



## **Negotiating borders: Social relations, migration processes and social change in Oaxaca, Mexico.**

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**NEGOTIATING BORDERS: SOCIAL RELATIONS, MIGRATION PROCESSES  
AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN OAXACA, MEXICO**

**by**

**Kimberly McCabe Grimes**

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the**

**DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**In the Graduate College**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA**

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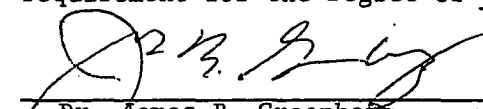
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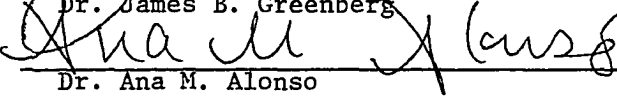
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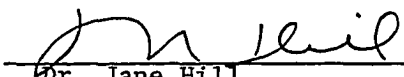
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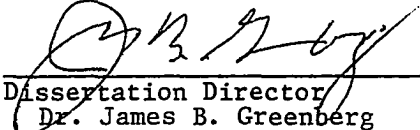
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to first thank the people of Putla who benevolently shared their knowledge, their time, and their hospitality with me. To them I owe the greatest debt for without their support and collaboration this dissertation would never have been achieved.

I am also greatly indebted to my committee members, Dr. James Greenberg, Dr. Ana Alonso and Dr. Jane Hill, for their support, advice and criticisms. Their teachings and guidance enriched this dissertation in countless ways and to them I give my gratitude.

I thank the people of the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores de Antropología Social* in Oaxaca for their support. A special thanks to Dr. Salomón Nahmad Sitton who generously shared his knowledge of Oaxaca with me and who directed me to archival resources in Oaxaca City. I also thank the Department of Anthropology, University of Arizona for the Comins Fellowship which provided initial support for my research. To the director, Dr. Timothy Finan, the staff and fellow students of the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, University of Arizona, I am deeply grateful for the friendships and for the Bureau's financial assistance throughout my graduate career but especially over this past year while I wrote the dissertation. Their support was immeasurable and I hope that they know how much their amity means to me. I want to especially thank Brian Fulfroost for sharing his abundant computer knowledge with me. Susan Jorstad graciously drew Figures 1 and 2 under very short notice and I thank her for doing such a wonderful job.

My in-laws, Elena Aguilar and Filadelfo Hernandez, are two of the most generous people I have ever met. They introduced me to Putla with their childhood stories and continued helping me with my research to this day. I can never thank them enough for all the love and kindness that they have given me. The same is true for my family, especially my mother, Sandra Robertson, and my sister, Rebecca Mais. Their constant support and love allowed me to pursue my dreams and to accomplish my goals. I am eternally grateful and truly blessed to have such wonderful people in my life.

Most of all, I owe my most profound debt to my husband, Marco Antonio Hernandez Aguilar. No words are enough to express my gratitude to him. He has been my biggest cheerleader - relentless in giving me encouragement and love, and in sharing knowledge about his home country. In Putla, his observations and insights helped me to rethink many first impressions and to better understand people's thoughts and actions. His contributions are throughout this dissertation.

**This dissertation is dedicated to Marco  
and in loving memory of Vance and Pearl McCabe.**

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## ABSTRACT

The investigation of the relationships between migration processes and the constructions of social identities and of social relations within local, national and international contexts illustrates how social change in an Oaxacan community in Mexico is a complex, multi-faceted process. This study examines how migration processes and social change shape and are shaped by people and practices in specific historical moments interacting dialectically with broader social, economic and political structures. By paying greater attention to the quotidian and to the choices that people make as they go about their daily lives, the heterogeneity and multiplicity of community members' subjectivities and experiences are highlighted. Gender, ethnicity, race, age, class, sexuality, and religion are examined as crucial variables in processes of social differentiation and in the social reproduction of gender/racial/class hierarchies in which women and men are situated. The research applies the concept of hegemony to demonstrate that power is not separate from meaning; the social construction of meanings plays an important role in the creation of consent, collaboration or resistance. Community members have internalized their own domination through hegemonic processes, reproducing the dominant social order, yet they frequently challenge their own particular social locations within this social order. Migration processes and the globalization of communication and consumption in advanced capitalism have played key roles in these processes. New experiences and information technologies have led to a redefining and re-presenting of meanings and practices which have had negative and positive impacts on individuals, on families and on the community.

## PREFACE

I sit watching the bustle of people getting ready to board the bus. Families kiss and hug their kin goodbye, giving last minute advice and instructions. Children run around as their mothers yell to them to get out of the road. Men heave burlap sacks filled with dried chiles to the driver on top of the bus. Young men joke and punch each other, hiding their uneasiness as they begin their first trip to *el norte*. Soon everyone is on-board and the bus spits smoke and rumbles off. The trip up the windy mountain road begins.

Living next to the bus terminal in a western Oaxacan town for over a year, I observed this daily bus-filling ritual hundreds of times. Yet each time was new, exciting; I could feel the streams of emotions gushing out from the people leaving and from those saying their farewells. It made me reflect upon all the articles and books that I had read on "migration" before arriving here to do my dissertation field research. I felt disappointed. How could so much be written on the subject of migration yet so little capture what it means to the people who experience it and their families, their friends, their community?

At the same time I felt intimidated and overwhelmed. I had come here to understand how the process of migration has changed and is changing life in a town in Mexico. Obviously I knew that there would be no clear-cut answer. Different personal histories and experiences formed in different contexts and historical consciousnesses would generate a multitude of changes - some quite evident, others more subtle. It was this variation that I was after. But in a town where some 20,000 people live, I wondered if it would be possible to capture, understand, and interpret the social change occurring and

the role that migration plays. Thus I began my journey into the lives of the people of Putla de Guerrero: "Putla" from the Aztec name "Pochtlan" meaning "place of fog." The name comforted me as it came to symbolize my entrance into a community that I knew somewhat and my position within the community as neither an insider or an outsider.

### **Telling the Story**

Doing anthropological research these days is like trying to walk along the top of a fence, always tipping from one side to the other, looking for a way to re-present people's lives without resorting to academic imperialism. Recognizing past errors of asserting authority claims about the "Other" has led to a questioning of our role and of our goals in anthropological research. My uneasiness as a white, U.S. academic studying the lives of a group of people in Oaxaca was heightened by the requirements of Academia as to what is acceptable and necessary for dissertation research. Conscious of my particular subject position, I tried to alleviate part of my apprehension by not silencing other voices and by selecting a research area where I have a strong personal as well as professional interest. For years before I even thought about my dissertation, I listened to stories that my in-laws would tell about "*el pueblo*" - a nameless town in Oaxaca near the state of Guerrero. Born in Putla and in a town near Putla, my in-laws were part of the mass rural exodus to the Federal District in the late 1950s. My husband, born and raised in Mexico City, had visited Putla when he was young but knew very little about the place of his ancestors. I wanted to learn more about the place, its history, its people - not just for the dissertation but for my

children. Living in Putla did not make me a Putlecan, yet I was not an absolute outsider. I have family ties that bind.

I believe that my family connection made me more responsible to the people by increasing my awareness as to how my research could affect their lives. People worried about their reputation and the local gossip that could result if they discussed certain subjects with me or if they spoke harshly about their community. More than anything else, money was a taboo subject. When asking questions about money, such as how much has a family member sent from the United States, most people would answer *un poco* (a little) even when they had built a two-story house with in-door plumbing and set up a small business with the remittances. Putlecans eagerly display new wealth through the purchasing of more consumer items but it is considered in bad taste to speak about money or worse, to boast about it (see section VIII). I never pushed people for information when they hesitated to answer or seemed uncomfortable. Rather I would quickly change the conversation, the way my family members did when conversations became too personal. Remembering that I too could harm my family's reputation made me conform more to local etiquette.

I do not want to give the impression that I felt in anyway restricted due to my family connection; I simply felt more responsible and in-tune to the community's members. Moreover, many times my research was aided by this connection. Some people who were at first suspicious of why a *gringa* wanted to know about their family, relaxed when they learned that I am married to a man whose family is originally from Putla. It helped to

assure people that I am not another *gringa* evangelist or a CIA spy investigating illegal Putlecans in the United States.

With time however, I came to realize that my acceptance in the community had as much to do with migration processes as with my family. Almost every family with whom I visited, has a family member or members living in the United States. Without desiring so, *la gringa* became the source for information about the United States and my voice, "the authority." Most of the time I enjoyed answering peoples' questions, even the uncomfortable ones, such as if it is true that the U.S. government will not allow children to send money home to their parents because parents are not considered dependents. Questions like this one placed me in the middle of family tensions - sons/daughters not sending money as they were expected to do. But I learned more from many of these discussions than I did from the questions that I had prepared. What made me anxious, however, was their belief that I knew more than they did because I am a *norteamericana* (white, female, U.S. citizen) working on my doctorate. Many Putlecans believe that all white people in the United States are intelligent, well-educated, kind, clean, and altruistic - "they even stop for animals in the road." These beliefs are something that I will discuss in much greater detail later on but it suffices to say now that they constructed my identity in ways that I found unsettling. Looking back at it now I can see the irony in the situation - what anthropologists have been doing to the "Other" for years, was now being done by the "Other."

