be much more colorful, either in plain fabrics or fabrics with patterns.



Figure 9. Examples of the everyday costume for women



Figure 10. Examples of the everyday costume for men

The traditional (ceremonial) costume

The traditional or ceremonial costume is the costume that the Huichol consider as their finest. It is used on special occasions, such as religious celebrations, pilgrimages, meetings with other authorities and other civilian occasions that would require elegant clothing. Among those established in urban centers, as well as among those that travel around selling handicraft, the Huichol costume is usually worn only in those occasions where one's identity as Huichol should be made present visually, as be further discussed.

Traditional costumes can be pieces of art. They are hand-embroidered by the women in the family (usually the wife/mother). The costume is more elaborate for the man than for the woman, because a woman usually uses more time in the elaboration of a costume for her husband than on a costume for herself. A finely embroidered traditional costume can take months to make, and women put a lot of effort into it, as a woman's fine weaving and embroidery, particularly on the husband's costume, elevates the status of a Huichol family: "Through her work she may be able to establish a higher social position through the recognition of her creative and industrious skills and capabilities, from which her husband and family all benefit" (Schaefer, 1990:183-184). The embroideries are symmetrical designs inspired on elements of Huichol mythology, such as deer, two-headed eagles, scorpions, birds, flowers, peyote, among others.

Women also make the woven accessories that complement the traditional costume. As with the embroidery, a woman who is a good weaver equals a woman who is a good wife. Woven accessories serve as visual representations of the woman's capabilities. "It is most important for the girl to know how to weave well for her husband, so that his family will be assured that she is taking good care of him and fulfilling her wifely responsibilities" (Schaefer, 1990:181).

Women:

As with the everyday costume, the traditional costume consists of a blouse, a skirt, a headscarf and other accessories (figure 11). The main difference between the two costumes is the choice of color and the decorations. The blouse is long-sleeved with round neck. It is made in white cotton canvas (also known as *manta*) with red bias tape on the hems of the sleeves and waist. It is decorated with colorful embroideries in cross-

stitch in synthetic yarn. The skirt follows the same style. It is made from white cotton canvas and decorated with red bias tape and cross-stitch embroideries. The traditional costume is complemented with the following accessories:

- A xikuri made in cotton canvas, with red bias around the edges and decorated with cross-stitch embroideries.
- Beaded jewelry (earrings, necklaces, wristbands).
- Embroidered or woven kütsiuri handbag, usually more elaborate than the everyday handbag.
- Same style of sandals as with the everyday costume. Some women use “*mestizo* sandals” with heels (*con tacón*), referring to sandals in a more modern, westernized style.

Men:

The traditional costume for men is very elaborate. Its main elements are a shirt or kamixa and the xaweruxi wide-legged trousers. Both are made in white cotton canvas with red bias tape on the hems and decorated with colorful embroideries in cross-stitch (figure 11). On the shirt, the embroideries go along the neckline, shoulders, bottom of the sleeves and bottom of the shirt. Commonly, there is an embroidered eight-point star/ eight-petal flower in the bottom of the neckline. The trousers can be embroidered in their entirety or just have embroideries on the bottom of the legs. It is complemented with the following accessories:

- Short cape in white cotton canvas and red cotton poplin called tawaxa. It has red bias tape all around the edges and embroidered decorations in cross-stitch. It is worn over the shoulders and tied up at the front. Sometimes it is substituted by a red bandana worn around the neck (usually on warm days).
- A huyame long woven belt to close the shirt.
- A second belt with pouches called kasihuire. The pouches resemble the kütsiuri handbags but are much smaller in size. It is worn over the huyame.
- Traditional Huichol hat called xupureru, made of straw with an embroidered band and decorated with turkey, hawk or eagle feathers. It has small shells or beaded ornaments hanging around the rim of the hat. This hat is mainly used by those that

belong to the group of the Xukurikate religious authorities and/or by the shamans during religious ceremonies and pilgrimages.

- Beaded jewelry (usually wristbands).
- Woven or embroidered kütsiuri handbag (more elaborate than in the everyday dress).
- Leather sandals.

Unlike the everyday costume, the traditional costume remains pretty much the same in all communities. According to Rajsbaum, the embroideries from San Andrés Cohamiata and Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitán tend to be more elaborate than those from San Sebastián Teponahuastlán or Tuxpan de Bolaños (Rajsbaum, 1994:70).



Figure 11. Traditional costume men and women

Mestizo (non-indigenous) clothing

By *mestizo* clothing, I refer to the Westernized “modern” style used by the non-indigenous population in Mexico. I use the words *mestizo* clothing as that is how the Huichol define this style.

Among men, this style consists primarily of denim trousers, long-sleeved shirt, cowboy boots, belt and hat, a very common outfit in all of *mestizo* north-Mexico. Women tend to be conservative in their choice of clothes, using matching sets of cotton blouses and skirts (no trousers). The younger generations, especially those settled in the city, have adopted more modern styles of clothes. Young boys wear, for example, sneakers, baggy jeans, t-shirts and caps. Young girls can be seen wearing mini-skirts, shorts, or jeans, and sleeve-less tank tops and blouses.

The use of *mestizo* clothes among men in the rural Huichol communities is not uncommon. I often saw men mixing Huichol and *mestizo* clothes (wearing Huichol trousers with T-shirts and sneakers, for example) or wearing “cowboy style” *mestizo* clothes and complementing them with some Huichol accessories (usually a wristband and a kütsiuri handbag). The use of *mestizo* clothes by men was mostly in the everyday context. During celebrations they would use their traditional dress. On the other hand, I hardly ever saw a woman wearing *mestizo* clothes. Women would always wear their everyday dresses. “In some societies undergoing rapid change or migration, men adopt a Western, “modern” form of dress before women do” (Hau-Nung Chan, 2000, cited in Huisman 2005).

There is a strong prejudice towards the use of *mestizo* clothes among women in the rural communities. For example, I recall once visiting a family, which lived right outside of San Andrés Cohamiata. When I arrived, one of the small girls of the family was wearing a *mestizo* dress her father had bought while traveling around. Then an older sister said that she was going into town. The little girl wanted to join her sister. The mother insisted that she should change clothes; that she could not go into town wearing the dress. When I asked why, the mother said: “People would point at her and laugh at her. We do not dress like that around here”. She was only allowed to use the dress at home.



Figure 12. Huichol couple wearing *mestizo* clothing



Figure 13. Young woman wearing *mestizo*-style clothes in Zitakua

On a different occasion, I was talking about the celebration of San Andrés, the patron saint of the community, with another woman. She explained to me that as part of the celebration they had a rodeo night, where men mounted horses and bulls, a band played live music and they danced all night. She then commented: “At the 30 of November party, the rodeo, one would like to dress up with jeans, cowboy boots, jacket and hat, like people do in the rodeo in Tepic²⁸. But no, here we all have to look the same, with our skirt, blouse, sandals and xikuri”²⁹. When I asked what would happen if a woman chose to wear *mestizo* clothes she said that she would be criticized: “People would ask, why does she want to look different? Whose attention does she wish to get? Is she unhappy with her husband? Look at that crazy woman [*loca*], who knows what is happening to her”³⁰.

The use of the word *loca* in the previous example has two connotations: On the one hand it stands for “crazy, mad”, on the other hand, it stands for “easy” and “loose” (of loose morals). Huichol women that seek to stand out by wearing *mestizo* clothes are seen as looking for the attention of men, as provocative and a threat to other women.

Things are different outside the traditional communities, where the use of *mestizo* clothes, both among men and women, is the norm rather than the exception. For example, a woman from San Andrés Cohamiata explained to me that her family uses *mestizo* clothes when traveling to *mestizo* places. “Do you think we dress like this [points at her Huichol clothes] when we go to Colotlán? No, we use clothes like yours³¹”. Colotlán is a small *mestizo* town in Jalisco, the neighbor state of Nayarit. She and her family move from San Andrés Cohamiata to Colotlán every summer, where her husband, a teacher, attends a teaching-course during school holidays.

Among those established in Tepic in a more permanent way, *mestizo* clothing has replaced the everyday dress. As mentioned before, in 2008 I had the opportunity to meet again my host family in San Andrés Cohamiata after they had migrated to the city of

²⁸ Rodeos are quite common in non-indigenous cities and towns in Mexico. People wear cowboy-style clothes and there is usually horse riding, bull riding, cockfights, live music and dancing.

²⁹ “*Cuando las fiestas del 30 de Noviembre, para el rodeo, se antoja vestirse así con sus pantalones de mezclilla, botas vaqueras, chamarra y sombrero, así como en el rodeo en Tepic. Pero no, aquí todas siempre tenemos que andar igual, con nuestra falda, blusa y xikuri*”.

³⁰ “*La gente diría: ¿por qué ella querrá andar diferente? ¿A quién querrá llamarle la atención?, ¿Ya no estará a gusto con su marido? Mira a esa loca, sabe qué le pasa ahora*”.

³¹ “*¿Tu crees que nos vestimos así cuando vamos a Colotlán? No, nos vestimos así como tú*”.

Tepic. While the man of the family continued using the same clothes as before (*mestizo* shirt and trousers, sandals and Huichol handbag), I observed that the woman had stopped using her Huichol clothes and begun to use *mestizo* clothes. She said that she occasionally wore her Huichol everyday dress when at home, but she did not wear it to go to the doctor, the supermarket or when taking a walk around the city center.

Mestizo style clothes are also widely used in Zitakua, especially by the younger generations and by those that work in the city. As in the case described above, women (particularly mature women) would use their Huichol everyday clothes at home, but would change when going to the city. One would rarely see a person using Huichol clothes (either everyday dress or traditional costume) outside the handicraft-selling area, for example.

The main reason for choosing *mestizo* clothing over Huichol clothing is connected to the prejudices indigenous people are exposed to in the city. These discourses range from the Huichol being ignorant and backward, to evil and cunning (these discourses will be further described in Chapter 4). By using *mestizo* clothing, they do not make evident their indigenusness and can, to a certain extent, avoid uncomfortable situations by blending in.

Elisa, a Huichol woman who migrated to Tepic when she was a teenager, says that many Huichol that move to the city refuse to wear their everyday Huichol clothes because “people treat them bad”³². Elisa herself does not wear Huichol clothes but always carries a Huichol accessory, like a Huichol necklace, wristband or handbag. “I do not wear my Huichol costume but I always carry with me something Huichol to remind me of who I am”³³. To Elisa, to wear a Huichol accessory with *mestizo* clothes is a way of keeping her identity without standing out too much.

The use of *mestizo* clothing becomes a strategy of self-protection against the preconceptions and prejudices of the non-indigenous population in the city. As Natividad Gutiérrez explains:

³² “La gente los trata mal”

³³ “Yo no uso mi ropa huichola, pero siempre llevo algo Huichol para recordar quién soy”

One element of self-perception as indigenous is generally a sense of being exposed to a permanent situation of conflict as a result of the display of “visible signs of identity”. [...] The individual would take objective measures of self-protection in order to avoid harassment, discrimination or embarrassment. [...] Some mechanisms of self-protection might signify a desire by individuals to emulate the dominant culture or to reject their own (1999:48).

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The use of the Huichol costume in Tepic

Even though *mestizo* clothing has basically become the everyday dress for the Huichol established in the city, especially among women, the traditional costume continues to be used in particular occasions, especially those situations where it is paramount to make a visual statement about Huichol identity. In this thesis, I place a lot of emphasis on Huichol clothing as an identity marker because Huichol themselves recognize clothing as part of what makes them Huichol. The other important elements being to speak the language, to have knowledge of their traditions, and to fulfill religious obligations, such as participating in the pilgrimage to Wirikuta or taking part in the celebrations of the ceremonial center.

I identified three main contexts in which the Huichol established in Tepic used Huichol clothing, particularly their traditional costumes. I will focus only on two of them: the use of the traditional costume during religious ceremonies in Zitakua and the use of the costume while selling handicraft. The third context in which the Huichol used their traditional clothing was during meetings with political leaders and city and state authorities, such as the annual celebration of the International Day of the World’s Indigenous People (*Día Internacional de las Poblaciones Indígenas*), which usually takes place in Zitakua and is attended by the State governor. I do not describe those meetings, as I did not have the opportunity to witness any of them.

Religious celebrations in Zitakua

As mentioned in the introduction, Zitakua was created so that the Huichol settled in the city would be able to follow their traditions and perform their ceremonies in a similar

way to the way it is done in the traditional communities. During my stay in Tepic, I had the opportunity to attend different celebrations in Zitakua, both of religious and civil character. It was only on those celebrations related to Huichol religion that the traditional costume was used. The two main celebrations in which I could observe the use of the costume were the Tatei Neixa and the Holy Week, or Weiya. Both celebrations take place in the ceremonial center and are attended not only by Zitakuans, but also by Huichol established in other parts of the city.

The Tatei Neixa is a ceremony that marks the end of the rainy season and the arrival of the first crops. It is also, as I have discussed elsewhere, ceremony for children. A person, for the Huichol, is composed of flesh and spirit (kupuri). A child, when born is only flesh. The child then has to fulfill five cycles of Tatei Neixa, that is, take part in the ceremony for five years, for the spirit to anchor to the flesh and him/her to become a person. These ceremonies are important steps in the socialization of the child, because through the ceremonies the child also leaves the domestic realm of the mother and gradually becomes integrated to the social group (Manzanares Monter, 2003).

The ceremony in itself lasts two days and is an imaginary recreation of the pilgrimage to Wirikuta, the most sacred place for the Huichol³⁴. The children, guided by the mara'akame, “turn into small eagles” and “fly” to and from Wirikuta, retracing the steps of the Huichol deities when they created the universe. It is through the fulfillment of these imaginary pilgrimages that the soul is gradually anchored in the body.

