

## August 2008 Newsletter

In June of this year, Juan and Diana Negrín returned to Guadalajara and the Wixárika region to resume their respective investigations and receive first-hand updates on the continuing struggle between the community of Santa Catarina Cuexcomatlán, or Tuapurie, and the government ([see March 2008 newsletter](#)). Although the Amatlán-Bolaños-Huejuquilla el Alto road that passes through Wixárika territory has been formally stopped, the blockade that began on February 10, 2008 at *Awatsaitiia* or Ciénega de los Caballos has remained in force, and the question of reparations of ecological and cultural damages is yet to be resolved. The construction of the illegal road is not the only issue that members of Tuapurie have had to denounce in recent months. The electrification via posts and cables to Nueva Colonia, one of Tuapurie's headquarters, was approved by the community under strict conditions and pending environmental impact studies. But once again, the municipal government of Mezquitic ignored the community's mandate for an environmental impact study and began felling trees and digging ditches for the electric posts in obvious violation of Huichol territorial and political jurisdiction. On July 24<sup>th</sup>, the Communal Assembly of Tuapurie denounced such actions and demanded that this latest infrastructural project be halted. Making matters worse, during the first week of August, the authorities of Tuapurie discovered that agents from Jalisco's State Water Commission (CEA) and the Municipality of Mezquitic visited the headquarters of Pueblo Nuevo and Nueva Colonia to conduct a series of studies whose content has yet to be disclosed. Tuapurie's authorities are demanding to know why they were not previously contacted and consulted by the CEA; communal authorities are asking that the commission's representatives attend the next communal assembly to discuss the CEA's intentions. (For more information on these cases see related articles in the Spanish news section of our website)



Public Notice of the Amatlán-Bolaños-Huejuquilla el Alto Road Closure

The construction of the road, the installation of electric posts and cables and the CEA's water studies mark the municipal, state and federal governments' ongoing failure to respect the territorial, political, and cultural autonomy of the Wixaritari. In June of this year, the National Indigenous Congress (Congreso Nacional Indígena or CNI), held their XXI Assembly in Mesa del Tirador of the Wixárika community of San Sebastián Teponahuastlán, or Wautiia, and released a communiqué that condemns the Mexican state and private corporations for their continued disregard of the rights of indigenous people and their territories in Mexico. The communiqué specifically condemns poorly

orchestrated development projects such as dams, ongoing deforestation, the pollution of waterways, the destruction of native corn, and incursions by the army and other police forces in indigenous communities. (For the CNI's complete communiqué in Spanish from this XXI assembly see the following: [Manifiesto de Mesa del Tirador a los Pueblos de México y del Mundo](#))

In this context, during the end of the first week of June, Juan and Diana traveled to Nueva Colonia and the ceremonial center of Keuruwitüa, just as the first major rains began to drench the sierra. The rainy season is a busy time, as communal members prepare for the Dance of the Hikuri (Hikuri Neixa) and the subsequent Dance of the Sowing (Namawita Neixa). Just about every family was immersed in the labor of hulling corn, preparing for planting of crops, and others were building new homes made out of bricks. Yet despite people's incredibly busy schedules, Juan was able to make some progress with his ongoing investigations and visit with his co-father Uxayucauye. Unfortunately, the rainy season is a difficult time for outsiders to visit the Wixaritari not only because of the intense labor in which they must engage, but also because of the lack of food that is available. This year has been especially harsh in the Keuruwitüa area due to some spring fires that scorched the pasture grounds leading to the starvation of just about all of the cattle. For these reasons, Juan and Diana felt it appropriate to return to mestizo territory where they would continue to visit and work with Wixárika friends and acquaintances in the cities of Zacatecas, Guadalajara and Tepic.



Hulling the grains of the multicolored native corn in preparation for their planting.