I remember one day when I went to the post office to pick up a package my sister

had sent me. Several days before I had interviewed the postman's sister and they had obviously talked about me and my research. Always polite, he asked if I would tell him a bit more about the purpose of my research. I explained my interest in the town and in its history. He smiled as he told me that he was very happy to have a *norteamericana* writing his town's history rather than a fellow townsman. He explained that the people in Putla are ignorant and uninterested in their own *raíces* (cultural roots); nor does the Mexican government care about them since politicians are *corruptos* (corrupt, spoiled). Only "foreigners" (referring to U.S. citizens or Europeans) care enough to come and to write "our" history. He was paying me a compliment but I felt uncomfortable with the insinuation that foreigners are somehow "superior" and more altruistic than Mexican people.

I didn't have to "pay my dues" so to speak to earn my status; they gave me the voice of authority. It is interesting to compare my easy entrance into the community with my husband's. Even though it is my husband's blood relatives who are from Putla, he had problems in the beginning with young men wanting to pick a fight because he's *chilango*.<sup>1</sup> The young men expressed the resentment, frustration and jealousy felt by many rural Mexicans towards the people from the nation's capital. My husband had to earn respect in the town which he accomplished rather quickly through teaching English classes and playing music in *La Casa de la Cultura*. His students admired him and word passed rapidly that he is *buena onda* (a good person).

More than just receiving "authority" I also realized that I was commodified and

engaged as a status symbol by 'middle-class' people in the town, mainly younger Putlecans who had studied a career in Mexico City or Oaxaca City, and who are striving for greater "whiteness" (see section IX). *La gringa* and her husband were invited to all the 'uptown' social events where many times I felt like a dressed up mannequin, a form representing a human figure, something to be seen with - not someone you talk to. Once at a party of my husband's aunt (in Anglo kinship, she would be called a cousin), the aunt took me by the hand with my husband following behind and introduced me to her friends table by table as *mi sobrina y su esposo* (my niece and her husband). We never stopped to engage in a conversation with any of these people and by the end of the 'tour,' I was seated by her side at the head table.

My personal experiences made me comprehend how much relations of power affect and are affected by the process of research. My relationship with the community was constantly being reshaped and redefined as we both struggled to understand one another.

### **The Research Process**

Although the field of cultural anthropology is currently undergoing a critical reassessment of roles and goals, one stable or defining element is its commitment to participant observation; cultural anthropologists live with the people we 'study' in communities throughout the world. The information that informs this study comes from living in Putla for three months in 1991, ten months in 1993 and four months in 1994, in

Mexico City for varying amounts of time from 1989 to today, and in Atlantic City, New Jersey for three weeks in 1994.<sup>2</sup> I also made several day trips to other communities in the region in order to understand Putla's position as *cabecera* (county seat) of the district.

Putla is a medium-sized community in the mountains of western Oaxaca - a community that is located in one of the economically poorest regions in Mexico today. The town has a long tradition of migration to Mexican urban centers and to the United States, and a high out-migration rate. Because one of the main focuses of my research is to understand the relationship between circular migration and the re-construction of social identities and social relations, I needed to grasp the heterogeneity of the town's peoples. Due to time and money constraints, I could not interview everyone in the town to determine its social makeup so I selected a random sample. I followed Bernard's book on research methods and interviewed at least one member of 378 families, the sample size required for a population of 20,000 for a five percent confidence interval (Bernard 1988:105). Many times during the interviews, everyone who was home became curious and joined in the conversation. The formal questionnaire consisted of 121 questions covering a wide range of issues: family relations, education, leisure time, economic, political and religious activities, personal aspirations and aversions, and migration histories of family members. Many questions were open-ended which led to extended conversations on many of the topics.

From the group of people that I interviewed, I selected 33 women and men of different ages, classes, and marital statuses for the recording of their life histories in order

to understand the different experiences of community members who have migrated and those who have not, and their conceptions of self and of others. Through the telling of their own life histories, women and men reveal how social identity is never static; people actively construct, modify, defend and challenge conceptions of the self and of social location within the family, the local community, the nation-state and the international community.

During the research process, some of the Putlecans' responses and concerns led me to examine attitudes and practices that I had not previously considered. For example, not until I joined the local ecology group did I fully comprehend the profound impact that consumption processes have on a community (see section VIII). The research was a feedback process. As I learned from them and they from me, our repertoires of questions expanded and, in many instances, included areas of mutual concern.

Little historical or anthropological/sociological research has been conducted specifically on the region of Putla. I reviewed colonial, nineteenth-century and twentieth-century documents relating to the region of Putla in the National Archives (AGN) in Mexico City, in two state archives in Oaxaca City (*Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca* and *Archivo General de Notaria y Registro Publico de la Propiedad*), and in the Catholic church archive in Putla in order to understand the community's history and the broader national and international historical processes that have affected the region. As Gmelch points out, many studies of migration have tended to view migration as a "static event" due to the nature of traditional anthropological fieldwork; researchers live for a

limited time in a limited space (1980:135). Even many of the scholars who discuss transnational migration (back and forth across borders) have failed to recognize the importance of a historical perspective. My study brings a diachronic perspective to migration studies and focuses on the relational aspects of experience, knowledge and productive activities.

The study begins (section V) with a discussion of theoretical orientations in studies of migration processes and how the production of knowledge has influenced studies. Section VI provides an historical overview of the town and region of Putla de Guerrero, and its relationship to broader national and international processes from pre-Hispanic times to today. In section VII, I describe Putlecan lifeways at mid-twentieth century before the completion of a national road into the region initiated a multitude of material and social changes. The ensuing transformations in Putlecan lives and in the town are examined in section VIII with particular attention to the roles that migration processes and the expansion of information and new technologies have played in these changes. In the next section (IX), I then look specifically at the constructions of identities which have occurred due to these processes and how they, in turn, have affected social relations in the community. Section X links identity constructions, migration processes and social changes to current socioeconomic and political transformations in Mexico and in the international community. The final section XI concludes the study by readdressing issues raised in section V. To protect the privacy of individual Putlecans, all first names used in the text are pseudonyms.

**Endnotes:**

1. In southern and western Mexico, the term *chilango* refers to people from the Federal District who identify themselves as more progressive and advanced than provincial Mexicans. As a result, most provincial Mexicans dislike and resent *chilangos*.
2. Atlantic City, N.J. is the principal receiving area for Putlecan migrants in the U.S.

## **PERSPECTIVES AND DEBATES IN MIGRATION STUDIES**

### **Migration Doctrines**

The process of migration, or the movement of people across space, represents one of the major recurrent themes in human history; it has played a central historical role in the construction of multicultural societies in both 'first' and 'third' world nations. In the past thirty years, the literature examining the process of migration has rapidly multiplied, making it a central concern in the social sciences and in law (Tomasi et al. 1989).

Witnessing the mass rural exodus and rapid urbanization of most 'third' world countries following World War II and the steady growth of international migration, researchers have focused on understanding the causes of migration and have prioritized economics in the investigations. Two main theoretical perspectives have emerged in the literature: neo-classical economic approaches derived from the "individual relocation" genre started by Ravenstein a century ago and the structural-historical approaches whose roots lie in Marx's historical materialism.

The orthodox perspective of neo-classical economists is the "most widely-held approach to the causes of migration" (Portes & Bach 1985:3). Called the "push-pull" or equilibrium model, this approach proposes that economic, political and social hardships "push" individuals to leave their hometown while comparative advantages "pull" them to other areas (Lee 1966; Todaro 1976). The decision to migrate stems from rational, individual choice and from the gap in employment possibilities and wages between sending

and receiving areas. The geographic mobility of labor works as an equilibrium mechanism - evening out inequalities in exchange. The model is congruent with modernization theory which views migration as a necessary and beneficial process, shifting human resources from areas of marginal productivity to growing industrial areas (Lewis 1954; Herrick 1965).

Scholars have critiqued the push-pull model as reductionist and ahistorical (Dinerman 1978; Wood 1982; Portes and Borocz 1989). The analysis centers on the individual living in a vacuum, devoid of history and social relationships. Moreover, history has shown that migration does not function as an equilibrium mechanism. Rapid rural to urban migration over the past several decades has resulted in the formation of megacities or "primate centers" in the 'third' world which have not absorbed all the incoming labor nor provided the infrastructural services for the growing population. Rather than evening out inequalities, migration has led to an increase in under/unemployment, in informal market activities, and in the number and size of irregular (squatter) settlements (Portes 1989).