The children and the first crops are placed in a similar category. The first crops, as children, are small and tender. Through the ceremony, the first crops are blessed and nurtured. The deities are offered thanks for the crops and asked to stop the rain, as the crops have received enough and do not need it anymore. Not many have crops in Zitakua, though. Some have small parcels in their gardens, so the ceremony is celebrated more with the children in focus than in relation to the crops.

³⁴ Wirikuta is located in the desert region close to Real de Catorce, in the state of San Luis Potosí.



Figure 14. Girl wearing everyday clothes and boy wearing traditional costume during the Tatei Neixa of Zitakua



Figure 15. Tatei Neixa, Zitakua



Figure 16. *Judíos* walking around Zitakua during the celebration of the Holy Week

The Holy Week, on the other hand, is a ceremony that combines elements from Huichol religion and Catholicism. In Huichol mythology, Jesus and the sun are the same, and represent society, order, its rules and its authorities. The Holy Week stages the battle of the forces of the sun against the forces of the underworld: the uncontrolled nature. During the Holy Week, the forces of the underworld, embodied by the *Judíos*, take over the forces of the sun, represented by the death of Jesus. During three days, the *Judíos* overpower the Huichol authorities and are allowed to do and demand whatever they want around the neighborhood. The shamans, representatives of the forces of the sun, will during these three days, perform rituals and sacrifices³⁵ to restore the order of the world and reinstate the power of the forces of the sun and with them, the Huichol authorities. The resurrection of Jesus symbolizes the victory of the shamans over the *Judíos*, and the restoration of world in the way it is meant to be (Gutiérrez del Ángel, 2002; Manzanares Monter, 2003).

Many Huichol who do not live in Zitakua come to the neighborhood to attend and participate in both ceremonies. Ideally one should perform the ceremonies in one's community of origin, but if one is unable to travel back to the communities, it is accepted to attend and perform the ceremonies somewhere else³⁶.

On these occasions, the use of Huichol clothing, especially if one is an active participant, is important. The participants try to wear the Huichol traditional costume, as it is considered the most elegant and is the one that denotes prestige, but everyday clothes are an alternative if a person does not have access to a traditional costume.

The use of the costume during the rituals in Zitakua serves different purposes. First, the costume shows belonging. It is a statement that one is Huichol and thus belongs to the group, regardless of not living in Zitakua, for example. The celebrations are the main fora where belonging to the indigenous group is expressed; where communal Huicholness is demonstrated. Wearing Huichol clothes underscores this belonging.

The costume is also related to the denotation of prestige. As mentioned in the descriptions of Huichol clothing, the degree of elaboration of the embroideries gives

³⁵ Sacrifices consist on the killing of an animal, usually a goat or a cow, and offering the blood to the Huichol deities.

³⁶ According to informants, the *Tatej Neixa* should preferably be celebrated in the ranch of the maternal grandfather of the child. The Holy Week is traditionally celebrated in San Andrés Cohamiata.

prestige not only to the wearer, but also to the wife of the family, who is the one that usually embroiders the costume. The embroidery skills of a woman are, in a way, visual proof of her skills as a wife. Shamans, traditional authorities and Xukurikate religious authorities all wear elaborate embroidered costumes to denote their high ranks within Huichol society.

Costume-wearing during the ceremonies also shows knowledge of the traditions and willingness to perpetuate them. During the Tatei Neixa, for example, I overheard a mother trying to convince her reluctant teenage daughter to wear the costume for the celebration by telling her: “this is the way things should be done³⁷”. To wear the Huichol costume during the rituals is part of following and perpetuating the traditions the way it is done in the traditional communities. This idea is directly connected to a second statement, regularly used by the traditional governor: “We do it for the culture³⁸”. This was an answer given to explain almost everything that is done in Zitakua, from handicraft selling to wearing the Huichol costume during the religious ceremonies. They wear the costume to show that they care, to show that despite living in the city, and having daily contact with *mestizo* society, they make an effort to preserve their traditions and ways of living. In this sense, the wearing of the costume can also be considered a counter-statement to the criticism Zitakua receives from the traditional communities, which deem Zitakua and its inhabitants as too urbanized, as only interested in Huichol culture to make money and as too *mestizo*-like. These statements arise from the use of the Huichol costume in contexts where the wearer benefits economically, such as in handicraft selling, as the next section will explore.

The use of Huichol clothing when selling handicraft

Another context in which the Huichol costume is used as a visual marker of indigenous identity is within handicraft selling. As mentioned in the introduction, the popularity of Huichol handicraft has given many Huichol the chance to make a living out of handicraft production and sales in the cities. Competition in the cities is high, so the artisans have

³⁷ “*Así es como debe de ser*”.

³⁸ “*Es por la cultura*”

found strategies to make the products they sell more attractive in the eyes of the consumer. One such strategy is the use of the traditional costume while selling handicraft.

The artisans are aware that the buyers are interested not only in the object that is purchased, but also in the origin of the objects they buy: the culture behind the object. The use of the traditional costume, together with knowledge of the mythology surrounding the designs depicted in the objects, caters to this need. The costume serves as a visual representation of Huichol knowledge and culture; a visual confirmation that the object being bought is part of a greater set of beliefs. This not only increases the interest of the buyer on the object, but also gives the object a higher degree of “authenticity” and a higher symbolic value than an object bought on, for example, a *mestizo* store or from a *mestizo*-looking seller.

The use of the indigenous costume as a strategy to sell handicraft is a phenomena that has been observed since the 1970’s, when Tim Knab (1981; n.d.) documented how the Huichol artisans established in Mexico City created a whole image around the artisan/seller, which he defined as “the baroque Huichol (*el Huichol barroco*)”. This image resulted from the preference the consumer has for what appears to be the most traditional form of indigenous art. Handicraft became more “traditional”, more “original” to the eyes of the buyer when the person behind its manufacture and commercialization wore “real” indigenous clothes, spoke the indigenous language and had knowledge of the traditions and beliefs of the indigenous group it represented (Knab, 1981).

This phenomena has also been observed more recently by Séverine Durin (2008) among the Huichol established in the city of Monterrey, in the north of Mexico. Durin argues that, among the Huichol settled in Monterrey, the construction of a façade, that is, the way in which the artisan presents himself to the buyers, is as important as the product that is being sold. Durin identified three different façades among the artisans, each corresponding to three market segments: popular (local), tourist and ethnic (Durin, 2008:306). The first façade is that of the artisan (*el artesano*) per se. This façade relates to the popular market segment and is connected to the smaller items of handicraft, such as beaded earrings, wristbands and necklaces, usually bought by local costumers. In this market segment, the origin of the object and the ethnicity of the producer do not play an important role on sales, as the buyer is mainly interested on the function and fineness of

the object³⁹. The seller presents him/herself as a skilled artisan, but does not necessarily wear a Huichol costume to do so.

The second façade identified by Durin, in tune with Knab (1981), is that of the baroque Huichol (*el Huichol barroco*). This façade is related to the tourist market segment and includes those products that portray Huichol symbols and mythology (such as beaded figures, yarn-paintings and handbags), and which are normally sold in museums, tourist markets and fairs. The objects sold to this (in this?) market segment are much more culture-specific and directly connected to Huichol tradition and beliefs. The seller presents him/herself as a Huichol artisan, through the use of Huichol clothing, and will usually explain the meaning of the different symbols represented in the object for sale to the buyer.

The third façade is that of the wise man (*el sabio*) and is connected to a third market segment, defined by Durin as ethnic. This segment comprises Huichol products sold in contexts of cultural and ethnic expression, such as New Age religious ceremonies in Monterrey, where the Huichol are invited to perform and in where they use to opportunity to also sell handicraft. Here the seller is also a performer, and as such, a repository of cultural knowledge that is represented during the ceremonies and transmitted through the object for sale (Durin, 2008:369-371). The seller uses Huichol clothing during the performance of the rituals and during handicraft selling.

I also observed a strategic use of Huichol clothing when selling handicraft among the Huichol established in Tepic. In a similar way to Durin, I identified that there is a different portrayal of the seller, through the use or non-use of Huichol clothing depending on whether the artisan is selling indirectly (wholesale to tourist stores) or directly (markets, stalls).

I noticed that the artisans, when doing wholesale to tourist stores, did not necessarily use Huichol clothing. They identified themselves and their products as Huichol to the shopkeepers, but did not necessarily wear Huichol clothing, as the main elements influencing the sale were the quality of the products and the bargaining skills of the seller. Some, for example, chose to use *mestizo* clothes with a Huichol accessory, to

³⁹ In addition, these objects are not necessarily exclusive to the Huichol, as other indigenous (Mazahua) and non-indigenous artisans elaborate similar items.

convey the image that the seller has knowledge of the “ways of the city” and at the same time remains Huichol. To wear Huichol clothing might give the image that the seller is a newcomer to the city (as Huicholes that live in the city use *mestizo* clothes) and thus is not familiar with bargaining and wholesale. This is related again to the *mestizo* prejudices on indigenous people being poor and ignorant. Wholesale is not a popular option among Zitakuans, for example, as they consider that the shopkeepers usually benefit economically a lot more than they do. They therefore prefer direct sale⁴⁰.

As mentioned in the introduction, the three main spaces for direct sale in Tepic are the *Plaza de las Artesanías* in the city center, the selling area in the *Mirador* of Zitakua and the Huichol Pavilion in the annual *Feria de la Mexicanidad*. It is mainly in these selling spaces that the artisans of Tepic wear their Huichol traditional costume, as these are spaces in which they have direct contact with the costumers, usually tourists interested on learning more about indigenous tradition and beliefs. The colorful outfits draw attention to the products and convey the image that the seller belongs to, and knows about, the culture behind the object for sale. It gives a visual background of the culture behind the object, or in the words of Nash: “the culture of the artisan is packaged along with the product” (Nash, 1993:12). The object acquires an added value is then perceived as more authentic and closer to the culture it comes from.

Another effect is that it gives the impression that the customer is buying directly from the producer and that he/she is not dealing with middlemen. This gives the impression that the customer will get a better price, as he is buying directly from the producer and not paying the extra charged by, for example, tourist stores. *Mestizo* neighbors of mine, for example, would often suggest buying handicraft directly in Zitakua. “It is worth buying handicraft in Zitakua, it is cheap there. In the center [meaning tourist stores] it is too expensive”⁴¹. The prices in Zitakua and in the center were more or less the same, and certain objects had the same price in tourist stores as in the other commercial spaces. But the idea that one buys directly from the artisan,

⁴⁰ Ironically, Zitakuans usually approach tourist stores when in immediate need of money, as it guarantees quick cash. Some shopkeepers do take advantage of the situation and offer deals that the artisans would not accept in other circumstances, thus reinforcing the idea that wholesale is not profitable and that the artisans are easy preys.

⁴¹ “*Vale la pena comprar en la Zitakua, ahí si está barato. En el centro está muy cara la artesanía*”.

confirmed by the use of the costume, influences the perception of the economic cost of the product to the buyer.



Figure 17. Man selling handicraft in the Zócalo



Figure 18. Huichol Pavillion in the Feria de la Mexicanidad

Strategies of Huicholness

From the previous descriptions, it is clear that the Huichol costume, among the Huichol, has different usages that serve different purposes, some more intentional than others. Huichol clothing is both a sign and a symbol of Huicholness. It is a non-verbal signifier that can be interpreted and understood without even having to interact with the wearer. The main use of the Huichol costume is that of the identity marker. It clearly states Huicholness whether in the local context of the community, or the context of the city, whether with the purpose of honoring and recognizing the ethnic belonging or of increasing the value of an object for sale.

In the case of the traditional communities, Huichol clothing expresses group cohesion by creating uniformity: it states clearly who belongs and who does not. “Dress standards insulate and differentiate group members from outsiders and also create feelings of solidarity and collective identity among members” (Huisman, 2005:46). Their costumes quickly define them as Huichol in the eyes of other Huichol. To stand out becomes undesirable as it states difference and/or a wish to not belong (to not be Huichol; to not be a Huichol woman). Huichol clothing has a similar effect during religious ceremonies in Zitakua: it gives collective identity to Huichol men and women, regardless of their place of residence in Tepic. It promotes a feeling of solidarity among Zitakuans and non-Zitakuans and creates a sense of communality among Huichol from different communities of origin.

Within the context of the community (traditional or urban), an elaborate traditional costume represents the skills of the maker, which in turn reflects her qualities as good woman. It also conveys prestige to the wearer, and shows the status of the wearer (and his family) in the community. In addition, it is an expression of his/her role in the community, as religious and political authorities, highly respected in Huichol society, tend to wear the finer costumes.

However, outside the context of the traditional community and outside of Zitakua (non-indigenous contexts), the use of Huichol clothing has the opposite effect. To wear Huichol clothing is a statement about being different. We have seen that the use of the Huichol clothing on an everyday basis in the city is limited to the domestic sphere and is avoided in public spaces, while the *mestizo* style clothes have been favored as they make

blending in easier. I believe that the use of the Huichol clothing in the city becomes a lot more rationalized, as the individuals are more aware, on an everyday basis, that clothing marks them as different. A Huichol man or woman will use the Huichol costume when he or she consciously and actively wants to state his or hers identity as indigenous. The reasons behind can vary, but the result is the same: The costume becomes the most obvious visual signifier of indigenous belonging. By using it, a man or a woman states Huicholness to the eyes of the *mestizos* or to other Huichol.

But the lack of use of the costume in non-indigenous settings shows that the Huichol costume also carries with it a set of negative connotations. It alienates the indigenous from the non-indigenous, it visually marks that the wearer is of indigenous origin and is thus charged with prejudices.

I believe that all the meaning attached to the clothing leads to a strategic use of it, depending of the context in which the wearer finds him/herself. The wearer will wear Huichol clothing when Huicholness and indigenousness is expected, and will avoid it in those contexts in which wearing it is not relevant or might even be considered detrimental.