In Guadalajara, Juan and Diana met with Claudio de la Rosa, a Wixárika from Tuapurie who recently finished his undergraduate studies in the Education Department at one of Guadalajara's most prestigious private university's: ITESO (Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Occidente). De la Rosa's thesis project examined the current bilingual and bicultural education system operating in the Huichol area, and inspired him to begin work on the creation of the first high school or *preparatoria*<sup>1</sup> for the eastern ranges of the Wixárika Sierra Madre. De la Rosa's

hope is that more Wixárika youth can begin to access higher education without having to leave their native communities and venture to the local mestizo municipalities or farther off cities. Additionally, de la Rosa hopes that families may feel more comfortable allowing their daughters to study high school, as they can still remain relatively close to home. A *preparatoria* in Tuapurie also means that families will not need to incur the travel and living costs associated with sending their children out of the community. The *preparatoria* is projected to open and begin classes in the fall of 2009 in the headquarter

<sup>1</sup> The equivalent of high school in Mexico is called *preparatoria* and encompasses three years of study equivalent to the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades in the U.S. system.

village of Pueblo Nuevo, the curriculum will follow the “intercultural” model that ITESO professor Rocío Aguinaga and Wixaritari students have worked to develop, and the school itself will be designed by ITESO architecture students with a focus on green building. De la Rosa is currently receiving institutional support for this project from the ITESO and AJAGI (Asociación Jalisciense de Apoyo a Grupos Indígenas).

In early July of this year, Diana was able to go to Tepic to visit with a group of Wixárika university graduates who belong to the Association of Indigenous Professionals of Nayarit (Asociación de Profesionistas Indígenas de Nayarit), an organization that is linked with the Association of Wixárika Students which comprises high school as well as university level students. Members of these organizations are also responsible for the [Pueblo Indígena](#) website that illustrates contemporary Wixárika music and culture, and uploads relevant news articles, community photographs and student commentaries. The group of university graduates with whom Diana met are working on a variety of projects that reflect the interdisciplinary nature of their own studies as well as their commitment to apply their education to the needs of Wixaritari communities. Their most recent efforts were concentrated on the creation of a Huichol “as a second language” booklet to instruct non-Wixárika and Wixárika students alike at the Autonomous University of Nayarit.<sup>2</sup> Another project that they hope to materialize seeks to create workshops for the younger generations of Wixárika around the increasing problem of domestic violence within the rural and urban communities, to a large part exacerbated by the consumption and abuse of alcohol. One of the students who is leading this project received her bachelors degree in law and is currently completing her masters work in gender studies. These Wixárika students and professionals informed Diana that they were impressed with the commitment that Juan and Yvonne had showed over the years toward the general Wixárika culture and territory and discussed their interest in collaborating with the Wixárika Research Center on website and field related projects.

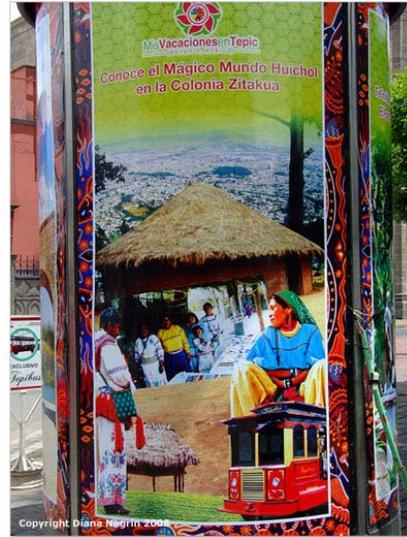
The Wixárika Research Center is excited about the growing number of Wixaritari who are accessing a university education and becoming professionals while keeping their community’s wellbeing in mind. Nonetheless, many Wixárika students struggle with the financial burdens of living outside of their communities and in a society that holds on to racist and exclusionist attitudes toward indigenous people. Furthermore, scholarships that cover living expenses are difficult to access; as a result Wixárika students often tell us that they have trouble covering rent, transportation, food and school material costs, not to mention the purchase of personal computers. In the past two years, we have been fortunate to receive some support to make small scholarships available to two Wixárika students through our foundation; we would like to widen this aspect of our work to make scholarship funds available to more students on a more consistent basis. If you are interested in supporting one of the students who has petitioned us for financial assistance, please do contact us at [contributions@wixarika.org](mailto:contributions@wixarika.org).

Meanwhile, political and economic trends continue to favor ethnic and ecological tourism, or *eculturismo*, as a path for regional development that profits off of and further

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<sup>2</sup> They shared with Diana the difficulty of making such a booklet due to differences in the spoken language amongst the different Wixárika communities as well as the differences that anthropologists and linguists have debated.