To critique the push-pull model is not to deny that people do make "rational" decisions based on information that they receive from relatives, friends, newspapers, television, and other sources. However, the options from which people choose are not unlimited; they are constrained by structural and historical factors. In the case of unemployment in rural Oaxaca, for example, migration is perceived by many people as the only "rational" option for those who lack adequate land and/or water to farm, or capital to

start a business. Day labor will not feed the family, so they leave. When we start asking why there is no land or why the daily minimum wage is insufficient, we must turn to the historical and structural context in which these people live. Repetitive descriptions of push-pull factors and migrant-nonmigrant differentials suffer from a timeless functionality and a lack of attention to structural factors.

Structural-historical models have demonstrated the importance of relating regional migration patterns to the broader socioeconomic and political transformations within nations and in the international community. The link between capitalist expansion and expanded migration is critical to our understanding of current migration processes. For example, Cornelius (1988) identifies macro-level factors in both the Mexican and the United States economies that play a central role in Mexican migration to its northern neighbor in the 1980s: the automation and fragmentation of manufacturing production globally; the expansion of service industries in the U.S.; the increasing employer preference for part-time, temporary workers; the changing U.S. demographic profile; and the negative or negligible economic growth in Mexico since the 1982 crisis.

Historicized approaches, such as dependency theory or the core-periphery framework, have demonstrated that we live in a world economy where inequality is a structural given (Frank 1968; Wallerstein 1974). While this perspective is a dramatic improvement over the evolutionary approach which places nations in an economic continuum (Rostow 1960), the approaches dichotomize nations or regions within nations as "winners" and "losers." They fail to recognize the uneven penetration of capitalism

throughout the world which impacts local, regional and national contexts differently. Migrants are portrayed as mechanically responding to structural factors. They are treated "like empty grocery carts wheeled back and forth between origin and destination under the hungry intentions of world capital" (Bach and Schraml 1982:324). The global interpretations have remained on general and abstract levels, leaving the actual mechanisms through which people move unexplained.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, scholars began searching for an analytic bridge to generate a comprehensive analysis which would include both individual decision-making and the particular socioeconomic structures in which migrants are situated. They proposed the use of the household as the intermediate unit of analysis (Arizpe 1982; Dinerman 1982; Kemper 1977; Murillo 1979; Pessar 1982; Roberts 1981; Selby and Murphy 1982; Wood 1981,1982). Households are depicted as the strategic site of articulation of economic and political processes - the link between the micro and the macro. They are characterized as consumption, production, and distributive units which collectively share resources (Dinerman 1982:9). As a collective unit, households respond to opportunities and limitations produced by extra-domestic processes and institutions. In the household framework, migration is viewed as an adaptive or sustenance strategy employed by the household to ensure its maintenance and reproduction.

The use of the household as an intermediate unit of analysis is problematic. The view of households as an undifferentiated unit, a site of sharing and cooperation, is diametrically opposed to investigations of the family/household which emphasize intra-

family relations in which gender hierarchies and other relations of domination and exploitation are constructed (Barrett 1988; Beneria and Roldan 1987; Hartmann 1981; Rapp et. al 1979; Sacks 1982). The unified household "glosses over the variety of experiences that social categories of persons have within households. These experiences alter radically depending on gender, generation, and class" (Rapp et al. 1979:178). Folbre reminds us that "economic self-interest can operate within the home as well as within the market" (1986:245). The use of the household in the Latin American context has led scholars to underestimate "the autonomous role played by kin structures in regulating social life" (Grasmuck 1991:2). Lomnitz and Perez-Lizaur argue that the three-generation extended family is the "basic meaningful unit of solidarity in Mexico" (1987:7). Warman (1980) agrees, maintaining that the extended family acts as the coordinating unit for the use and protection of resources in peasant groups in Morelos. The extended family plays a greater role in the lives of Mexicans than is seen in studies using the household as their basic unit of analysis. Yet few studies include an analysis of kinship and family life in Latin America (Smith 1984:3-4).

In the homogenous household, the social actors are invisible. The concept of the household is reified. "Collective rationality" rather than individual rationality drives decision-making. A household "chooses" migration when it can no longer maintain its desired consumption level and the advantages of migration outweigh its costs (Bach and Schraml 1982:332-333). As Schmink warns, the emphasis on household economic strategies as responses to externally-induced pressures "can lose its meaning to the extent

that it becomes a mere functionalist label applied *ex post facto* to whatever behavior is found" (1984:95).

### **Knowledge and Power in Studies of Migration**

The general perspectives which guide mainstream migration studies fall short of grasping the diverse experiences and histories of the people who migrate, the differing political and economic contexts from which they embark, and the transformations migration processes generate in their personal lives and in the communities in which they live. In 1989, the International Migration Review assessed a quarter century of migration research in its Silver Anniversary Review. The editors concluded that "scholarship on international migration is still searching for a general theory capable of elucidating the multiple facets of the complex drama involved in international migration" (Tomasi et al. 1989:396). While the review highlighted important areas of research lacking in migration studies such as the role of the state in migration processes, the deficiency of information on 'third' world nations, the contextualization of migration as a global phenomenon, and the ethical questions of state immigration policies, unexamined assumptions still undermine much of the scholarly research on migration processes.

The editors report that gaps in knowledge will be filled by more studies from scholars armed with their "improved" statistics and other measurement tools and supported by 'first' world universities and economic 'development' agencies which seek to better understand "international migration stocks and trends" as they have done over the

past 25 years (Tomasi et al. 1989:399). Scholars hold on to the search for a totalizing theory to explain migration processes and to direct policy strategies. "As a result, governmental policies now stand a much better chance of being informed by scientific research on international migration" (Tomasi et al. 1989:398).

From this perspective migrants become numbers to be counted, numbers that are to inform 'first' world governmental policies. Since these studies are policy driven, they often serve the interests of states. Failing to address how hidden hegemonic ideologies have colored perceptions of migration remains a key problem in migration studies.

Understanding how knowledge is produced is key to liberating discourses on migration processes and social change from states' hegemonic agendas. By paying close attention to how we construct our subjects, we can challenge the dualisms and essentialism which pervades the migration literature. The manipulation of social identity by naturalizing and normalizing differences is a key strategy in the legitimization of economic and political domination (Gramsci 1971; Williams 1977). It produces ideological justifications that make domination the "natural" outcome of differences in women versus men, of people of color versus whites, and of poor people versus the affluent. Differences are reduced to the simplicity of essences upon which dualist oppositions are built.

In development and migration literatures, the 'third' world is constructed as traditional, poor, colored, led by emotions and feelings, feminine whereas the 'first' world is modern, wealthy, white, led by rational thought, masculine. The interrelationship of racial, class and gender ideologies subordinates the 'third' world in relation to the 'first.'

By engendering the 'third' world as feminine, 'she' becomes irrational, instinctual and excluded. The rational, modern 'first' world retains its power to make universal knowledge claims. As Donna Haraway reminds us, the claim of "objectivity is not about dis-engagement, but about mutual and usually unequal structuring" (1991:201). Ironically, it is migration processes which reveal just how inappropriate the 'first' world/ third' world dichotomy is. With the massive influx of 'third' world peoples into the 'first' world,

contemporary definitions of the 'third world' can no longer have the same geographical contours and boundaries they had... In the postindustrial world, systemic socioeconomic and ideological processes position the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, as well as 'minority' populations (people of color) in the United States and Europe (Mohanty 1991:2).

State projects and political ideologies work to standardize migration contexts and immigrants experiences. In the mid-1970s, a time of economic recession in the United States, members of the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship and International Law blamed undocumented migrants for the high unemployment rate and for burdening local tax resources. The American "myth of opportunity" was used to "reify illegal aliens in order to deny difference, inequality and history" (Chock 1991:279).

The typical opportunity story centers on an immigrant whose arrival in America, desire for betterment, striving in adversity, and putting down of roots make him a 'new man.' That is, he is the Promethean hero of his own story; the story erases his past, foreign cultural baggage, and restraining social ties. The telling of such stories focused the debate about illegal immigration on individuals...rather than on social structure, culture or history (Chock 1991:281).

By comparing contemporary undocumented immigrants to an idealized version of past

'individual' immigrants, Congressional members eliminated any possibility for challenges to their construction of the situation. With unitary individualism at the heart of the ideology of the dominant social group, relations of difference are relegated to a lower status than the expressive forms of the dominant ideology (Corrigan 1990:121-123). The passage of Proposition O, the English-only campaign in San Francisco (Woolard 1989) and of California's Proposition 187 in 1994 demonstrates the effectiveness of 'naturalizing' arguments. These arguments persuaded a majority of the citizens of California (including many "liberals") that the Propositions are necessary for the state's well-being.

Proposition 187 highlights how 'scientific' research on migration is manipulated by government policies. Supporters of the proposition presented statistical evidence to promote their claim that undocumented immigrants drain state resources, conveniently "overlooking" all other evidence to the contrary (see Portes and Rumbaut 1990). Rather than "objectively" informing government policy, studies on immigration are subjectively applied to achieve particular political agendas. A study by Durand and Massey shows that for fifty years Congressional representatives have used studies to exaggerate the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States; the numbers are used for "party politics" (1992:10). Portes and Rumbaut discuss how economists in testimonies before the U.S. Congress proliferate the perceptions that contemporary immigrants are low-skilled and the quality of immigrant labor is continuing to decline even though "highly educated immigrants remain strongly represented at the top of the U.S. occupational pyramid" (1990:58).