In the particular case of handicraft selling, the use of the costume proves a good strategy in those arenas where the buyer is not only interested in acquiring a product, but on knowing more about the culture behind it. The costume becomes a visual signifier of this culture; the wearer a repository of the mythology surrounding it. The persona of the artisan contextualizes the object for sale and gives it a value that, objects sold in tourist stores, for example, do not have/transmit, namely authenticity. “In settings where information or knowledge are valuable commodities that simultaneously function as capital and as means of production, distinctive forms of knowledge acquire special economic value” (Eriksen, 2004). However, not all contexts related to handicraft-selling benefit from the use of Huichol clothing. Zitakuans, aware of the prejudices around being indigenous, avoid wearing indigenous clothing when doing wholesale to stores, with the intention of presenting a different image to that of the “typical, ignorant and naive” indigenous person.

The case of Tepic is very particular though, especially when it comes to sales of handicraft in public spaces. An aspect not yet discussed, is the role of the local

government and the tourist industry on the main spaces of direct sale. In this chapter, I have explored the use of Huichol clothing from the perspective of the Huichol. In the next chapter I will also focus on the use of Huichol clothing, particularly the embroidered traditional costume, but from the perspective of the city government of Tepic and the *Secretaría de Turismo* (Tourist Bureau). I wish to show how the costume, the quintessential visual signifier of Huicholness, is used to represent indigeneity as a whole and to construct/validate the imaginary of the *mestizo* Nayarita.

3. Huichol representations, the State and the Nayarita (*mestizo*) imaginary.

There are two particular events that triggered my interest on the use of Huichol clothing. During one of my first visits to Zitakua, I overheard a seller reminding the others about the importance of wearing their traditional costumes when the city's tour bus, *Tepibús*, arrived to the neighborhood. "We have to wear our traditional costume. The guide from the Tepibús came and scolded Raúl [the Tatuwani (traditional governor) of Zitakua] because we were not wearing it when the tourists arrived and that was the agreement. He said that next time, we are going to get sanctioned".

Months later, on a related matter, the city government organized a private Tepibús tour for a group of important businessmen, who were in the Tepic in connection with the construction of a new shopping center not so far from Zitakua. The Huichol authorities were told in advance, and Mauricio, the son of the Tatuwani was to make sure that the neighborhood would be clean and all the handicraft sellers would be in their stalls wearing their traditional costumes. While giving instructions to the sellers, he commented that he was having some trouble with a group of "drunk men" in the ceremonial center, because they were celebrating something and did not want to go away. He wanted the area to be clear and clean for the important guests. I found out later that the "drunk men" were no other than one of the shamans and his family, who were celebrating their return from the pilgrimage to Wirikuta, the main Huichol sacred place. The pilgrimage concludes with the "reintroduction" of the pilgrims to the community, with a meal and rituals in the ceremonial center. This comment was quite surprising, as I would never have expected the spiritual leader to be addressed as a "drunk" by other authorities, nor to be asked to leave the area of the ceremonial center after coming back from an event of high religious significance.

These two events made me wonder why it was so important for the city and the Huichol authorities to give a certain image of, on the one hand, the Huichol, and on the other hand, of the neighborhood to the tourists? I was especially intrigued by the fact that the artisans could be sanctioned for not wearing the traditional costume in the selling

stalls of Zitakua. As seen in the previous chapter, the Huichol themselves are aware of the advantages of wearing Huichol clothing while selling. But why would the government have to remind the artisans about it, to the degree of sanctioning them if they failed to do so? On the other hand, why was the government interested in giving a certain image of the neighborhood to the visitors, to the extent that the Tepibús visit would be prioritized over the fulfillment of Huichol tradition?

These two events made me realize that the Huichol (*lo Huichol*) in Tepic did not limit itself to the community, and was not only present in the context of the Zitakua. It played an important role in the wider context of the city. The Huichol was everywhere. Tourist brochures, local government stationery, pamphlets, Internet portals, posters and billboards were all decorated with Huichol patterns or displayed images of what looked like Huichol people. The artisans selling handicraft in public places were all wearing Huichol traditional costumes. The local ethnographic museum, *El Museo de Artes Populares Casa de los Cuatro Pueblos*, (The Museum of Popular Arts of the Four Indigenous Groups) displayed handicraft and ritual objects from the four indigenous groups of the state: Cora, Mexicanero, Tepehuán and Huichol⁴². Nonetheless, more than half of the space of the museum was devoted to the Huichol. While riding the Tepibús, the tourist guide spoke about Huichol legends, medicine men, mythology, handicraft, artists, etc. The other indigenous groups were barely mentioned. Despite the multiplicity of indigenous groups in the area, it seemed like the Huichol were the “poster children” of the government when it came to the portrayal of the indigenous within the city.

In this chapter, I explore the government’s representation of indigeneity within the city, with focus, but not limited to, the use of the Huichol traditional costume in public spaces destined to tourism. I suggest that these representations play a role in the construction of the concept of the Nayarita mestizo (identity). The regional imaginary of the *mestizo* Nayarita, just as the national imaginary of the *mestizo* Mexican, is constructed/based on discourse and visual representation in public spaces, using mechanisms that have its origins in the politics of *indigenismo*. The visual representation of indigeneity in Tepic is the result of the selection of indigenous elements that better embellish and stand for the imaginary of the *mestizo* Nayarita.

⁴² In addition to a very small selection of *mestizo* leather-handicraft typical to the state.

To support my argument, I will first introduce the reader to the politics of *indigenismo*, the concepts of national and regional imaginaries of *mestizo* identity, and the role of museums and public plazas on giving substance to these imaginaries. I will then elaborate on the representations of indigeneity found around Tepic, particularly in public areas destined to tourism such as Zitakua and the Zócalo, to discuss how the State's use of the Huichol to represent indigeneity, which I define as "Staging Huicholness" is done in relation to the broader context of the imaginary of the Nayarita, using mechanisms that are reminiscent of the politics of *indigenismo*. Finally, I will reflect on how the staging of Huicholness has, somehow, turned the Huichol and their costume into a metonymic symbol of indigeneity in the city and the state, which not only stands for what is Huichol but also for all that is indigenous.

The politics of *indigenismo* and the imaginary of the *mestizo*

Ever since colonial times, the notion of "the indigenous" in Mexico has been charged with negative connotations. Indigenous seems to be synonymous with poverty, ignorance, lack of development, cultural and racial inferiority... "Autochthonous people [...] are defined in terms of marginality and all its corollary connotations: low socioeconomic status, subordination, inferiority, oppression and cultural and linguistic dissimilarities vis-à-vis the mestizo" (Gutiérrez, 1999:31). The origin of these preconceptions can be traced back to colonial times, where the various forms of forced labor of indigenous men and the widespread domesticity of indigenous women gave rise to stereotypical prejudices associated with the menial nature of the work (Gutiérrez, 1999:39).

Throughout history, there have been a number of attempts to revalue the indigenous. A significant effort was that of *criollo*⁴³ nationalists, like Miguel Hidalgo, during the War of Independence in 1810-1821. The main movement, however, occurred during 20th century, after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (Alonso, 2004). At that time, the Mexican State intellectuals José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio sketched the politics of what is known as *indigenismo*: a new nationalistic project that aimed towards the creation of a homogeneous *mestizo* Mexican society based on its heterogeneous

⁴³ Term used to define a person of Spanish descent born in colonial territory.

indigenous roots. The concept of the *Mexican mestizo* is the epitome of the mixture between the Spanish and the indigenous origins; homogeneity as a product of heterogeneity. “Mexican official discourses promoted ‘racial and cultural intermixture’ as the only way to create homogeneity out of heterogeneity, unity out of fragmentation, a strong nation that could withstand the international menace of U.S. imperialism” (Alonso, 2004:464).

José Vasconcelos proposed a vitalist⁴⁴ notion of the Mexican *mestizo* that he referred to as *the Cosmic Race*, where the heterogeneity of the Mexican nation would be reconfigured in terms of homogeneity. He considered visual aesthetics and history to be important factors in the reconfiguration, as these are “the soul of a nation”. He defined the *mestizo* as “the hyphen of the meeting point of Spanish-Indian Tragedy” (Vasconcelos, 1926:82). Being the unique product of the violent encounter of two races, the *mestizo* could not connect fully with the past, as they were neither Spanish nor indigenous. To resolve this problem, he suggested the development of a new aesthetic that would not privilege the Spanish over the indigenous, a new aesthetic that would give substance to the history of the *mestizo*.

However, as much as Vasconcelos’s *cosmic race* celebrated the aesthetic and spiritual genius of the indigenous, it relied on the indigenous past of the nation. This implied that the indigenous was to be represented by the greatness of the glorious civilizations of the past, like the Aztecs or the Mayans, not by the illiteracy and poverty of the groups of the present. “Vasconcelos’s work as a whole is marked by discomformity, caught in a postcolonial ambivalence about Indians that celebrates their aesthetic and spiritual genius in the past, but reviles their contemporary condition of *cultural decline*” (Alonso, 2004:465). His work was selective in the sense that it did not wish to consider all aspects of the indigenous, only those that would “embellish/enrich” the substance of the *mestizo*, those aspects that the *mestizo* population could be proud of.

The other State intellectual that played an important role regarding *indigenismo* was Manuel Gamio, the father of modern Mexican anthropology. His book, *Forjando Patria* (1916) aimed towards the creation of a new nation in relation to an external Other,

⁴⁴ Vitalism: a doctrine that states the processes of life are not explicable by the laws of physics and chemistry alone and that life is in some part self-determining (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

the imperialist U.S., as well as to internal others: the European oriented pre-Revolutionary elite on the one side, and the indigenous groups on the other (Alonso, 2004:466). He believed that

[T]he fusion of races, convergence and fusion of cultural manifestations, linguistic unification, and economic equilibrium of social elements should characterize a Mexican population before it constitutes and embodies a powerful state with a coherent and well defined nationality (Gamio, 1923: 221).

More than focusing on the indigenous past, like Vasconcelos did, Gamio suggested the development of a *mestizo* aesthetics based on elements of the indigenous cultural production of the present, such as indigenous traditional costumes, music and handicraft. To Gamio, indigenous culture is the true basis for national identity and is represented through their cultural production. “Combining his conviction that ‘indigenous culture is the true basis for national identity’ with his belief in scientific methods, Gamio engaged in numerous ‘experiments’, generating methodologies for cultural and aesthetic representation that have had a lasting impact on subsequent state practices” (Alonso, 2004:469). In Gamio’s ideas, the cultural elements from the indigenous would be relevant in terms of the *mestizo*; to ornate and represent *mestizo* identity and not as representations of the indigenous in itself. Museums and public plazas would be important arenas because it was there that indigenous cultural production was exhibited; where those heterogeneous elements that ground the notion of the *mestizo* could be seen and appreciated; the repositories of the genius of the nation.

We can say then that key elements of the politics of *indigenismo* were: (a) the promotion of cultural/ethnic homogeneity created out of heterogeneity (b) a recognition of the indigenous not in itself, but in relation to a wider *mestizo* context; (c) and a promotion of indigenous cultural production to represent and “embellish” the *mestizo*, not as a representation of the indigenous in itself.

Indigenismo has been widely criticized, as the idea of the Mexican *mestizo* nation of Gamio and Vasconcelos rejected cultural ethnic difference and encouraged the integration of indigenous groups to the nation, disregarding their traditions and beliefs. It also promoted the recognition elements of the indigenous (mainly indigenous cultural production) only in relation to a bigger, cultural other, the *mestizo* (see Alonso, 2004;

Bonfil Batalla, 1991; García Canclini, 1995; Gutiérrez, 1999; 2001; Kaplan, 1993). The criticism has produced changes in governmental policies, though these changes have been more in discourse than in practice. Many elements of *indigenismo* are still present in the modern Mexican nationalism project. Official nationalism in Mexico still aims towards integration and homogeneity through instances such as the education system, which provides a standardized mass-education and a highly selective official view of national identity and history (Gutiérrez, 1999: 1,4). The recognition of the indigenous past and present is still done selectively and in relation to a wider national culture, though in a more veiled way.

National and regional mestizo imaginaries

The most significant “end-result” of *indigenismo*, and one that prevails in governmental policy and discourse, is the notion of the imaginary of the *mestizo*. This concept, according to Gutiérrez,

has two important functions in the making of the modern Mexican nation. On the one hand, it produces (a) the idea of common origin for antagonistic groups and (b) the mestizo population itself – the result of an imposed myth of origin – became the yardstick of national integration for indigenous in terms of adoption of language (Spanish), religion (Christianity) and way of life (urbanization). The result has been, so far, an elastic formula, or common identity, that has contributed significantly to the foundations of a diversified nation: social cohesion, political unity and cultural originality...” (Gutiérrez, 2001:5)

The imaginary of the *mestizo* succeeded by giving identity to a great percentage of the population that did not consider themselves neither indigenous nor Spanish. Nowadays, 91.2% of the population defines itself as *mestizo* (Comisión para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2006).

Museums and public urban spaces have played a historic role in the creation of national images, being the main depositories of indigenous cultural production and visual culture: “The monumentalization of indigenous culture as “national patrimony” is omnipresent in Mexican cities, particularly in the capital’s monuments and plazas, and in the huge network of museums run by the National Institute of Anthropology (INAH)” (Alonso, 2004:469). Both museums and public plazas have thus been central to the

public representation of *mestizaje*, by exhibiting that which makes Mexicans proud of what comes from their mixed heritage; inscribing the indigenous into the heritage of the *mestizo*. As explained by Wherry:

The state agencies most important for managing the country's international identity are its tourism and museum institutions. These agencies tell the outside world what the national character is, which villages or towns best represent the character, and which ethnic groups have contributed to the nation's cultural coffers (Wherry, 2006:126).

Museums and public plazas function as “visual proof”/visual expressions of these imaginaries by displaying the nation's patrimony. Indigenous cultural production plays an important part on these expressions, as it gives substance to the indigenous root of the *mestizo* imaginary.