embeds superficial notions of Wixárika culture. In the last two years, the small city of Tepic has promoted the peri-urban Wixárika neighborhood of Zitakua<sup>3</sup> as a tourist destination through this initiative, and the image of the Wixaritari as a “magical” people can now be seen in a variety of advertisements throughout the city. It is worth noting that the increased visibility of the Wixárika through tourist advertisements occurs at the same time that Wixárika artisan vendors have been officially prohibited from selling their crafts in Tepic’s downtown plaza. They must now apply for permits in the designated “Plaza de las artesanías”, an alleyway next to the plaza. The prohibition of Wixárika artisans from selling their crafts in public squares was also set in place in Guadalajara’s downtown area. In both cities, the alternate areas that have been designated for the sale of Huichol crafts are less than ideal, especially in Guadalajara where they must solicit a space in a little visited underground mall, *Pasaje Morelos*. According to Wixárika friends, sales have suffered under these new conditions, aggravating the already existent problem of an oversaturated market of Wixárika crafts, namely beaded jewelry, masks and animals.



Advertisement promoting Zitakua



Plaza de las artesanías

Surely individual Wixaritari have been able to profit from some of the tourist initiatives propelled by the Mexican government, perhaps most notably in Tateikié or San Andrés Cohamiata where bungalows, gift shops, and restaurants have been installed for the reception of a relatively large tourist audience. The most notable downside of Tateikié’s tourist development is that it sits high in the mountains where visitors draw on a very limited water resource and contribute to the area’s villagization which not only creates further water scarcity but also lends to the growing problem of waste which does not get transported out of the community. The question of opening their communities up to tourist initiatives has created a great deal of division amongst the Wixaritari who see tourism as a double-edged sword that allows

for a selected few to profit while creating a list of disadvantages including the above mentioned increase in pollution and water scarcity. Meanwhile the more pressing issues of education, health and nutrition could be better addressed by state development

<sup>3</sup> Zitakua is an urban community that sprung in the late 90’s to accommodate many underclass Wixaritari who had become uprooted and resorted to finding temporary housing in the ghettos of Tepic and its neighborhoods. At that time it included many Wixaritari who had lost lands since the dam of Aguamilpa flooded them, as well as some engaged in the practice of crafts for a growing appreciative market.

initiatives. Despite governmental pressures, Tuapurie and parts of Wautüa adamantly continue to oppose state or private *eculturista* projects.

In the area bordering the states of Nayarit and Jalisco there continue to be several matters of importance for the work of the Wixárika Research Center. The construction that is underway of the La Yesca dam presents the third of three major hydroelectric dams built along the Santiago River in the past twenty years, and will further endanger the ecological, social and cultural integrity of the region. La Yesca will be one of the largest dams of its kind in Latin America, the project has angered many area residents whose homes will be inundated and who have seen little if any benefits including employment opportunities promised by the government as a result of the construction process (see: [Para empresas extranjeras, los beneficios de la hidroeléctrica La Yesca, lamentan habitantes](#)) Already the El Cajón dam, inaugurated by President Felipe Calderón in June of 2007, has inundated a portion of Wixárika territory and displaced rural farmers. All three dams have been a joint venture between the state governments and the private firm, Grupo ICA. Meanwhile the downriver inhabitants have witnessed the contamination of their water, including the death of an eight year old boy who died of intoxication after falling into the Santiago River in February of this year. Ironically, residents who live in the area around Aguamilpa, El Cajón and La Yesca have yet to see the benefits of these projects and largely remain without electric power, potable water and other basic services. Furthermore, those whose lands were inundated still await proper reparations for their lost land.

On a final note, Doctor Micaela Carrillo, the first allopathic Wixárika doctor and a close friend of the Negrín family, won a battle with the Secretary of Health of Jalisco which had transferred her away from her native community of Tuapurie and placed her in Wautüa where she had served previously. Members of Tuapurie were pleased with Carrillo's one year of work in the community, not only due to her ability to relate to patients in their own language, but more importantly because she is a fellow Tuapuritanaca and has shown her incredible dedication to her profession and people. Apparently her sudden transfer to Wautüa was a result of the Secretary of Health's shuffling of personnel conducted by Guadalajara bureaucrats without much knowledge of what is occurring in the field. After a petition with more than 800 signatures from members of Tuapurie was gathered, Dr. Carrillo was given notice that she could return in mid-August to practice in her own community.

Before closing, we would like to remind our readers that the continuation of our work to expand the Wixárika website with new articles and exhibits, and translations of Spanish language press reports for our readers is dependant on the donations we receive. If you are interested in helping to support the Wixarika Research Center's continued work please contact us at [contributions@wixarika.org](mailto:contributions@wixarika.org). Your donation is tax deductible and will be very much appreciated.

Thank you,

The Wixárika Staff