### **Examining Migration Processes and Social Change**

Recent scholarship has begun questioning and examining the intellectual inadequacies and false assumptions underlining methods and models in social analyses (Anzaldúa 1987,1990; Haraway 1991,1989; hooks 1990,1992; de Lauretis 1986; di Leonardo 1991; Minh-ha 1989,1991; Mohanty et al. 1991; Moore 1988; Ong 1988; West 1993). This body of research has brought attention to the interrelationships between gender, race and class processes in the production of hegemonic ideologies. Their critiques have shown how epistemology has been flattened in such a way that the complex and multiple ways people construct and experience social life are lost or ignored.

These critiques have yet to influence mainstream migration perspectives and their descriptions of immigrant populations. Migration scholars still tend to see immigrant populations as "bounded" social groups, essentializing complex social identities and social processes. Hooks demonstrates in her research on African-Americans how we must deconstruct essentialist categories in order to create "new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency" (hooks 1990:28). When diversity is ignored, African-Americans are dichotomized and identified as nationalist (black-identified) or assimilationist (white-identified). The struggle is to "continually oppose re-inscribed notions of 'authentic' black identity" (hooks 1990:28).

Donna Haraway elucidates how we can begin to build critical theories that provide more adequate, richer accounts of the world without intellectual chauvinism by what she calls "situated knowledges."

Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of 'objective' knowledge...Coming to terms with the agency of the 'objects' studied is the only way to avoid gross error and false knowledge of many kinds in these (social and human) sciences (Haraway 1991:198).

Our studies must proliferate information about the people with whom we work, not appropriate it: healing breaches of knowledge, not stealing it (Anzaldúa 1990:xxi).

We need to recognize the heterogeneity and multiplicity of subjectivities and experiences that produce diverse cultural forms in order to produce a more adequate knowledge of the interrelationships of social identities, social relations and global processes in migration studies. My point is not simply academic. The information derived from studies of migration and immigrant populations has re-produced and defended racist, classist and sexist ideologies, increasing intolerance and hatred in societies today. By defining people as 'insiders' versus 'outsiders' and by essentializing migrants, we contribute to this process and make the possibility of empowerment of others who are not white (whether they are migrants or citizens) more difficult. We all lose when we negate the role of immigrants in the enrichment, economically and culturally, of many countries (Pronk 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 1990:245-246).

Essentializing migrants is the heart of acculturation studies, the popular model for looking at migration and social change from the 1930s to the late 1960s (Roseberry 1989:84-85). Through assimilation/adaptation/acculturation, the "donor" culture divests the "receptor" of its former culture while the "receptor" eagerly tries to become more like

the first (or as Rosaldo more aptly calls the process "deculturation" - "to become part of the culturally invisible mainstream" (1989:209). This process culminates in the United States as the renowned "melting pot." Acculturation studies measure the success or the failure the immigrants' attempts to assimilate, placing them on the dualist version of the linear model of culture change (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:8; Roseberry 1989:85).

Migrants/immigrants do not simply assimilate foreign cultures' ideas and practices but rather re-construct new identities in the context of mediating institutions which shape their strategies and choices (Lamphere 1992). "Culturally and socially they are something new, and they must be understood on their own terms" (Turino 1993:249). New identities coupled with new cultural practices are continuously created, modified and digested, not fixed and essential.

Acculturationists reify cultures (cultures do not change; people do) and assume that the two are autonomous, coming into contact like Wolf's (1982:6) "global pool hall and billiard balls" analogy without any consideration of power relations. Moreover, history is denied to at least one of the cultures. If the donor had history, the receptor was given only a "historical baseline." Ironically, if the idea of pluralism was discussed, it was viewed as the outcome of contact (Roseberry 1989:86).

Ignoring the "other's" history, flattening social processes and human identities to fixed forms, denying agency and negating the role of power in cultural production have left studies of migration and social change hollow. The majority of these studies center on immigrants and change in 'first' world nations, mainly the United States and European

countries. In discussions of social change in Latin America, the view of "Americanization" or "Westernization" of these countries carries the same problems of reductionism, homogenization and reification.

Roseberry describes the dilemma that anthropologists face when looking at the "Americanization" of Latin America as one of rejecting "the homogenizing stereotype without retreating into the equally stereotypic comfort of the distinctiveness of his or her 'own people'" (1989:82). The question becomes how to understand social change and living differences in a particular community in a country in Latin America that is exposed to (or even bombarded at times) North American/European ideas and material goods via global communications, trade, and the people themselves who cross borders, without resorting to homogenizing, totalizing, and essentializing people and the spaces in which they live.

### **Migration and Social Change: An Alternative Perspective**

The most interesting and difficult part of any cultural analysis, in complex societies, is that which seeks to grasp the hegemonic in its active and formative but also its transformational processes (Williams 1977:113).

The concept of hegemony is fundamental to the development of a framework for understanding migration processes. Examining hegemonic processes which are actively constituted, modified, defended, and challenged by social groups, allows us to observe the creative agency of migrants and immigrant populations within certain social, cultural and historical limits. The constant interplay between material production, socio-political

institutions, and experience and consciousness creates a social field in which migrants develop and sustain multiple relations across political borders. The re-construction of social identities actively emerges within this multinational context. Individuals leave their social groups and enter new ones which offer different modes of thought, experience, feeling and action. Migrants accommodate, challenge, renegotiate and resist these new modes.

Social change is not uni-directional ("Americanization" of Latin America) but rather a relational process - a redefining, reordering and re-presenting of meanings, practices and subjectively experienced realities in a global context. In advanced capitalism, the modern culture of consumption reaches much further than ever before into the lives of people due to "changes in the social character of labour, in the social character of communications and in the social character of decision-making" (Williams 1977:125). These changes have affected migration processes; expectations and new "visions of modern life and individual fulfillment that goes with it" have motivated more people to migrate from more places in the world in the past two decades (Portes 1990:13; Pronk 1993; Salt 1989).

While advanced capitalism is a major factor in contemporary patterns of migration, migration does not necessarily result from capitalist penetration (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991:102-103). Global economic processes are filtered through nation-state policies. The state as arbitrator of disparate interests,

is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable

equilibria between the interests of the fundamental group and those of subordinate groups - equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interest (Gramsci 1971:182).

The state can maintain those structures which support the advanced capitalist enterprise, managing the contradictions and dislocations associated with its penetration and using migration as an escape-value. The state can assume a "gate-keeping" function controlling the entrance of foreigners or the exit of its citizens (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991:78). Or as in the case of Mexico, it can do both simultaneously.

Mexican government officials are keenly aware that many rural areas are sustained not by agricultural activities, but by remittances of migratory income principally from the United States (Grindle 1988). The flow of immigrants north creates tensions in the government's political relations with the United States. At the same time, however, Mexican political leaders are committed to neo-liberal economic policies which support U.S. and Mexican corporate interests - policies which have consequentially increased the number of Mexican migrants entering the United States. Hence, the Mexican government finds itself in the paradoxical situation of sending its armed forces to guard the border in order to keep its citizens from crossing it while continuing to support policies that stimulate U.S.-bound migration. The undocumented Mexican migrants find themselves in the contradictory position of being desired by capital as a cheap labor supply yet spurned by U.S. political rhetoric as constituting the "silent invasion."

Crossing borders and at home, migrants have differential access to power. World-

systems theory and the mode-of-production literature have placed the people we study within larger historical, political and economic processes and have demonstrated the impact of structures of power upon them. Most importantly, they have fostered the renewal of historical investigation in ethnographic inquiry. Too little attention, however, is paid to the activity of the people (Roseberry 1988:171-172). People question and renegotiate the racial/classist/sexist hierarchies in which they are situated. Passive pawns they are not. The concept of hegemony helps us to unite structure and agency and to understand how the social domination of one group over another is created and defended. Gramsci's expansion of the concept from its more traditional definition of just political rule/domination (i.e. in Lenin's work) to include consent and compromise, places our analyses in the realm of political and civil society. It is the ability of a dominant group

to establish a position of leadership by winning the consent of allied and subordinate groups through articulating common interests and goals - by establishing linkages across different identities and social positions. The concept (hegemony), thus, comes to be associated with cultural, moral and ideological leadership, and...the state as a kind of educator (Turino 1993:10).

Marginalized peoples often internalize their own domination or marginality through 'common sensical notions' that are the product of historical processes which make situations of inequality appear as "natural" outcomes of differences in racial and/or gendered intellectual capabilities (Gramsci 1971; Williams 1989). However as Williams (1977:112-114) discusses, hegemony is a process that must be recreated, modified and defended against challenges from others who are outside or on the edge - those struggling for access to valued resources, for economic and symbolic capital.