I believe that *mestizo* imaginaries are not only constructed at a national level. Foreign tourism may stimulate internal demand for imagery and group identity on local, regional and national levels (Kaplan, 1993). Regional imaginaries are built on similar premises as the national notion of the *mestizo*, but rely on local history, cultural production and visual representations. The sections that follow will explore how the indigenous is represented in Tepic, by focusing on the use of the Huichol traditional costume in public spaces, especially those places destined to tourists, like Zitakua and the Zócalo. Above I mentioned that the representation of the indigenous in the city, especially in spheres connected to the local government, is predominantly Huichol, despite the multiplicity of indigenous groups on the area. My aim is to show how this focus on the Huichol can be better understood when seen as forming part of a representation of the Nayarita (*mestizo*) imaginary.

The Huichol as tourist attractions

There is an increasing presence of “the indigenous” in the city of Tepic. From being a city that, until 1947 did not allow entrance to people wearing “non-civilized clothes”⁴⁵ (Pacheco Ladrón de Guevara, 1994), it has become a place that embraces its indigenous

⁴⁵ The police code of 1947 did not allow entrance to the city to people who did not wear “western-style trousers”. The cotton trousers usually worn by men of indigenous origin were not considered “civilized” and were improper to wear in the city (Pacheco Ladrón de Guevara, 1994).

origins and proudly displays them. The city is full of posters, advertisements, sculptures and murals portraying indigenous people in picturesque clothes, making stunning pieces of handicraft or performing complex ceremonies. The use of indigenous imagery, words and names in restaurants, taxis, busses and hotels is widespread. Indigenous artisans, wearing colorful embroidered costumes can be seen selling handicraft in the main plazas of the city. The city proudly claims that it has its “own indigenous settlement”, the Zitakua neighborhood, where visitors can see indigenous people “in their own environment” and buy their handicraft.



Figure 19. Poster in the *Zócalo* advertising Zitakua. Behind: Cathedral of Tepic.

Zitakua and the Tepibus

Soon after Zitakua was established as a neighborhood in 1989, A tukipa ceremonial center for the performance of Huichol religious celebrations was constructed. Since then, the ceremonial center has been used to perform Huichol rituals, occasionally at the request of the city government⁴⁶. According to Pacheco Ladrón de Guevara, the city government contributed to the establishment of Zitakua “to have an indigenous stage to show to their national and international visitors” (Pacheco Ladrón de Guevara, 1999). Still, it was not until 2006 that its full potential as a tourist site was evaluated.

In October 2006, the local government, through the Hábitat Program⁴⁷ of the Secretary of Social Development (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* - SEDESOL), rehabilitated the neighborhood to make it a tourist attraction. The road that leads to the neighborhood was paved to give easier access to cars and busses (in contrast with the potholed dirt roads of the adjacent neighborhoods). The ceremonial center was refurbished: public toilets were added and a seating area for visitors was created (Revista Opción, 2006). Selling stalls for food and handicraft were built, first around a basketball court that serves as the neighborhood’s center and reunion point, and later moved to the area of the *Mirador*, Zitakua’s look out point, as it provided easier access to handicapped visitors, better parking possibilities to tour busses and a magnificent view of the city of Tepic.

In Zitakua, visitors are given the unique opportunity to observe the Huichol “in their own environment” without having to travel to the isolated rural communities. As stated in the tourist brochure:

The magical hands of the Huichol thread stories and lay dreams in their beautiful and special, colorful handicraft. They, our indigenous brothers, fill us with pride because of their traditions, history and culture; because they let us enjoy all they create for our delight.

Here in Tepic you can find the Huichol settlement named Colonia Zitakua, where they maintain their traditions, ways of relating and way of life. We invite you to visit them and to learn more

⁴⁶ The wedding of the Mexican painter mentioned in Chapter 1 is such an example.

⁴⁷ The Hábitat Program was created to face the problems of poverty in urban marginal areas. It had as a main goal the improvement of the basic infrastructure of the poorest urban areas of Mexico (SEDESOL, n.d.).

about this ethnic group, pride of all the Nayaritas, and to buy their unique handicraft⁴⁸ (Dirección de Turismo Municipal de Tepic, 2007, my translation⁴⁹).

Small colorful pictures of the handicraft stalls and a bigger picture of the ceremonial center, with a Huichol family wearing the traditional costume, accompany the brochure.

During Easter of 2007, Zitakua was included as one of the stops in the route of the tourist bus, Tepibús, run by the city government. The Tepibus consists of two tram-like, open busses that visit various places of interest around the city a couple of times every day. A guide describes the different sites (in Spanish). The tickets are not expensive (around 1 USD. per person), making it very affordable. The ride lasts 2 hours. It drives by the main plazas, buildings and parks of Tepic and stops in two main places, the Jauja Ruins and Zitakua. The Jauja Ruins are the remains of an old textile factory that burnt during the Mexican Revolution and that is known for being the place of origin of *El son de la negra*, a very famous mariachi song. Zitakua is the “Huichol community within the city”.

As the Tepibús ascends the road that leads to Zitakua, a 3-meter-tall statue of José Benítez, a famous Huichol artist and shaman, welcomes the visitors (figure 21). The statue of the shaman is wearing the traditional costume and is portrayed in the act of “blessing” the whole city of Tepic. Tourists are told how he became a mara’akame and how he is one of the founders of the neighborhood. They are also introduced to Huichol way of life. A special emphasis is placed on those aspects that are different from *mestizo* way of living, such as polygamy and shamanism. The tourists are also taught some words and phrases in Huichol language, such as kiakü (how are you?), panparios (thank you) and uka nunutsi tsitsi kü temaike (pretty girl).

⁴⁸ *Las manos mágicas de los huicholes tejen historias, plasman sueños en sus creaciones de singular colorido y belleza artesanal. Ellos, nuestros hermanos indígenas, nos llenan de orgullo por sus tradiciones, por su historia y cultura, por dejarnos disfrutar todo lo que ellos crean para nuestro regocijo.*

Aquí en Tepic se encuentra el asentamiento Huichol denominado colonia Zitacua, donde ellos mantienen sus costumbres, su forma de vida y de relacionarse. Te invitamos a visitarlos y conozcas más de esta etnia, orgullo de todos los nayaritas, al tiempo que compras su artesanía única.

⁴⁹ I attempted to do a translation as close as possible to the original. The translation reflects the syntax errors and heavy sentences of the original.



Figure 20. Statue of José Benítez in the selling area of Zitakua



Figure 21. Tepibus and the selling area of Zitakua



Colonia Zitacua

Las manos mágicas de los huicholes tejen historias, plasman sueños en sus creaciones de singular colorido y belleza artesanal. Ellos, nuestros hermanos indígenas, nos llenan de orgullo por sus tradiciones, por su historia y cultura, por dejarnos disfrutar todo lo que ellos crean para nuestro regocijo.

Aquí en Tepic se encuentra el asentamiento huichol denominado Colonia Zitacua, donde ellos mantienen sus costumbres, su forma de vida y de relacionarse. Te invitamos a visitarlos y conozcas más de esta etnia, orgullo de todos los nayaritas, al tiempo que compras su artesanía única.






I Informes en la Dirección de Turismo Municipal, calle Puebla esq. con Amado Nervo, planta baja.

Figure 22. Tourist Brochure featuring a Huichol mask in the cover and Zitakua as a tourist attraction.

The bus stops right in front of the selling stalls, where a group of artisans, all clad in Huichol dresses (both everyday and traditional costumes), receive the tourists and invite them to look at the handicraft and to buy some food. The tourists can also walk around the area of the ceremonial center. After 15 minutes, the guide asks the tourists to get on the bus and drives back to the city center, where the ride finishes.

The Zócalo and the Plaza de las Artesanías

Like many other central plazas in Mexico, Tepic's main plaza, or *zócalo*, functions as a meeting, recreation and tourist point. On the one end of the *zócalo* stands the cathedral and on the opposite end, the Ayuntamiento, where the city government offices are located. To the right of the Ayuntamiento stands the *Plaza de las Artesanías*: a recently created area with handicraft stalls, tended by what one assumes are Huichol artisans wearing their traditional costumes. Up until December 2007, when the *Plaza de las Artesanías* was finished, these same artisans had their stalls right outside the Ayuntamiento. I was struck by the uniformity of the clothes worn by these sellers. In other Mexican central plazas one usually finds a diversity of indigenous clothes and handicrafts, but in Tepic all the handicraft sellers wore the most elegant versions of the Huichol costume. None of the sellers wore, for example, Cora or Tepehuán costumes. Very rarely one would see a seller wearing *mestizo* clothes.

The Huichol governor from Zitakua later explained to me that to sell in the *Zócalo*, and in the *Plaza de las Artesanías*, artisans need to get a permit from the local authorities. In exchange, the city government requests the sellers to wear the Huichol traditional costume. Those who do not wear the costume are not to be allowed to sell in these areas. Everyday Huichol clothes are permitted to a certain extent (if, for example, the traditional costume is dirty), but the traditional costumes are preferred. Not all the sellers in the *zócalo* are Huichol, though. The Huichol governor claims that some of the sellers are *mestizo*, but even they are asked to wear Huichol costume.

The same criteria apply to handicraft sellers in Zitakua, though it is the Huichol governor, and not the city authorities, who decides who can sell in the neighborhood and who cannot. The only request from the city authorities is that the sellers wear the

traditional costume, especially when the Tepibús comes. Not wearing the suit could result in warnings and eventual withdrawal of the sales-permit. If the tour guide from the Tepibús considered that people were not wearing the right clothes, he would report it to the Huichol governor (often as a sort of reprimand), who would in turn give a warning to the sellers, saying they would be sanctioned (i.e. withdraw the sales-permit) if they failed to wear the costume.

Staging Huicholness

Why is there an emphasis on the use of the traditional embroidered costume over other kind of Huichol clothing (as expressed by the warnings given to the artisans in Zitakua and the uniformity of costumes in the city center)? I believe that both in Zitakua and in the *Plaza de las Artesanías* the artisans have become, in a way, the representatives of the city's indigeneity to the eyes of the tourists and locals. By demanding the handicraft sellers to use the Huichol traditional costume (and not to use everyday clothes or *mestizo* clothes while selling), the State is defining how the representatives of indigeneity in the city should look like in public. This is what I mean by *staging Huicholness*: the presentation of an image of the Huichol for public view. It should be noted, however, that by using the word “staging”, I do not refer to the act of presenting the Huichol in a theatrical, make-believe way, but to the creation of an image for public view that exalts certain Huichol elements over others, in a similar manner to how *indigenismo* chose certain elements of indigenous aesthetics over others to display the indigenous content of the idea of the *mestizo*.

By requesting the use of the Huichol traditional costume, the government exhibits an image of the indigenous for public effect that, on the one hand, breaks with the preconception of the indigenous as synonymous with poverty, dirtiness and ignorance, through the use of what is considered one of the most visually attractive indigenous costumes of the country. On the other hand, it gives the visitor the message that Tepic is proud of its indigenous population; that they care about their culture and traditions. The elegant, clean and delicately embroidered suits of the Huichol convey a message of richness of tradition, knowledge and culture.

Zitakua, as a tourist site, becomes the epitome of the indigenous by being the place in which the Huichol can be Huichol, and can *be seen* being Huichol, as a sort of a living ethnographic museum. Also here, the government has a say to how they should dress, how the neighborhood should be kept and how they should behave (at least) when the Tepibús arrives with tourists. If we return to the case of the businessmen that visited Zitakua in a private Tepibús visit, the local Huichol government, in tune with the authorities of the city, wanted to avoid to present the neighborhood in a negative light, by “shoving away” the “drunken” pilgrims that were celebrating in the ceremonial center, even though it involved disrespecting the religious authorities of the neighborhood. The government had made clear before that drunkenness does not go together with culture and tradition, and had repeatedly prompted Zitakuans to stop drinking alcohol during religious ceremonies. As told by a Zitakuan to a journalist:

The city mayor and the governor of Nayarit tell us that we should not drink alcohol in the ceremonial center because our culture will go away, and they send us papers where they order us not to drink. If they do not want to drink, they should not do it, but they cannot stop us because we are free, and here it is a tradition...⁵⁰ (Narváez Robles, 2006, my translation).

The visitors that come to Zitakua are meant to see clean indigenous people wearing their traditional suits and making handicraft, not *mestizo*-clad Huichol, intoxicated by alcohol and devoid of tradition and culture.

To answer to the question in the beginning of this section, it is clear that the interests of the government do not collide with the Huichol interests when it comes to the use of Huichol clothing while selling. However, the main difference relies on the definition of the visual image of the Huichol, expressed by the government’s preference towards a particular costume and their requests on how the neighborhood should look like. The Huichol artisans consider that they look Huichol regardless of wearing everyday clothes or the traditional costume while selling. They achieve the task of expressing Huicholness through both sets of clothes. The government, however, has a preference

⁵⁰ “El presidente municipal y el gobierno del estado nos dicen que no se deben tomar bebidas alcohólicas en el centro ceremonial que porque la cultura se nos va a quitar, y nos mandan papelitos donde se ordena que no tomemos. Si no quieren venir a tomar ellos, que no vengan, pero no lo puede impedir porque nosotros somos libres y aquí es una costumbre...” (Narváez Robles, 2006).

over the traditional costume and, as seen, encourages the artisans to use it over the everyday clothes.

The Huichol and the Nayarita *Mestizo* Imaginary

What is the role of the Huichol in the construction of the Nayarita *mestizo* imaginary? Since the government of Celso H. Delgado back in the late 1980's, the Huichol has been considered an important part of the Nayarita *mestizo* identity, defined as the roots of the state and of the people of Nayarit (Pacheco Ladrón de Guevara, 1999), and as the "brothers of the Nayaritas" (Dirección de Turismo Municipal de Tepic, 2007). However, the region's plurality of indigenous groups seems to be of little relevance. As mentioned previously, the Cora, Mexicanero and Tepehuán are absent from the *Plaza de las Artesanías* of the city center. They are not included in the tourist brochures issued by the Tourist Bureau. They are mentioned in passing in the speech of the tourist guide of the Tepibús, and only in relation to the contents of the local ethnographic museum. There is a clear predominance of Huichol elements in the portrayal of the indigenous around the city, especially in public spaces controlled by the government, like museums, public plazas, handicraft markets and tourist sites. However, this representations are expressed on the premises of the government, who dictates how the Huichol artisans are to look like, and even behave, in such spaces, as shown in the previous section.