The process of self-induction into the migrant labor process constitutes an important aspect of the regeneration of a migrant labor pool and in the overall reproduction of the social order. Migrants reproduce themselves in the process of constituting themselves as political and social subjects, and in many cases, in an antagonistic relation to the prevailing structures. A key issue for migration studies is to recognize its contradictory nature and to comprehend how it gets played out in particular contexts. How do migrants through their own activity and ideological development contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of the social order and yet, at the same time, resist it?

The processes of socioeconomic differentiation operate along many axes; the categories of gender, class, race, nationality and ethnicity are the most common terms used for hegemonic constructions of identity. These terms are historically charged. Wolf demonstrates that the construction of the categories of 'race' and 'ethnicity' occurred during the development of capitalism.

Distinctions of 'race' have implications rather different from 'ethnic' variations. Racial designations, such as 'Indian' or 'Negro', are the outcome of the subjugation of populations in the course of European mercantile expansion... The terms disregard cultural and physical differences within each of the two large categories, denying any constituent group political, economic, or ideological identity of its own (Wolf 1982:380).

Race denies cultural differences and essentializes social groups. Ethnicity, on the hand, represents how people construct their own identification in relation to the labor market. These identifications change through time,

as particular cohorts of workers gained access to different segments of the labor market and began to treat their access as a resource to be defended both socially and politically (Wolf 1982:380).

Meillassoux (1981) points out that profits to the capitalist economy from the use of migrant labor depend on the establishment of a double labor market and the construction of racist and xenophobic ideologies which legitimize that market. The historical constructions of racial/class hierarchies are continually re-enacted. However as Calagione's (1992) work with Jamaican workers in New York City shows, migrants question and renegotiate these hierarchies. Jamaican laborers used recorded music and singing to "subtly control the pacing of the day's task, and to insert workers from different localities into the flow of the crew's work," linking practices from the home country to urban construction work in New York. By controlling time in the workplace, immigrants were able to empower themselves in the face of exploitative labor hierarchies. Glick Schiller et al. (1991) illustrate how migrants actively maintain several identities which link them to home and host nations.

By maintaining many different racial, national, and ethnic identities, transmigrants are able to express their resistance to the global political and economic situations that engulf them, even as they accommodate themselves to living conditions marked by vulnerability and insecurity. These migrants express this resistance in small, everyday ways that usually do not directly challenge or even recognize the basic premises of the systems that surround them and dictate the terms of their existence (Glick Schiller et al. 1992:11).

In the social sciences, the term 'gender' all too often is equated with women's studies. Only recently have studies begun to deconstruct the unmarked category of "men" and examine the multiple subjectivities of masculinity as well as femininity (e.g. Corrigan

1990). "Culturally-constructed gender relations operate as one of the major axes of social power in most, if not all societies" (Bottomley 1992:14).

In a recent study of Mexican settlement in the United States, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994:8) pays particular attention "to power relations of gender in immigrant social networks and in families, as they constrain or facilitate migration for women and men." Her work shows how political and economic transformations affect gender relations and how gender relations help determine the ways opportunities and limitations of these broader forces are translated into different migration patterns. Another study by Alonso (1992) on work and *gusto* in a northern Mexican community also demonstrates how attention to both men's and women's perception of work leads to a more precise analysis of the relationship between circular migration to the United States and the re-conceptualization of the social self.

In many studies of migration, women migrants are assigned to the status of dependents and men that of the "breadwinner." Women are seen as the "housekeeper" whether they are working in remunerated activities in the receiving areas or not. Furthermore, gender relations and the organization of public and private life are rapidly changing due to the development of new multinational labor forces (i.e the rapid incorporation of women of color in multinational export-processing industries and the expansion of service jobs) and the construction of racist and sexist ideologies used to recruit and to justify these labor forces. Migration processes directly impact these transformations. How are gender relations within the family, in the community and in the

larger society modifying due to changes in the multinational labor force and what role does migration play? How are female/male migrants' identities constructed through the interrelations of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and nationality in both home and host societies, and in relation to the state and the international economy?

This study seeks to understand how migration processes and social change shape and are shaped by people and practices in specific historical moments interacting dialectically with broader social, economic and political structures. My study views women and men as 'actors' - people who make choices and who critically understand their positions. One of the contributions of this study is its attention to specificities; though my research addresses questions of broad relevance, it does so by focusing on the quotidian and on the choices that people make as they go about their daily lives. In my investigations, I examine gender, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, marital status, and position within the family as crucial variables in processes of social differentiation and in the social re-production of gender/racial/class hierarchies in which women and men are situated. Focusing on the multiple axes of identity and agency allows me to understand the often conflictual and contradictory character of people's lives. My research uses the concept of hegemony to demonstrate that power is not separate from meaning; the social construction of 'common' meanings plays an important role in the creation of consent, collaboration or resistance.

## **SITUATING PUTLA IN TIME AND SPACE**

### **Borders and Boundaries**

The very idea of a map, with its implicit dependence upon the survey of a stable terrain, fixed referents and measurement, seems to contradict the palpable flux and fluidity of metropolitan life and cosmopolitan movement. Maps are full of references and indications, but they are not peopled...With a map in our hands we can begin to grasp an outline, a shape, some sort of location. But that preliminary orientation hardly exhausts the reality in which we find ourselves (Chambers 1994:92).

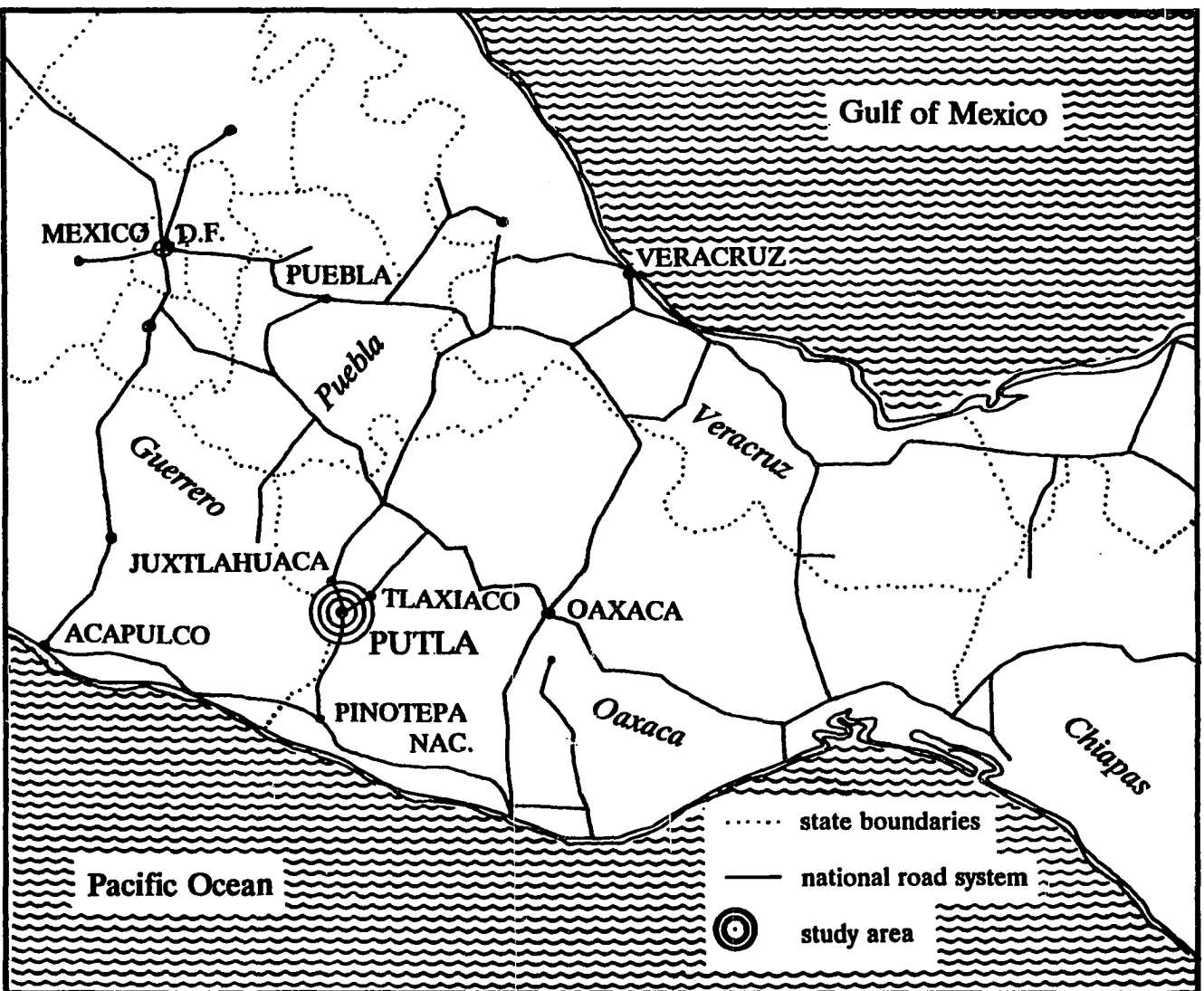
Arriving in Putla to live for the second time, I could not believe how much the town had grown in two years: more people, more taco stands, and more dirt piles, stones, metal rods and cement mixing ponds to supply the numerous construction projects on what had been vacant lots and agricultural lands. The map that I had of the town, which showed the community as a tightly-bounded entity, certainly gave no hint of its physical growth, its changes. Discussions stemming from Wolf's work about the problem of "treating named entities as fixed entities/bounded objects" were underscored (1982:7). How do you begin to describe and understand change and migration to and from a community when peoples' lives continually spill over what on a map demarks as its borders? The town called Putla occupies a particular terrain and its community members can tell you how to get there - its location - but even they cannot agree as to where the town begins or ends.