It is precisely the selectiveness of the elements that portray indigeneity (the lack of some groups, the staging of the other) around the city that leads me to suggest that the representation of the indigenous in Tepic is better understood if seen in the light of the politics of *indigenismo*. In the particular case of Tepic, the public representation of the Huichol in the city center, tourist sites and museums, together with the use of Huichol aesthetics in government-related merchandise and propaganda, for example, serves the greater purpose of giving substance and embellishing the imaginary of the Nayarita *mestizo*. As explained by Wherry:

Some governments are not disposed towards certain types of cultural commodities. The market for cultural goods must contend with the state's sense of what types of goods represent the national character. [...] The state's self-perception leads it to view some cultural endowments with pride and others with shame. [...] By choosing to promote one sector or to suppress another, the state

can align its interests and its reputation with the image of modernity instead of the stigmatized image of an indigenous, 'backward' Other (Wherry, 2006: 126).

I do not think it is a coincidence that the Huichol is what predominantly portrays the indigenous in Tepic. Compared to the other indigenous groups in the area, they are much more "visually attractive" and much more known nationally and internationally, for their handicraft, use of hallucinogenic cacti in rituals and complex mythology. They have internationally renowned artists. They are, in sum, better representatives of the roots of the city. But as representatives of these roots, they are not to be associated with the prejudices often attached to indigeneity. Through a controlled image of the indigenous in public spaces such as Zitakua and Zócalo, the government promotes the positive elements of the indigenous in Tepic. This not only gives substance to the imaginary of the Nayarita. It also conveys a message of being a city of richness of culture and tradition, as well as of being a government that respects, tolerates and embraces its indigenous population, to the extent of allowing the creation of a Huichol community within the city.

It is interesting how the Huichol, and their traditional costume, in a way, become a metonymic symbol of indigeneity not only in public spaces, but also in the Nayarita imaginary as a whole. The next chapter will explore how this metonymic character of the costume (and the Huichol) has been internalized and expressed during a religious Catholic ritual that celebrates the Virgin of Guadalupe, the quintessential symbol of *mestizaje* in Mexico.

4. *Las Lupitas y los Juanes*: The Huichol and the religious expression of the Nayarita imaginary

The previous chapter explored how the government of Tepic relies on the Huichol traditional costume, among other elements, to display a particular image of the indigenous within the city that, reminiscent of the politics of *indigenismo*, stages an idea of the indigenous that better represents the Nayarita *mestizo* regional character of the city and the state. The visual expression of this imaginary takes place in those public spaces destined to tourism, such as museums and public plazas. I have argued that the sellers on Zitakua and the Zócalo of Tepic are visual representations of the indigenous substance of the imaginary of the *mestizo* Nayarita. My argument relies on the fact that the government's representations of the indigenous in Tepic's museums, public plazas and sites of interest are incongruent with the multicultural reality of the state. The government portrays an image of the indigenous that promotes certain elements of one indigenous group (such as the costume, the handicraft and the mythology of the Huichol) and ignores the others (as shown by the lack of non-Huichol costumes among the sellers in the Zócalo, and the requests to keep the selling area of Zitakua in a certain way). This staged image of indigeneity attempts to break with the prejudices related to the indigenous, and conveys a feeling of being rooted in a rich, skilled and complex tradition that the Nayaritas can be proud of, and incorporate to, their regional heritage.

From this, the question that follows is: How do the non-indigenous population of Tepic (which I refer to as the *mestizos*) relate to the government's construction of the imaginary of the Nayarita? More specifically, what do the Huichol mean to the *mestizos*? Do they think of them in the same terms as the local government represents them? The aim of this chapter is to explore how the non-indigenous population of Tepic relates to, internalizes and expresses the Huichol, both in their everyday and ritual life. I believe that these questions are relevant as, in order to get a broader understanding of the *mestizo* Nayarita imaginary of identity, we are not to look only at how the state constructs an image of the Nayarita, but to explore how the population relates to, appropriates and expresses this imaginary, both in their everyday and ritual lives (i.e. not focus on what is

being said, but to also see what is being done). “The challenge of understanding national identity from the perspective of the social sciences and humanities is not only to survey museum collections or debate cultural policies but to look critically at the way in which citizens relate to, defend and feel their patrimony, rituals or commemorations” (Gutiérrez, 2001:7).

To answer these questions, this chapter focuses, on the one side, on the everyday discourses of the *mestizos* on the Huichol. These discourses show ambivalence as they, on the one hand, express prejudice and fear, and on the other, respect. On the other side, I explore the Catholic celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Tepic, as it has the particularity of being an occasion in which the *mestizos* dress up as Huichol to represent and honor their indigenous roots.

I suggest that the use of the Huichol traditional costume during the Catholic ritual by the *mestizos*, can be understood as a local expression of the indigenous as a whole, in tune with the representation of the indigenous in the regional *mestizo* imaginary of the Nayarita. I believe that it is not coincidental that the use of this particular indigenous costume happens during the ritual that commemorates the strongest symbol of *mestizaje* of the Mexican culture, namely the Virgin of Guadalupe.

I left out the Virgin of Guadalupe in the previous chapter on purpose. Though her image has been used by the State to strengthen the portrayal of the Mexican mestizo on several occasions⁵¹, *indigenismo* politics and the nation-state program did not rely on her image to build and complement their construction of the imaginary of the *mestizo*, I believe, as a result of the clear separation of the church and the State in Mexico after the Reforma Laws (*Leyes de Reforma*) of 1859 were passed. Nevertheless, she is a very important, if not the most important, icon of *mestizaje* in Mexico.

The indigenous seen through the eyes of the *mestizos*

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the main reason why the Huichol settled in Tepic do not use their indigenous clothes on an everyday basis is because the clothes identify them visually as indigenous and expose them to a set of preconceptions and prejudices from

⁵¹ By, for example, Miguel Hidalgo during the War of Independence of 1810, or more recently, by then right-wing candidate for president Vicente Fox in 2001, during his last rally before the elections.

the non-indigenous population in the city. Chapter 3 showed how the city government has attempted to break these prejudices (i.e. by requesting clean clothes among the handicraft sellers, by suggesting the control of the use of alcohol in celebrations in Zitakua, etc.) to stage an alternative image of the indigenous, one that does not “confirm” the prejudices. What is the content of these prejudices and preconceptions in the concrete context of Tepic? The sections that follow show examples of the discourses about the Huichol, gathered through formal and informal conversations with *mestizos*. By focusing on the way *mestizos* talk about the Huichol, I wish to give the reader an insight on how the Huichol are defined and perceived by the *mestizos*, for the reader to better understand why the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe becomes particular and interesting.

Coritas and Huicholitos

A common way to refer to indigenous people in Tepic is the use of the words *coritas* and *huicholitos*, which literally mean “little Coras and “little Huichol”. The words, used by *mestizos* in colloquial speech, are used indistinctively and embrace all indigenous people in Tepic, regardless of their ethnic origin. It is very common that a *mestizo* person refers to the Huichol from Zitakua as *coritas*. Others, more aware of the difference among the indigenous groups of the area, refer to them as *huicholitos*. According to *mestizos*, it is a kind way of calling indigenous people (*llamar de cariño*)⁵².

The words “cora” and “huichol” without diminutive are also used with negative meaning. The phrases “*No seas Cora*” and “*No seas Huichol*” (“Do not be Cora”, “Do not be Huichol”) are used, in general, towards a person that does not follow social conventions and who is impolite. For example, a mother might use the phrase when her child is too shy and does not want to greet other people, or when the child is addressed and does not want to answer⁵³.

⁵² It is common practice in Mexican Spanish to use diminutive to “soften down” the meaning of a word, turning a word with negative meaning into a word positive meaning. For example, words like *gorda* (fat), *chaparra* (short) or *flaca* (skinny), all are adjectives with negative connotations used to describe a person. The diminutives *gordita*, *chaparrita* or *flaquita*, on the other hand, are all “sweet words” that can be used to refer to someone without them being considered negative. A parent or a grandparent would easily use this words to call their children or grandchildren without them being offended.

⁵³ It must be said that I heard this phrases being used also by some Huichol in Zitakua, though they would prefer to use “*No seas cora*”. See introduction.

The use of diminutive has then, two connotations. On the one hand, it tones down the negative connotations of the words. On the other hand, it puts indigenous people in the same category as children, and the indigenous become the “young” that need to be guided and taken care of. Both terms are not well received among the Huichol, who dislike very much to be called Cora, as they think of the Cora as a less developed group than themselves, and they definitely do not like the use of diminutive, as “they are not children”⁵⁴.

The Huichol and the supernatural

A very common discourse on the Huichol among the *mestizos* in Tepic has to do with the Huichol being perceived as people in touch with the supernatural. It is a popular belief that the Huichol can do witchcraft, both good and evil. While working in Zitakua, I often met *mestizos* asking for the shaman, looking for remedies that ranged from *peyote* pomade against rheumatism, to alternative treatments to conditions where allopathic medicine had not been successful, such as cancer or infertility. One of the shamans even started his own traditional medicine consultancy, open both to Zitakuans and *mestizos*, where he would perform *limpias* (spiritual “cleansings”) and give advice on natural medicine.

Most of the time, though, the discourses about the Huichol and the supernatural are negative and defined as witchcraft. For example, I recall chatting with an optometrist: When I explained that I was an anthropologist and that I worked as a teacher in Zitakua he got scared, and quickly advised me to stay away from those people, as they did evil witchcraft: “Isn’t that a *corita* neighborhood? You should be very careful. Those do evil witchcraft. Aren’t you scared?”⁵⁵ He had never been up there himself, “I know better than that”⁵⁶.

On another occasion, I witnessed how the *mestizo* belief in Huichol sorcery was used to the advantage of Zitakuans, to solve a problem with some *mestizo* bus drivers. Some weeks after Easter, there was friction among the public bus drivers and the artisans

⁵⁴ *No somos niños.*

⁵⁵ *Pero qué no es esa una colonia de coritas? Debe de andar con cuidado, esos hacen brujería de la mala. No le da miedo?*

⁵⁶ *Ni loco* (literal: “Not even if I was crazy”)

at the Mirador. Zitakua is the final stop for one of the public bus lines in Tepic and the bus drivers always parked in the Mirador to take a pause to clean the inside of the busses before starting the circuit again. Bus drivers are not allowed to get down from their busses (drivers must remain in the bus at all times, according to one of the drivers), so, when the drivers cleaned the busses, they would drop all the trash out of the windows and doors and into the Mirador. Since they were not even allowed to get down to go to the toilet, some urinated inside soda bottles and just threw them out of the window. The artisans got very upset, as the city authorities request them to keep the Mirador very clean for the tourists, and were disgusted at having to pick bottles with urine from the grounds.

After some failed attempts to talk with the drivers and to report them to the city authorities, the *mestizo* teacher of the school in Zitakua, aware of the popular belief of the Huichol as sorcerers, spoke to one of the drivers and told him that if they kept urinating and throwing out the bottles, the Huichol women were going to take the bottles and do witchcraft to them, so that their penises would dry and fall off⁵⁷. The bus driver immediately gave the names of the drivers that were responsible for these actions and took it very seriously. There were no more problems with the bus drivers in the months that followed.

The Huichol as cunning, wrongdoers

Another common discourse on the Huichol is that of the cunning wrongdoer, a person that will try to take advantage of a situation for his benefit. For example, after a month in Tepic I realized that taxi drivers avoided as much as possible driving to Zitakua. Once a passenger got into the taxi and named the destination, the driver would increase the price ridiculously (even though fares were fixed and it was illegal to increase the price) to discourage the passenger. Some simply said that they would not drive a person to Zitakua and asked you to get down and ride another taxi.

Once I took a taxi and asked the driver why it was that they do not drive to Zitakua. He told me that some do not do it because it is far away. Others do not like it because it is unsafe. In his case, he said that on his second day at work he drove a man up

⁵⁷ “Si siguen tirando los botes con orines las mujeres los van a agarrar y les van a hacer brujería y se les va a secar y caer el pene”.

to the neighborhood. When they arrived, the man said: “Well, guess what, I am not going to pay you because I have no money”. The taxi driver thought it was a joke. The man then said, “I have a store here, I can invite you something to drink if you want, but I am not going to pay you”⁵⁸. The man got out of the taxi and left. The driver, still thinking that the passenger was joking, waited. He thought the passenger had just left to fetch the money, but the passenger never came back. He has since then avoided the area and refuses to drive people up there, because he does not know if he can trust them. The avoidance of the neighborhood was not directly related to the identification of the passenger as Huichol, but the identification of Zitakuans as Huichol, and a general idea of Zitakua as a dangerous place.

On another occasion, I was speaking to the son of a prosperous man in Nayarit. His family has tobacco fields and it was common that they employed Huichol seasonal workers to help with the crops. But after having a bad experience with a Huichol worker, he refuses to hire more Huichol. He says that in the beginning the Huichol man was hard working and appeared to be honest. He liked him and gave him housing and food. The Huichol man then fetched his family and brought them to live with him. And then he fetched his other family (he had two wives) and began to slack in his job. The boss got annoyed and in the end asked him to leave. The Huichol worker sued the boss and it all ended up in court. “Despite us giving him a place to stay and food, not only to him, but to his family, he sued us”⁵⁹. Since then he does not want anything to do with Huichol workers, as he thinks of them as abusive and problematic.

The Huichol as ignorant and uncivilized

In addition to the two previous discourses, there is another discourse that permeates the *mestizo* opinion on the Huichol, and that it is the one of the Huichol as ignorant. On those rare occasions in which a taxi driver would agree to drive me to Zitakua, it was common for the driver to ask me what was I doing there. Every time I explained that I was a

⁵⁸ *No pues, qué crees? Que no te voy a pagar porque no traigo feria [...] Acá tengo una tienda, te puedo invitar un jugo, un vino, pero no te voy a pagar”.*

⁵⁹ *“A pesar de que le dimos casa, le dimos comida, no solo a él sino a toda su familia, de mala gana nos metió una demanda”.*

teacher. Their replies varied and went from: “what is the point, those do not learn” to “that is a very noble thing to do” or the usual “don’t you get scared?”⁶⁰

Many consider the Huichol as uncivilized. Once I rode the Tepibus to experience the visit to Zitakua from the perspective of the tourist. As we approached the neighborhood, I heard a fellow passenger telling her children: “When we arrive to Zitakua make sure not to touch anything, because it is very dirty. The Huichol do not know how to go to the toilet. They just go and do their thing anywhere. That is why everything is dirty there⁶¹.” On another occasion, I was speaking to my *mestizo* housekeeper about the Huichol and she was adamant in affirming that Huichol women “do not know how to take care of themselves, and this is why they end up having a lot of children”⁶². She was very proud that she, after her fourth child, had decided to get sterilized, because she knew how to take control of it.

There is also prejudice from medical staff, as I witnessed when I accompanied Araceli, my main informant in Zitakua, to the hospital, because her child had injured his finger. The doctors took in the mother and child and began curing the boy. After his finger was fixed, a doctor took Araceli and the boy to another room, to give her care instructions and a prescription for medicines. After a moment, the doctor called me into the room: “Are you a friend? Can you come in? I am going to give you the instructions for your friend as I need to make sure she understands what I say and that she does as I say”⁶³. Even when Araceli speaks perfect Spanish, the doctor repeated the instructions to me. She constantly said that she needed to be sure Araceli understood. Araceli later explained that sometimes, when the doctors learn that they are from Zitakua, they treat them as if they do not understand, as if they do not speak Spanish. I witnessed a similar episode while on the pilgrimage to El Pichón, when the man of the family I was accompanying fell ill on the way to the chapel and the paramedics were called. The paramedic began asking the wife information about the patient, including his name and address. The wife was reticent to give their address. She did not want to tell them that

⁶⁰ “*Y eso para qué? Esos no aprenden nada*”, “*No pues, eso es algo noble, ellos sí de verdad necesitan ayuda*”, “*No le da miedo?*”.

⁶¹ “*Cuando lleguemos a Zitakua no vayan a tocar nada porque está sucio. Los Huicholes no saben ir al baño, nomás hacen ahí por donde sea. Por eso es que está sucio*”.

⁶² “*Las Huicholas no se saben cuidar. Por eso tienen un montón de hijos*”.

⁶³ “*Usted es su amiga? Viene con ella? Puede venir? Es que necesito que ella entienda las instrucciones que le voy a dar*”.

they were from Zitakua. She did not want to let the paramedic know that they were from Zitakua, and thus Huichol, as she considers that sometimes doctors treat them different once they know they are indigenous.

Not directly related to ignorance, but connected to the perception of the Huichol having little contact with the “modern world” and perceived as traditional and unchanging, was the comment of a tourist visiting Zitakua. While seated in the Mirador with the artisans I heard a man asking if one of my students, a young girl who was tending her mother’s stall and was dressed in a modern *mestizo* way (hair and makeup included), was Huichol: “That girl there is not Huichol, is she? She is very pretty⁶⁴”. When one of the artisans asked him to elaborate he said that he did not think that she was Huichol because she looked “too modern”⁶⁵. To be “too modern” is an adjective connected to life in the city and prosperity and broke with *mestizo* notions of the Huichol as not changing from their traditional ways and clothes, and not incorporating modernity into their lives.

At no point during my fieldwork did I come upon someone explicitly saying that the Huichol were the roots of the state, or defining them as “their brothers the Huichol” like the government did in museums, the Tepibús and the tourist brochures. The definitions above show what is an ambivalent discourse that, on the one hand, respects and fears the Huichol for their knowledge of the supernatural, but on the other hand defines them in terms of poverty, ignorance, backwardness, abusiveness and dirtiness. As chapter 2 showed, these discourses have had an effect on the use of Huichol clothing in contexts where the Huichol do not consider necessary or relevant to visually state their cultural origin.

Given these negative connotations, it is therefore noteworthy that *mestizos* wear the Huichol traditional costume during the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Why, if in everyday discourse the Huichol are perceived in a mainly negative way, do the *mestizos* use Huichol clothes when attending the pilgrimage of the Virgin of Guadalupe? Before describing the pilgrimage itself and addressing this question, I consider it relevant

⁶⁴ “*Esa muchachita de ahí, no es Huichola, o sí? Está muy bonita*”

⁶⁵ “*Se ve muy moderna*”

to give a general background on the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego and their importance as polysemic symbols, especially their role in *mestizaje*.

The Virgin of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego

The story of the Virgin of Guadalupe and its significance

The Virgin of Guadalupe was seen for the first time the morning of the 9th of December of 1531 in the Tepeyac Hill (*Cerro del Tepeyac*), 20 km north of Mexico City, by Juan Diego, an indigenous man that had converted to Catholicism. The Virgin gave him the message that she was his mother, the Virgin Mary, and that she wanted them to erect a small temple in her honor right at that place. Juan Diego quickly returned to his village and went to see Archbishop Juan de Zumárraga. The Archbishop was kind but skeptic, and demanded proof of the identity of this woman, whom, according to Juan Diego, had green eyes but dark skin, and was dressed like an Aztec princess.

Before Juan Diego could go back to the site, his uncle fell ill and was dying. He hurried to get a priest and on the way he met the Virgin again. When he told her that nobody believed him and that they demanded evidence of her, the Virgin told him that her uncle had been cured. She also told him to go back to the Tepeyac Hill, where they had met the first time. There he would find fresh roses. He should pick those roses and bring them back to the Archbishop. Juan Diego did as told and found the flowers, even though it was December and not a season for blooming roses. He picked the flowers and gathered them in the front of his *ayate* (cotton shirt), and went to the Archbishop again. When he showed the flowers to the Archbishop, they saw that the image of the Virgin was imprinted in the *ayate* of Juan Diego. This was the proof that her apparitions had been real (Andersson, 2001; Rodriguez, 1994). This happened the 12th of December.

A shrine was built in the Tepeyac Hill in 1609. She was sworn principal patroness of Mexico City in 1737 and received Pontifical recognition in 1754 (Lafaye, 1976:295). Her shrine is now the main pilgrimage center in Latin America. Millions of persons visit the shrine every 12th of December. Juan Diego was canonized the 31st of July 2002 and became Saint Juan Diego. He is venerated the 9th of December, also in the Tepeyac Hill.

Whether or not one believes in the reality of the story, the fact remains that the Virgin of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego are highly venerated by people in every social group, regardless of being indigenous or *mestizo*.

The story of her apparition is significant in several ways. First, it marks the foundation of Mexican Christianity, as the Virgin of Guadalupe distinguished the new Indian Catholicism from the foreign Catholicism of the conquerors. Second, it affirmed the humanness of the indigenous populations, who, up to then, were thought of as not having a soul. Third, it provided a connection between the indigenous and Spanish cultures, as the indigenous thought of her in terms of the Aztec goddess Tonantzin⁶⁶ and their own traditions, and the Spaniards thought in terms of the Old Shrine of Guadalupe in Extremadura. She was an image the different groups could relate to and could make sense of in their own terms (Rodriguez, 1994:46). Most importantly, and as it will be discussed below, the Virgin of Guadalupe provided a symbolic means of forging a new culture and polity out of Indian and Spanish elements and became the basis of (spiritual) *mestizaje*; a protonational symbol of the *mestizo* (Gutiérrez, 1999:37) that brought together disparate groups who otherwise were not in touch with each other (Rodriguez, 1994:46).

The Virgin of Guadalupe as a symbol

The Virgin of Guadalupe is a polysemic symbol that changes and transforms itself into different topical types depending of the context (Andersson, 2001:76). She gives meaning from the individual level of the person to the general level of the nation. The Virgin of Guadalupe is not only seen as unique to Mexico, a singular creation, but as a national symbol she is extremely powerful, supercharged, embodying various meanings (Melhuus, 1996: 236) that go from her religious character as a maker of miracles, to her role in the definition of femininity and womanhood, to her significance as a symbol of *mestizaje* and Mexicanity. In what follows I try to synthesize the main connotations that mestizos ascribe to her image. I also include what she symbolizes to the Huichol, and the representations they attribute to her.

⁶⁶ The Tepeyac Hill previously functioned as a veneration site for the Aztec goddess Tonantzin.

Guadalupe the maker of miracles

The Virgin of Guadalupe as a miracle maker is the widest symbol in popular religion. She is the one who intercedes before God and by her grace makes things happen. This quality is directly connected to pilgrimages, as by doing the pilgrimage one asks for her favor and /or thanks for her help (Andersson, 2001: 77).

The female, the ideal woman, the ideal mother

The Virgin is also a gendered symbol that represents the values of being female. The virgin is a primordial symbol of femininity and maternity (Melhuus, 1992). Women relate to her because she is a woman and a mother, though her representation of the female is ambiguous, as she is both a virgin and a mother. The Virgin overcomes all sexuality and rests on her purity, as she became a mother without being carnal. That makes her the ideal woman, as purity and chastity are highly valued characteristics in a woman in Mexican society, and so is motherhood. A woman, however, cannot become a mother without “employing” her sexuality, as this would be equivalent to denying motherhood, to denying womanhood in itself. Melhuus (1992,1996) explains how this contradiction is resolved through the notion of suffering. A woman who is a mother, suffers. The Virgin, as a mother, also suffered the loss of her child. “It is through the particular suffering evoked by the Virgin that the basis for women’s chastity is generated. It is suffering, explicitly expressed in a form of self-sacrifice, which serves to transcend sexuality and becomes the mark of motherhood. Thus suffering becomes a virtue” (Melhuus, 1992: 165).

Guadalupe the matron of mothers and pregnant women

The notion of Guadalupe as the matron of mothers and pregnant women shares characteristics from her symbolism as a maker of miracles and as a representative of the values of being female. She, as a woman and a mother, understands and has the power to help those in situations that pertain motherhood. She is the one people approach when a woman is unable to conceive. She is also approached when a woman is pregnant to ensure the wellbeing of the mother and child during pregnancy and birth. She is the one a woman gives thanks to for her children and their wellbeing.

Our Mother, The Queen of Mexico

The Virgin of Guadalupe is also a strong political and religious covenant. Her image stands for unity. She is the mother of all Mexicans. She unites the population regardless of age, ethnicity and social status. Through her the nation was born and given a moral mission. “Guadalupe belongs to the very birth of the nation. She gives moral commission to her own Mexican people” (Andersson, 2001:130). Guadalupe provided a symbolic means of forging a new culture and polity out of Indian and Spanish elements and became the basis of (spiritual) *mestizaje*. “The Virgin of Guadalupe is a reproductive dominant symbol of the Mexican state, Catholicism, indigenism or the battle for human dignity” (Andersson, 2001:76).

Tatei Wexika Wimari and Tanana

Among the Huichol, the Virgin of Guadalupe has two mythological representations. The first representation is related to the myth of origin of the Huichol, which explains the kinship of the Huichol divinities and gives mythological basis to the marriage form the Huichol consider as ideal: sororal polygyny. Here, Guadalupe is Tatei Wexika Wimari (Our Mother Eagle), the sister of Tatei Kewimuka (-Our- Mother of the Deer). The two sisters are married to Tawewiekame (Our Father the Sun). The union of Tawewiekame and Tatei Wexika Wimari gave birth to the Huichol communities and their patron saints, while his union with Tatei Kewimuka gave origin to the Huichol (people) (Gutiérrez del Ángel, 2002:69-70).

Her second representation is as Tanana (literally, Our Mother). As Tanana, she has the same attributes as Guadalupe has for the *mestizos*: she represents the values of womanhood and motherhood. She is the miracle maker. The 12th of December, she is venerated as Tanana.

Saint Juan Diego as a symbol

The symbolism around Juan Diego is not as complex as the one of the Virgin, though it is just as important. His recognition as a saint, as the only indigenous saint, reaffirmed the place and belonging of the indigenous population within Catholicism; and to a certain

extent, the worth of the indigenous populations in Mexico. While the Virgin of Guadalupe is quintessentially *mestizo*, Juan Diego is quintessentially indigenous.

He is a figure both men and women can identify themselves with, in the sense that there are no gender-specific qualities attached to his symbolism. He is primarily a symbol of the poor, a symbol of the indigenous, a symbol of those in marginal conditions. “Juan Diego represents all the poor who lived before, who were alive at the time and who were to live afterward, and not simply the historical Juan Diego” (Siller-Acuna, 1981:219, cited in Rodriguez, 1994:52). At the same time, he is a symbol of humbleness and tenacity. He exemplifies that it does not matter how bad the situation is as long as you have faith and conviction. He was not discouraged when people did not believe his story about the apparition of the Virgin. He prevailed and remained faithful to her.

The veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Tepic: The pilgrimage to El Pichón

The Virgin of Guadalupe is the most reproduced religious figure in Mexico and can be seen inside most of the houses (indigenous and non-indigenous), stores, restaurants and even public transportation around the country. Tepic is no exception. The majority of households and businesses have altars or images of the Virgin, which are lavishly decorated with flowers, china paper, votive candles, and even Christmas-tree lights, the days before the 12th of December.