There have always been inseparable connections between Putla and the Mixtec region in which it is situated, and to varying degrees at different historical moments, larger

cities (such as Tututepec, Tenochtitlán, Mexico City, Puebla, and Oaxaca City), the state of Oaxaca, the Mexican Republic and other nations around the globe (Figure 1). The geographical fluidity of people for social, economic, and/or political reasons, on the one hand, disintegrates the notion of boundaries yet people's sense of "self" includes identification with particular geographical spaces: to be Putlecan, Oaxacan, Mexican.

During my second stay, I got a new map from the state tax office (Figure 2). The map depicts geographically the place called Putla yet a sense of fluidity emerges by the town's roads extending off in every direction, open and unending. Putla is linked to its closest neighbor without any divisional lines sharply separating the spaces. The map highlights the need to understand Putla's connections with other spaces and the people who occupy these spaces - friends, relatives, neighbors, business associates, government officials, and strangers.

The issue of boundaries and borders is complex. As Wolf shows, we cannot continue thinking about communities/nations or cultures/societies as "internally homogenous and externally distinctive," as "bounded objects" (1982:6) Yet there is something that makes us feel that 'who we are' is somehow different from 'those over there.' And 'who we are,' our self-conscious manipulation of identity, depends greatly on where we are. I remember the day a Putlecan working in a pizza shop in Atlantic City, N.J. gave my husband a free lemonade, calling him *paisano* (fellow countryman) - identifying with their common roots in a foreign country. How different from the times we have lived in provincial Mexico where my husband is called *chilango* by the local people -

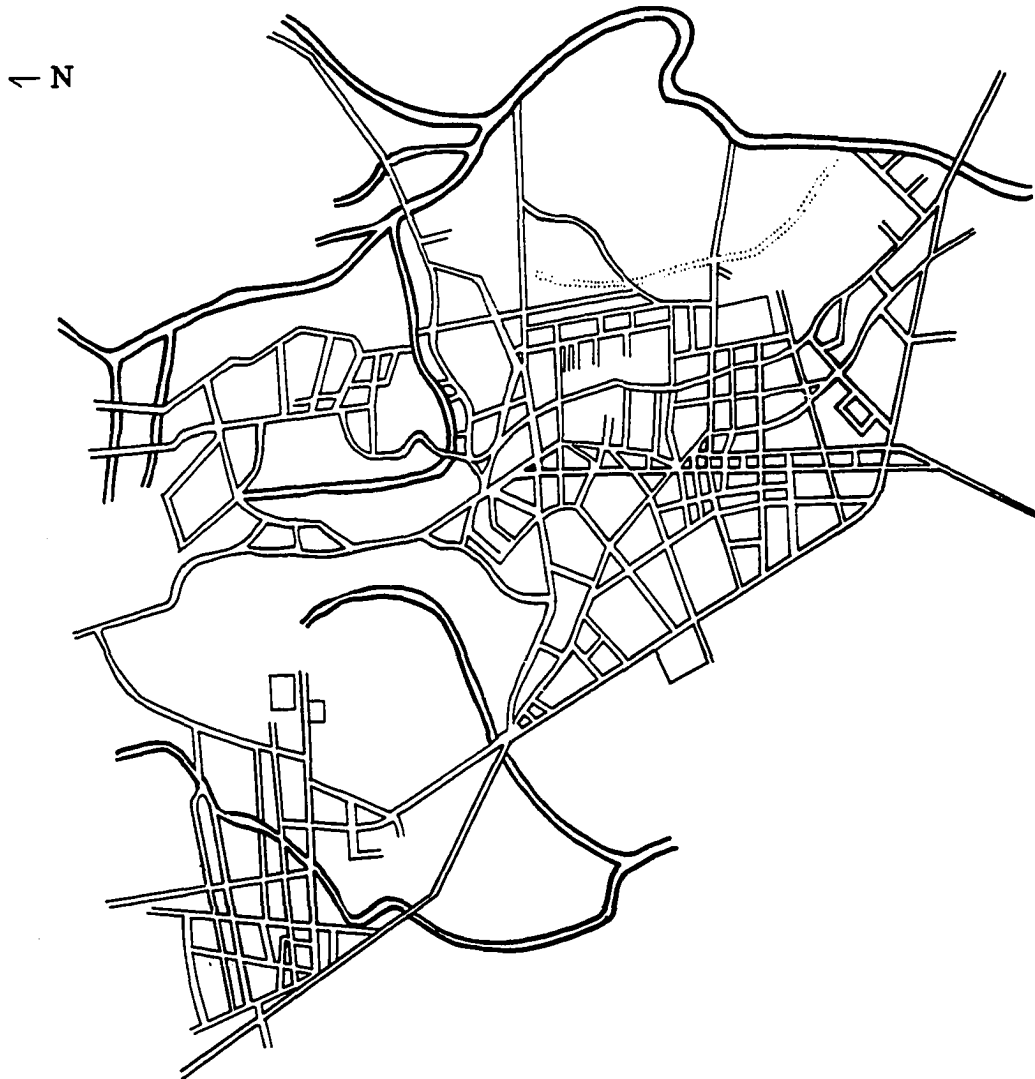


Source: García 1973

FIGURE 1: South-Central Mexico

**FIGURE 2: Putla de Guerrero, Oaxaca**

43



Source: Office of Recaudación de Rentas,  
Putla de Guerrero, Oaxaca

marking their differences. Our identities are in part rooted in geography. Borders play an important role in the distinguishing of 'us' and 'them.' But the lines are not fixed and closed, but rather flexible and fluid. The formation and the identification of 'who we are' are grounded in space and in time.

### **Putla in the Mixtec Region**

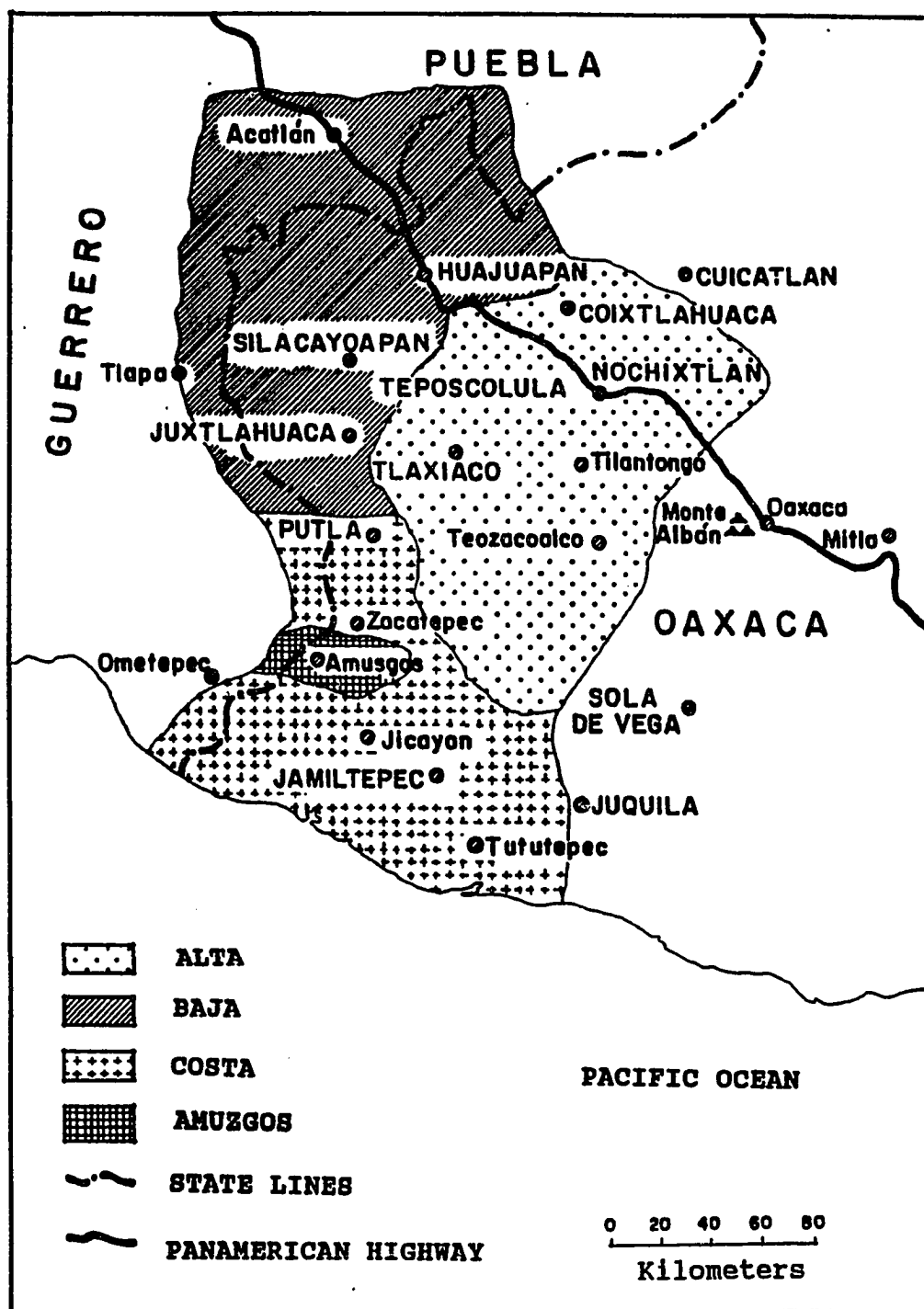
The state of Oaxaca is commonly described as a "crumbled sheet of paper," referring to its fragmented terrain of mountains and valleys. The state's fragmentation is also represented politically by its 572 *municipios* or counties, ethnically by the numerous indigenous groups and linguistically by the fifteen families of languages spoken by these ethnic groups (Greenberg 1989). Anthropological research in Oaxaca highlights the ethnic and linguistic diversity present in the state. By 1979, more communities in Oaxaca have been studied than in any other state in the Mexican Republic except for Chiapas; most studies focus on the indigenous populations (Chambers and Young 1979:49).