The main event to mark the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Tepic is the pilgrimage to El Pichón, a little *mestizo* town about two and a half hours walk from the city (5 km to the west). El Pichón has a chapel devoted to the Virgin of Guadalupe. It was constructed between 1940 and 1943, and its construction was in the charge of Father Francisco Escobar (n.n., 2009). It is said that the Virgin appeared in El Pichón, right where the chapel was built. This is the reason why the chapel is the main pilgrimage site for veneration of the Virgin in Nayarit. It is estimated that around 100,000 persons visit the chapel every year (n.n., 2008). It is commonly considered that “all Tepic” goes to El Pichón, regardless of social condition and ethnicity. In the words of a Huichol informant:

“All Tepic goes to El Pichón. It does not matter if you are *mestizo*, rich, poor, Huichol, indigenous. All the same go to El Pichón⁶⁷.

The cathedral of Tepic organizes a main pilgrimage the night of the 11th of December. People gather outside the cathedral and walk all the way to El Pichón. Many people try to be part of the main pilgrimage, as it arrives to El Pichón just before 12 a.m., in time to “sing the *Mañanitas*” to the Virgin (to sing the Mexican birthday song). Others go when they have the chance, even if it is before or after the 12th of December. Pilgrims begin to visit El Pichón as early as the 9th of December.

While the Catholic Church authorities of Tepic are the ones in charge of the main celebrations, the local authorities take part in the organization and the security measures for the population. The city government offers subsidized bus transportation to and from the city center to El Pichón for those who do not walk. In addition, the authorities close one of the lanes of Insurgentes Avenue (one of the main avenues of Tepic, which crosses the city from southeast to northwest and leads towards el Pichón), so pilgrims can walk freely, without risking being run down by a car. A group of volunteers, organized by the Church, assist the pilgrims, together with groups of policemen and paramedics.

Though the ideal is to do the whole pilgrimage walking, from right outside “ones house”, people can take a bus that brings them as close as possible to the Cathedral to join the main pilgrimage. Alternatively, they take public transportation to the city limits and walk from there. In either case, once the pilgrims reach the city limits, the volunteers lead them towards a pedestrian dirt road. This road runs parallel to the highway that goes to Mazatlán and ends in El Pichón. The dirt road crosses a couple of residential areas, but it mostly goes by agricultural fields.

The walk from the Cathedral to the city limits takes one hour. From there to El Pichón is around one and a half extra hours. El Pichón is located at the bottom of a ravine. It is a small chapel in a little town. The nine Stations of the Cross mark the arrival to the chapel, and begin right where the pedestrian road starts to descend, the last station being the chapel itself.

⁶⁷ *Todo Tepic va al Pichón. No le hace que sean mestizos, ricos, pobres, Huicholes, indígenas. Todos por igual van al Pichón.*



Figure 23. El Pichón Chapel



Figure 24. Female pilgrims fulfilling a manda.

People attend the pilgrimage not only to celebrate the anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin but also to ask for favors (*pedir favores*), to fulfill vows (*pagar mandas*) and to give thanks (*dar gracias*). The two first are directly related, as one gets a favor by fulfilling a vow, or one fulfills a vow because one gets a favor (it is a cause and effect relation that can go both ways). The act of “giving thanks” might or might not be a result of the first two, as one might thank because a request was fulfilled, but one might thank without previously having made a concrete/direct request. As explained by Huichol informant when I asked her why people go to El Pichón:

My *comadre*⁶⁸ Lupe could not get pregnant. She and her husband had tried for five years and nothing. They went to doctors, even to the mara'akame, but nothing. Then we told her to go the Virgin in El Pichón, because she is miraculous. So she and her husband did the pilgrimage and she got pregnant right away. This is why they now have to fulfill their vow (*traen manda*), because they have to go back to El Pichón every year to pay for the favor, to thank for the child. That is why I have a lot of faith in that Virgin in El Pichón, because she really helps.⁶⁹

The Virgin of Guadalupe is the matron of mothers and pregnant women. She is the one people pray to when a woman wants to get pregnant or is pregnant. She is the one a woman give thanks for her children and their wellbeing. She, as a woman and a mother, understands and has the power to help those in situations she is familiar with (situations that pertain motherhood). “Our Lady of Guadalupe expresses [...] woman’s values of being female, a mother, brown-skinned, mestiza. Her image compensates when a woman feels herself lacking and petitions her for strength, endurance, patience or compassion” (Rodriguez, 1994:48). She can also intercede and help in matters that do not necessarily have to do with motherhood. She is also approached in matters of health, healing, economic problems, exam results, etc.

⁶⁸ The godmother of her child.

⁶⁹ *Mi comadre Lupe no podía encargar bebé. Ella y su esposo ya habían intentado por cinco años y nada. Fueron con doctores, con el mara'akame y nada. Entonces le dijimos que fuera al Pichón, que esa virgen era milagrosa. Y ella y mi compadre peregrinaron y rápido encargaron bebé. Por eso decimos que ellos traen manda, porque tienen que agradecer por su hijo cada año. Yo por eso sí le tengo fé a esa virgen de El Pichón, porque sí cumple.*

An important element of the pilgrimage is the way people dress, the clothing they wear. It is common, especially among children, to dress up. For example, one could see children dressed up as figures from the story of the birth of Jesus, such as shepherds, angels and Virgin Maries. The most common costume, though, was the Huichol traditional costume. Girls wore embroidered skirts and blouses. Boys wore embroidered shirts and trousers. Some adults also wear costumes, especially women with *mandas*. Among adult women, I saw that many wore white manta suits with bias tape on the ends and headscarves, very similar to the Huichol everyday dress. Others would use Huichol embroidered costumes or variations of it. One of the most impressive costumes I saw was a woman wearing a manta shirt and dress decorated with bias tape, complemented by a headscarf and an embroidered cape depicting the Virgin, decorated with three-dimensional paper flowers (see figure below). Most of them would go barefoot, and would be accompanied by a female companion that tended for them.

The pilgrims carry with them objects to be given as a present to the Virgin, or to be blessed and taken back home. Among the presents to the Virgin are flower arrangements and candles. The children carry some small wooden boxes called *cavas* or *huacales*. These are given both when asking for or thanking for a favor directly related to the child that carries it. According to an informant, these boxes “contain the *manda*” and are left in El Pichón. Inside the boxes of the girls are miniature kitchen tools, while they boys carry miniature canes (Narváez Ramírez, 2007).

When pilgrims arrive at El Pichón, they head directly to the chapel. The first thing one sees is the main altar, which has an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe and is lavishly decorated with thousands of flowers and *papel picado* (china paper) in green, red and white, the colors of the Mexican flag. All the benches have been removed to make more space for the pilgrims. There are religious services all day long. After the end of each service, people would move forward towards the altar to get their children and their religious objects (crosses, images, rosaries) blessed with holy water by the Priest. Others would just pray to the Virgin and leave their offerings. Due to the amount of people that visit the chapel, there is no direct access to the altar. Instead, the objects one wishes to leave (like flowers or *cavas*) would be left on a table and female volunteers would place them closer to the altar. Candles are forbidden inside the church, to avoid the risk of fire,

but they could be burned up right outside the church, by the feet of another image of the Virgin of Guadalupe (see figures below).

Most pilgrims then take a bus that takes them back to Tepic. Very few pilgrims return to the city by foot.



Figure 25. Altar in El Pichón, decorated with the colors of the Mexican flag



Figure 26. Outdoor image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, also decorated with the colors of the Mexican flag, El Pichón

Lupitas and Juanes

The pilgrimage to El Pichón is, in many ways, very similar to any other celebrations of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico. What makes it particular, I believe, is the use of the Huichol costume by the *mestizos*. Given the ambivalent discourse on the Huichol among the latter, what is the significance of the *mestizos* wearing the Huichol costume during this celebration? Why do adult women, especially those asking/paying for a favor, wear Huichol-like clothes to the pilgrimage? What is the place of the Huichol costume worn by children among the angels, Virgin Maries and little shepherds?

Let us look closer at the costumes worn during the pilgrimage. The range of costumes among the children, as mentioned before, was wider than those worn by women. I did not see men wearing costumes.

Among the children, I identified costumes that depicted characters from the story of the birth of Jesus, reminiscent of those used in *Pastorelas*, which are theatrical representations of the birth of Jesus, done in all Mexican schools during December, where children participate dressed up as the different characters (Joseph, Mary, Archangel Gabriel, the Three Wise Men, shepherds, animals, Satan, etc.). It should be noted that the shepherds in Mexican *Pastorelas* are always indigenous (identifiable by the grammatical mistakes and intonation in their speech, their *manta* costumes, and the big straw hats on the boys and head scarves on the girls). These shepherds have not attributed ethnicity other than being indigenous. While very few children wore Virgin Mary and Archangel Gabriel costumes, many others wore shepherd costumes. The most extended costume among children was the Huichol traditional costume, though. Girls wore embroidered shirts, skirts and headscarves. Boys wore embroidered shirts and trousers. A few girls wore shirts and trousers (“male” Huichol costumes).

Among adult women, the costumes ranged from Huichol embroidered costumes to Huichol-like *manta* skirts and blouses, which looked like simpler versions of the traditional costume (without the embroideries). Unlike the embroidered Huichol costume, the simpler version of it is not available in stores/stalls. I was explained that these costumes are made by the pilgrims themselves and are part of the *manda*.

According to journalist José María Narváez Ramírez, this tradition of wearing a costume during the pilgrimage, especially dressing up the children, is to imitate the ways

in which indigenous people dress (Narváez Ramírez, 2007). The children dressed up as indigenous are referred to as “Lupitas” and “Juanes”, and represent the Virgin and Juan Diego, by dressing up like “indigenous peasants”. What the costumes above have in common (with the exception of the few Virgin Mary and Archangel Gabriel costumes) are that they represent indigeneity; that they are identified as indigenous by the wearers and the observers. It is their quality of indigenous that relates them to the figures of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego. The costumes serve the double purpose of representing and honoring these two characters.

In addition, I would like to add a third purpose behind wearing an indigenous costume during the pilgrimage. I suggest that the participants acquire (or aim to acquire) the characteristics that identify each of these figures. The girls, the Lupitas, embody a women’s value of being female, like the Virgin. The *cavas* they carry containing small kitchen utensils, objects of the grown up woman, representing them as potential women, potential mothers. By leaving the *cavas* in the altar of the Virgin, parents pray for her girl to become a good woman, a good mother. The case of boys, the Juanes, is slightly different from the case of girls. Their *cavas* do not contain miniature objects to represent manhood. They contain a miniature cane, an object symbolic of the strength of belief of Juan Diego. Boys wearing the costume of an indigenous peasant embody the humbleness, modesty and honesty of the Saint.

Adult women, particularly those fulfilling a *manda*, embody, in addition to the qualities of a good woman and mother, the suffering of the Virgin. As mentioned previously, the image of the Virgin plays an important role on the definition of gender roles in Mexican *mestizo* society, Melhuus states that there is intrinsic link between womanhood, motherhood and suffering (Melhuus, 1992: 165). One of the characteristics of the Virgin is that, she, as the mother of Jesus, suffered because she witnessed the death of her son. In a similar way, the female adult pilgrims in Tepic fulfill a *manda* through suffering and self-sacrifice, by walking barefoot all the way to El Pichón. Suffering becomes the vehicle through which a woman emulates the suffering of the Virgin and through which a woman hopes to receive her favor.



Figure 27. *Mestizo* mother and daughter wearing the Huichol traditional costume



Figure 28. "Lupita". *Mestizo* girl wearing the Huichol traditional costume

The “Huicholization” of Lupita and Juan

I have said that I was struck by the fact that the *mestizos* have chosen the Huichol costume when they venerate the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego. These two figures are national symbols with pretty standardized visual representations in church paintings, posters, stamps, movies, etc. Despite Juan Diego historically belonging to a different indigenous group (Aztec/Náhuatl), it is through the Huichol that the people from Nayarit choose to depict him. Regardless of Juan Diego’s description of the Virgin as a dark-skinned woman wearing the clothes of an Aztec princess, the Nayaritas wear the Huichol costume to represent her. The Lupitas and Juanes of the pilgrimage to El Pichón could, as well wear the same style of clothes depicted in many of the mentioned representations, but in Tepic they have been “Huicholized” and are represented, in its majority, but not exclusively, through the Huichol traditional costume. Even the costumes made and worn by adult women were reminiscent in many ways of the everyday Huichol costume, especially in their use of bias tape (the places where the bias tape is placed to decorate the costume).

Two points to be distinguished then are: 1. The *mestizos* choose to make an indigenous mark in their veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego, and 2. They choose the Huichol costume to do so. Why is it that the *mestizo* representation of the indigenous is done through the use of the Huichol costume or elements from it? How is it that something belonging to a group embedded with negative connotations in everyday discourse is taken to represent, honor and, embody these two figures?

I suggest that the Huichol traditional costume is chosen not by its qualities as Huichol, but by its qualities as indigenous. Just as the Huichol has become the representative of the indigenous in the discourse of the Nayarita *mestizo* imaginary of the government, the Huichol, through their traditional costume, once again stands for the indigenous as a whole. The purpose behind wearing the Huichol costume during the pilgrimage is to dress indigenous; to portray the indigenous qualities of Juan Diego and the Virgin of Guadalupe. The negativity derived from the everyday discourses does not influence the choice of costume because the costume is not representing Huicholness, but indigeneity. Regardless of the negative connotations, the Huichol and their costume are

what stands for the category of the indigenous in the Nayarita imaginary and a such, are used to depict it during the pilgrimage.

I believe that the Huichol costume, in the specific case of this ritual, goes through a process of appropriation where it not only stands for the indigenous, but where it gives the pilgrims a new identity as Lupita or Juan. I use the term appropriation in the way defined by Arnd Schneider:

Appropriation in its formal sense means a taking out of one context and putting into another, yet the extended meaning I have been advocating sees it as a hermeneutic procedure that, consequently, implies not only that cultural elements are invested with new signification but also that those who appropriate it are transformed, and ultimately construct and assume new identities (Schneider, 2006: 29).

The Huichol costume, as a cultural element, stands for the indigenous as a whole in the imaginary of the Nayarita. The *mestizos* appropriate the costume during the ritual to imitate the ways indigenous people dress. The costume thus stops being Huichol and becomes indigenous. In addition, the costume is given a new signification. Through the use of the costume, they become Lupita and Juan, embodying the characteristics of the Virgin and Juan Diego and thus acquiring, in a way, a new identity during the ritual.

Expressing mestizaje

We must not forget that the Virgin of Guadalupe, despite her qualities of indigenous, is a symbol of *mestizaje* and the Mexican par excellence. This was clearly portrayed in the El Pichón chapel by the decorations surrounding the image of the Virgin, which used the colors of the Mexican flag: green, white and red. In Tepic, she unites indigenous and non-indigenous groups alike in a way that no other occasion does. The Huichol costume is again present in an arena that symbolizes *mestizaje*, not as a representative of the Huichol, but as a representative of the indigenous, and represented not by the indigenous people themselves, but by those who do not consider themselves indigenous: the *mestizos*.

The Huichol costume has become the visual equivalent of the indigenous in the Nayarita imaginary. In this case, the Huichol does not stand for the Nayarita per se, but as a representative of the indigenous in the Nayarita mind. It is not possible to say that this

is a direct result of the portrayal of the indigenous of the government, but I believe that ritual expresses, in a way, an internalization and expression of the imaginary of the Nayarita. The *mestizos*, during the ritual, communicate what they see around the city, what they perceive as indigenous, and what they see is the Huichol. Whether the Huichol is experienced as positive or negative in everyday life is of no relevance to the ritual, as the main purpose is not to “be” Huichol, but to represent the indigenous and ultimately honor the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego.

5. Conclusions

In this thesis, I have used the Huichol costume and its use as a gateway to explore two different imaginaries of identity in a small *mestizo* city in west Mexico. The focus on the Huichol traditional costume took us from the local context of the indigenous community to the wider *mestizo* context of the city and the state. It showed how an item of dress can be used to explore the construction of the imaginaries of identity of two groups in different contexts; how the Huichol traditional costume, considered the quintessential symbol of Huichol indigeneity could also be use to express the political and religious imaginary of the *mestizo* of Nayarit. Within the anthropology of dress there appears to be a tendency of exploring items of dress in relation to one group in particular; for example, the study of indigenous dress in the premises of the indigenous. This thesis suggests that items of dress can have different levels of signification, among different groups of users, and even be part of the identity of opposite groups.

Chapter 2 explored the meaning behind the use of Huichol clothing, for the Huichol in Zitakua, in the context of the indigenous and the context of the non-indigenous. The indigenous costume is an important, if not the most important visual marker of indigeneity. But also within the Huichol, the traditional costume has different usages that serve different purposes surrounding its quality as an identity marker. Huichol clothing clearly states Huicholness whether in the local context of the community, or the context of the city, whether with the purpose of honoring and recognizing the ethnic belonging or of increasing the value of an object for sale.

Within the community, Huichol clothing expresses group cohesion by creating uniformity: it states clearly who belongs and who does not. To stand out becomes undesirable as it states difference and/or a wish to not belong. During religious ceremonies, it gives collective identity to Huichol men and women, regardless of their place of residence. It conveys a feeling of solidarity and creates a sense of communality

among the Huichol, whether they come from the same community or from different communities of origin⁷⁰.

Outside of the community (in non-indigenous contexts), Huichol clothing has the opposite effect. To wear Huichol clothing is a statement about being different. I have suggested that the use of the costume outside of the community is a lot more rationalized, as the individuals are aware that clothing marks them as different and choose to wear them, and not to wear them, depending on the context. A Huichol man or woman will use the Huichol costume when he or she consciously and actively wants to state his or hers identity as indigenous. He or she will not wear the dress when he wants to blend in. By using *mestizo* clothing, they do not make evident their indigenoussness and can, to a certain extent, avoid the prejudices attached to their identity as indigenous. The meaning attached to the clothing leads to a strategic use, or non-use, of it, depending of the context the wearer finds him/herself into. The wearer will wear Huichol clothing when Huicholness and indigenoussness is expected and desired, and will avoid it in those contexts in which wearing it is not relevant or might even be considered negative.

In the particular case of handicraft selling, the use of the costume proves a good strategy in those arenas where the buyer is not only interested in acquiring a product, but on knowing more about the culture behind it. The costume becomes a visual signifier of this culture; the wearer becomes a repository of the mythology surrounding it. The persona of the artisan contextualizes the object for sale and gives it a greater value, which objects sold through third parties, such as tourist stores, do not possess/transmit.

Chapter 3 shifted the focus from the level of the community to the level of the city. It made patent that the Huichol indigeneity in Tepic did not limit itself to the boundaries of Zitakua, and had a significant presence in the wider context of the city. Through the focus on the use of the Huichol costume in places destined to tourism, I

⁷⁰ There is one important aspect, regarding the use of Huichol clothing, that I have not mentioned and that requires further investigation: the use of the Huichol costume by *mestizos* and foreigners during Huichol celebrations. In 2002, I witnessed that many of the visitors wore items of Huichol clothing during the celebration of the Holy Week in San Andrés Cohamiata. That same year, I attended a Tatei Neixa celebration in Aguamilpa, Nayarit, where a big group of American men, women and children participated wearing full traditional costumes. The locals joked that the Americans were “more Huichol than the Huichol”, as very few locals were wearing traditional costumes (but wore, for example, everyday clothes). This, however, did not happen in any of the celebrations I attended in Zitakua and is the main reason why I did not include this data on the thesis.

explored the government's representation of indigeneity within the city and their role in the construction of the concept of the Nayarita *mestizo* (identity). I attempted to make evident that the government of Tepic relies on the Huichol traditional costume, among other elements, to display a particular image of the indigenous within the city that, reminiscent of the politics of *indigenismo*, stages an idea of the indigenous that better represents the Nayarita *mestizo* regional character of the city and the state. The visual expression of this imaginary takes place in those public spaces destined to tourism, such as museums and public plazas, where the Huichol-clad handicraft sellers are visual representations of the indigenous substance of the imaginary of the *mestizo* Nayarita. My argument relies on the fact that the government's representations of the indigenous in Tepic's museums, public plazas and sites of interest are incongruent with the multicultural reality of the state, as they portray an image of the indigenous that promotes certain elements of one indigenous group and ignores other elements and other indigenous groups. I defined this as the staging of Huicholness, but it could as well be defined as the staging of indigeneity. This staged image of indigeneity attempts to break with the prejudices related to the indigenous, and conveys a feeling of being rooted in a rich, skilled and complex tradition that the Nayarita people can be proud of, and incorporate to, their regional heritage. At the same time, it has the effect of reducing the indigenous to the Huichol (and to one particular image of the Huichol: that of the artisan wearing a traditional costume), thus turning the Huichol into a metonymic symbol that encompasses indigeneity in the region as a whole.

The use of the Huichol costume by the *mestizos* during the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, discussed in Chapter 4, stands again as an example of the metonymic character of the symbol. The Huichol are surrounded by a set of prejudices and negative connotations that permeate mestizo speech, such as ignorance, backwardness, evilness, cunningness. Nonetheless, the mestizos wear the Huichol costume when honoring the Virgin of Guadalupe. I suggested that the Huichol traditional costume is not chosen by its qualities as Huichol, but by its qualities as indigenous. The purpose behind wearing the Huichol costume during the pilgrimage is to dress as indigenous people; to portray the indigenous qualities of Juan Diego and the Virgin of Guadalupe. The negativity derived from the everyday discourses does not influence the

choice of costume because the costume is not representing Huicholness, but indigeneity more general. That the local representation of indigeneity in Tepic has taken the form of the Huichol suggests a parallel between the government's representation of the indigenous in public spaces destined to tourism, and the mestizos' representation of indigeneity during the ritual. Just as the Huichol has become the representative of the indigenous in the discourse of the Nayarita *mestizo* imaginary of the government, the Huichol, through their traditional costume, stands for the indigenous as a whole during the ritual.

I suggested briefly that an interesting quality of the costume during the ritual was that it not only served the purpose of honoring and representing the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego, but that it allowed the wearer to embody these two figures by acquiring a sort of temporal identity as Lupita and Juan, through a process of appropriation. This should be considered as a hypothesis for further study rather than a conclusion.

I would like to turn now to some reflections that rose from this project, which revolve around the life of indigenous groups in the city, the effect of governmental programs that promote ethnic tourism and the definition of urban indigenous identity.

To be indigenous in the city

These chapters gave a glimpse of the challenges that life in the city poses to those of indigenous origin. The urban Huichol are subject, in a way, to two conflicting interests. On the one hand, stands the interest to maintain Huichol tradition. On the other hand, stands the interest to adapt successfully to the *mestizo* environment of the city, and to leave behind the disadvantages that the recognition as indigenous might bring.

We could see that the Huichol established in the city are subject to a constant critique from the communities of origin, for their involvement with tourism and what they consider “ the commercialization of Huichol culture”. The Huichol of Zitakua are not seen as authentic enough, as Huichol enough, because of their use of *mestizo* clothes in everyday life and the suspicion that they are performing rituals on request from the government. The increasing importance of Zitakua as a tourist site will certainly not change this opinion. It is somehow ironic, however, that some of the traditional

communities, like San Andrés Cohamiata, have also developed strategies to attract tourism, such as the *Eculturismo* project, that include the performance of rituals for public view (see Durin and Aguilar Ros, 2008). Zitakua still carries the stigma of not being Huichol enough.

At the same time, urban Huichol are subject to prejudices from the *mestizo* citizens, who attribute them a set of negative connotations due to their identity as indigenous. To avoid these connotations, urban indigenous Huichol have learnt to live within two different cultural codes, and to shift from one to the other, depending of the occasion. I believe that to be Huichol in the city implies an extra effort, an extra reflection on ones identity, because it not only requests an adaptation to the *mestizo* context, but because it is not easy to identify with the indigenous tradition when the outside context has a negative opinion of indigeneity.

The public expression of indigeneity becomes a complex affair, as one is expected to show indigeneity “in the right way”. As Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn state:

On the one hand, those who dress in feathers, face paint, “native costume” or otherwise publicly embrace their traditions risk self-positioning in the semantic extremes of exotic primitivism [...] On the other hand, those who do not seem to measure up to stereotypical “feathers-and-beads” expectations often find themselves stigmatized as “half-breeds”, “assimilated” or even imposters; wearing suit and the risk of accusations of false indigenosity (de la Cadena & Starn, 2007:9).

I believe that the construction of an image for public effect of the Huichol does not mean that the Huichol are not real, or less Huichol than their rural counterparts. The use of strategies of Huicholness should not be seen as the necessary commercialization and loss of Huichol culture, but as Séverine Durin suggests, as a strategy to survive in a globalized world (Durin, 2008: 306-307). For example, in 2007, a percentage of the economic benefits that came from the Tepibús program allowed the participation of more Zitakuans in the celebration of the Tatei Neixa, by covering a set of expenses on the material necessary to participate⁷¹. With the money from the Tepibús, the governor could, for example, buy and hand out maize to make *tejuino* (a homemade fermented drink) and

⁷¹ The ritual exerts a lot of expenses on the participants, as it involves a set of offerings to the deities in the form of *tejuino* and fruit, the elaboration of an embroidered costume and other paraphernalia for the child/children, the payment of a fee to the mará'akame and inter-exchanges of food (fruit and *tamales*), *tejuino* and liquor with all the other families participating in the ritual. Not all families have the economic possibilities to do this every year.

tamales (a type of bread wrapped in corn leaves), elements that play an important role in the celebration. This meant fewer expenses for many families. In this particular case, the staging of Huicholness, and the economic benefit derived from it, aided the community in the celebration of the ritual.

A couple of months ago I received news that the government of Tepic was considering, in an attempt to draw more tourist attention to the area, to include a Huichol shaman who would perform rituals and cleansings in the *Plaza de las Artesanías*. Both Zitakua and the *Plaza de las Artesanías* give the government the opportunity to promote ethnic tourism, with the possibility to not only attract a new segment of the tourist market, but to promote the city as a place full of tradition, that embraces its indigenous populations.

We should keep in mind that even though the inclusion of the Huichol as a tourist attraction is very recent, and things might change in the future, for now it has an important influence on the neighborhood, which relies more and more on “Huicholness” (as defined by the government) to survive. Not only does their economy depend on the sales of handicraft and food to tourists, but also the attention they receive from the government is in terms of “remaining Huichol”.

The inclusion of Zitakua as a tourist site is already creating conflicts of interest among those involved. The government’s requests on clothing, together with the constant reminders on the importance of Zitakuans to remain indigenous, by doing an effort to “keep their traditions” and doing things “for the culture” (*por la cultura*), obeys an agenda that goes beyond the interests of the Huichol themselves. This is creating conflicts of interest inside the neighborhood. Doing something “*por la cultura*” is becoming synonymous with cooperating with the Tepic government. Anthropologist Lorenzo Bosco, who was also doing research on Zitakua at the time of my fieldwork, witnessed how the Huichol authorities had begun discussing whether those that do not commit should be kicked out of the community, as they are not doing anything to be Huichol. He considers that this revitalized interest on being Huichol in Zitakua has gone hand in hand with the government’s economic participation⁷².

⁷² Personal communication.

At the same time, there is an increasing rivalry and jealousy from the adjacent *mestizo* neighborhoods towards Zitakua, as they consider that Zitakua has received special benefits from the government. While Zitakua is often viewed as a poor neighborhood, the presence of public services is more visible than in the other neighborhoods. Many *mestizos* therefore said that if you are to be poor, it is better to be poor and indigenous, as there are more programs directed to the indigenous than to the non-indigenous poor.

If well the government's intervention has prompted a reevaluation of what defines Huicholness among Zitakuans, it is doing so within a frame that leaves little room for diverse expressions and definitions of belonging, by creating a fixed image of what Huichol should be is and closing the doors to the recognition of different ways of being Huichol in the city.

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