The town and district of Putla are located in the Mixtec region, an extensive and diverse region incorporating indigenous peoples (Mixtecs, Tacuates, Triquis, Amuzgos, Chocho) and *mestizos* (people of mixed European, Native American and/or African ancestry). The region extends from the western edge of the Valley of Oaxaca to the eastern side of Guerrero and from the Pacific Ocean to southern Puebla (Spores 1967:4). Scholars divide the Mixtec region into three subregions: the *Mixteca Baja* in northwestern Oaxaca, northeastern Guerrero and southern Puebla, the *Mixteca Alta*, east of the *Mixteca*

*Baja* to the edge of the Valley of Oaxaca, and the *Mixteca de la Costa* incorporating the southwestern coastal lowland of Oaxaca. The divisions are based primarily on geographical factors such as altitude and climate rather than social ones (Dahlgren 1954; Spores 1984).

The town of Putla is generally considered to be in the subregion of the *Mixteca de la Costa* (Figure 3) (Dahlgren 1954:22-23, Map II; Romero 1990:34; Spores 1967:7). The town marks the northern boundary of the *Mixteca de la Costa*. More importantly than its location in the *Mixteca de la Costa*, however, is its location in the Valley of Putla where the *Mixteca Alta*, the *Mixteca Baja* and the *Mixteca de la Costa* join; its position as a borderland has played a central role in its political and economic histories since pre-Hispanic times. The Valley of Putla has served as a political boundary between warring pre-Hispanic states, between colonial royal magistrates and provinces, and between post-Independence departments until the official creation of the district of Putla in beginning of the twentieth century (Dahlgren 1954; Gerhard 1993:436; Spores 1967:14; Valdes 1993:15,134). As a boundary between diverse ecological zones, the Valley of Putla has been, and is today, the site of an important regional marketplace, bringing together people from towns throughout the Mixtec region. The pre-Hispanic and colonial north-south trade routes which cross the western side of the *Sierra Madre del Sur* in Oaxaca, run through the Valley of Putla; the construction of the modern Mexican road #125 followed these routes (Dahlgren 1954:239; Flanet 1977:28). Emphasizing Putla's commercial role, some people say that the name comes from *los pochtecas*, referring to the pre-Hispanic

FIGURE 3: Subdivisions of the Mixtec Region



Source: Romero Frizzi 1990:35

merchants who traveled great distances selling their goods.

### **Indigenous Roots**

Research on the prehistory of the area that today comprises the district of Putla is limited to references in the Mixtec codices and ethnohistorical documents; no archaeological investigations have been conducted in the area (Spores 1984:10). Spores (1984:48) believes that Putla developed into a small kingdom (or city-state) sometime between 1000 and 1500 A.D. It was linked to other small kingdoms in the Mixtec region through a network of marriage and military alliances. In the fifteenth century, most of the people in the *Mixteca de la Costa* were subject to the kingdom of Tututepec, "one of the most powerful pre-Hispanic states in Oaxaca" that extended along the coast from Guerrero to Huatulco (Greenberg 1989:162).

There is disagreement as to whether Putla was under Tututepec's control or politically independent. Dahlgren (1954:190) reports that *el cacique*<sup>1</sup> of Putla was at war with Tututepec, constantly defending their independence; oral traditions recorded by Burgoa include Putla within Tututepec's domain (Gerhard 1993:436). Two things are clear however. First, Putla marked the boundary between the kingdom of Tututepec and smaller kingdoms in the *Mixteca Alta* (Tlaxiaco, Achiutla and Tilantongo). Second, Putla was the site of one of the most important *ferias* or fairs in the Mixtec region during late pre-Hispanic times. The grand fairs were held every twenty days and was a time for exchanging goods, for paying tributes and for worshiping the gods, especially the patron

of merchants (Dahlgren 1954:241,248-249).

Tibón (1984:169-170) recounts that the *feria* began as a result of the king of Achiutla's failed attack on Tututepec soldiers sometime in the middle of the fifteenth century. After the attack, the king of Tututepec sent his architects to build a grand marketplace in Putla in order to receive tribute from kingdoms to the north and to monopolize control over the intense trading between the regions. At this time, Putla is believed to have had a population of some ten thousand families. Years later, the kings of Achiutla and Tilantongo tired of paying tribute and began warring against the king of Tututepec. In the end, thousands died and the three kings announced a truce. The *feria* was terminated. The population at Putla declined and the town was eventually abandoned due to the end of the fair. Martínez (1883) following the history written by the priest Gay believes that the abandonment of the town was primarily due to the rivers flooding and the high humidity on the plain rather than the end of the fairs; the people of Putla moved to higher ground. The ruins of the pre-Hispanic marketplace are located in a wooded area on the valley floor, close to *Los Llanos de la Laguna* (Tibón 1984:180).

The Mixtec kings may have made peace but war returned to the region in the late fifteenth century provoked by Triple Alliance forces under the orders of Moctezuma I. The *Mexicanos* (aztecs) began conquering parts of the *Mixteca Alta* beginning with the city of Coixtlahuaca in the 1460s. By the 1480s *Mexica* control under the king Ahuitzotl expanded south in the Mixtec region, subjugating Putla and Juxtlahuaca (Dahlgren 1954:66-74). The *Mexicanos* had difficulty maintaining their authority; many Mixtec

towns resisted their control and rebelled. Not until the reign of Moctezuma II shortly before the arrival of the Spanish did the *Mexicanos* secure the mountain passes. They established military posts at Putla and Ayoxochiquilatzallan to fight against the armies of Tututepec (Gerhard 1993:163). Once again Putla marked the boundary between warring pre-Hispanic states.

The *Mexicanos* had little time to worry about the rebellious Mixtecs because a few years later in 1519 Hernan Cortes led the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica. Cortes sent exploratory and military parties to the Mixtec region in the early 1520s; the area soon after came under Spanish rule (Spores 1984:97). They gained control over the Juxtlahuaca/Putla region after Bernardino Vázquez de Tapia crushed a rebellion in late 1523/early 1524 (Gerhard 1993:164).

### **Turbulent Times: Putla in New Spain**

The arrival of the Spanish in the first half of the sixteenth century marked a time of profound economic, political, religious and social change for indigenous peoples. The introduction of Old World plants, animals and technologies transformed productive activities. A new system of law and political order subordinated the indigenous population to the will of the Spaniards. Coercive efforts to convert indigenous peoples to the religious belief system of the Spaniards led to the creation of new syncretic systems of religion to cope with Catholicism. Old World diseases ravaged indigenous populations.

Indigenous peoples' responses to the Spanish conquest varied across time and

spaces. In the Valley of Mexico, the Aztec empire collapsed under the initial conquest, fragmenting indigenous communities (Gibson 1964). In more peripheral regions, such as the Yucatan and the Villa Alta District in Oaxaca, indigenous communities preserved a degree of autonomy and isolation from the initial conquest (Chance 1989; Farriss 1984). Indigenous peoples in the Valley of Oaxaca held on to lands and titles in spite of Spanish attempts to control them (Taylor 1972). The conquest was never absolute. As Farriss (1984) demonstrates in her research on the Mayas, preservation of a central core of indigenous concepts and principles provided the framework within which modifications were made and new strategies of accommodation, negotiation and resistance emerged.

The Spanish policy of indirect rule allowed indigenous communities to continue self-governing under the auspices of Spanish officials. The official colonial policy of apartheid, seen by the Crown as a way to 'protect' indigenous peoples from Spanish abuses, functioned to maintain economic and social boundaries. These boundaries were under constant negotiation as indigenous peoples built syncretic economic systems based on their pre-existing forms of organization and in response to imposed European tributary and mercantile economies (Greenberg n.d.). Colonial political regulations insured Spanish domination in trade and in the extraction of labor and tribute from indigenous peoples but, at the same time, indigenous groups worked to reclaim and to defend their territories and their ethnic identities (Carmagnani 1988).

Putla and six outlying settlements, *estancias*, were placed under the *encomienda*<sup>2</sup> of the conquistador Antonio Aznar by the late 1520s. After his death in 1559, Aznar's son

of the same name gained control. When the son died, the land reverted back to the Spanish Crown sometime after 1570 (Gerhard 1993:164; Dahlgren 1954:36-37). Several of the *estancias* disappeared in a congregation in 1598. In 1600, two *estancias* of San Juan Copala, a Triqui community to the north of Putla, were moved to Putla (Gerhard 1993:165).

The Dominicans had religious control over the Mixtec region. Putla was first included under the parish of Tecomaxtlahuaca. In 1591, it was switched to the parish of Juxtlahuaca. Both parishes were under the bishopric of Oaxaca. Secular clergy replaced the Dominicans after 1706 (AGN 1591; Gerhard 1993:165-166).

Putla and its neighboring communities experienced a dramatic reduction in population due to epidemics. Cook and Borah (1968:32,38) estimate that the population in the *Mixteca Alta* dropped from 700,000 people at contact time to 25,000 people a century and a half later. Romero (1988:136) stresses that the epidemics were more devastating in *la Costa* region due to its tropical climate; viruses proliferated faster in tropical climates than in cooler ones. Putla is said to have had 50,000 people at the time of contact; after two epidemics, only 300 people remained (Tibón 1984:183). Whether or not these are precise figures, the point is clear that diseases coupled with harsh working conditions decimated the population of Putla in the sixteenth century.

The establishment of the colony of New Spain was to enhance the mother country's economy. Along with mining, other labor-intensive industries and commerce quickly began producing profits. Cortes gave his cousin's wife in Yanhuitlán silk worms in

1531, sparking the development of the silk industry. With the help of the Dominicans, sericulture spread rapidly through the *Mixteca Alta*. From the 1530s to 1580, the region became the most important silk producing area of New Spain (Borah 1943). The boom ended after traders began transporting inexpensive silks from China to Europe.

Putla remained peripheral to the silk boom. Productive activities in and around Putla concentrated on indigenous crops that had been grown for centuries in the hot and humid climate from Putla to the coast. Tribute in the form of cotton and cacao (from which chocolate is made) previously paid to indigenous kings, were now demanded by the Spanish. Europeans became hooked on chocolate, and cacao constituted a valuable export for Spain (Meyer and Sherman 1983:176). When the epidemic of 1545 drastically reduced the native population in the region, the *encomenderos* of the *Mixteca Alta* began pressuring their subjects for more cacao; native communities reinstated their old commercial networks to supply the new demands, networks which included people in the Valley of Putla (Romero 1990:65-66).

Tribute in cotton came in two forms: spun cotton or *mantas* (cloth). Spun cotton supplied the new *obrajes* (textile mills) in which indigenous peoples, primarily native women, working under heinous conditions manufactured a coarse cloth for everyday clothing in the colony (Vallens 1978:30). *Encomenderos* received a good price for *mantas* and spun cotton, enticing them to require both as a major part of the Mixtecs' tribute. As epidemics reduced the cotton-producing population, the Spanish began substituting other materials for cloth such as wool textiles (Romero 1990:62,66-67).

Indigenous products comprised the bulk of tribute in the coastal region. They also formed the majority of essentials supplied for daily needs in the *encomiendas*. Mixtecs provided the new colony with clothes, chickens, turkeys, salt, honey, chile, beans, corn, wax, and cacao (Rodríguez et al. 1989:146). The situation was modified through time by the expansion of Old World crops and livestock. By 1544 the growing of wheat and the raising of livestock were so successful that the Spanish demanded one-tenth of their annual yields as tribute (Romero 1988:123).

Socioeconomic changes resulting from the tribute requirements by Spanish authorities and from the dislocations due to epidemics, produced significant tensions in indigenous communities. The culmination of the pressures and tensions resulted in indigenous rebellions in the middle of the sixteenth century in the Mixtec region and in other regions in Oaxaca (Pastor 1987). To pacify the situation, the viceregal governor in 1558 ordered a reduction in tribute demands. In 1583, Putlecans got some relief from excessive tribute payments; the *corregidor* (local magistrate) of Huaxpaltepec was prohibited from excising spun cotton and basic supplies from the people of Putla (AGN 1583). Throughout the Mixtec region, maize production increased.

Beginning in the 1560s, solicitations for *estancias de ganado* (livestock ranches) escalated. Viceroy in Mexico City gave permission to local authorities in the Mixtec region to grant ranch lands (Romero 1990:82-84). In less populated areas, the amount of land dedicated to pasturage increased to feed the growing livestock population: *ganado menor* (sheep and goats) in the *Mixteca Alta* and *ganado mayor* (cattle) in the *Mixteca de*

*la Costa* (Romero 1988:129-131; Greenberg 1989:171). The reduction in the native population caused a labor shortage which restricted Spanish revenues. The switch to livestock production was in part a response to this shortage. A few shepherds could watch over large herds whereas silk or cotton production required more labor (Romero 1990:85; Greenberg 1989:174). For the local Spanish authorities, livestock enterprises became a way to increase their incomes in response to declining tribute (Greenberg 1989:171).

Of the eleven land grants for ranches around Putla that were recorded in colonial documents between 1563 and 1614, eight were for *ganado menor* and three, for *ganado mayor* (AGN 1563, 1581, 1584, 1588, 1589, 1589, 1590, 1590, 1592, 1606, 1614). Both Spaniards and indigenous *caciques* were granted lands. Indigenous communities defended their lands and owned vast herds throughout the Mixtec region. Many Spaniards had to lease grazing lands for their herds from indigenous communities (Romero 1990:188-216).

The encroachment of herds belonging to Spaniards on indigenous lands increased conflict between native peoples and the Spanish. Livestock often roamed without restraint, destroying natives crops; property boundaries were not respected and lands were stolen (Greenberg 1989:172; Romero 1990:333-334). In the mid-seventeenth century, the people of Putla began battling with the Jesuits of the *Colegio del Espiritu Santo de la Compañía de Jesús* in Puebla for all these reasons. The herds of cattle, sheep and goats owned by the *Colegio* grazed on lands around Putla. The animals continually entered Putla's communal lands, eating their crops and destroying their fruit trees. The *Colegio* claimed land that belong to the community. Finally in 1718, the *Colegio* was ordered to withdraw their

cattle and give Putlecans back their lands (AGN 1691-1718). The religious orders owned a great quantity of livestock and organized a network of ranches to support their *colegios* in New Spain; complaints about the destruction that their animals caused, proliferated throughout the Mixtec region (Romero 1990:209-211).

Conflict over land rights and herd destruction was not only caused by herds that lived in the Valley of Putla but also by the annual migration of sheep and goats through the valley. In the *Mixteca Alta*, the rainy season provided abundant herbage but in the winter, ranchers had to move their herds to rented pasture lands in the lower regions from Chalcatongo to the Pacific (Romero 1990:325,330). At the end of the seventeenth century, commerce in livestock began to assume a greater importance in Spanish and indigenous economic activities and so did the renting of pasture lands as animals multiplied. While raising livestock was a prosperous enterprise, the rapid growth of herds eventually led to the widespread ecological destruction of agricultural, pasture and forested lands throughout the Mixtec region.

Along with livestock, another Spanish-introduced industry, sugar production, became important in the Mixtec region in the beginning of the eighteenth century. One of the earliest sugar entrepreneurs in the region was Matias Vásquez Laines, grandson of a Spanish conquistador. In 1585, a royal grant issued land and water resources for the planting of sugarcane, for the construction of a sugar mill, and for a cattle ranch south of Chicahuaxtla, a Triqui community to the north of Putla (AGN 1585). Sugarcane was grown around Zacatepec south of Putla in the mid-sixteenth century (Rodríguez et al.

1989:147), but the sugar industry did not burgeon in the Mixtec region until a century and a half later.

Sugar mills were not as numerous in the Mixtec region as they were in other regions of New Spain. Sugarcane was grown and processed in the hotter climates of the *Mixteca Baja* and the *Mixteca de la Costa*, although it is mentioned in a few colonial documents of the *Mixteca Alta* (Spores 1984:126). Spanish families who had large livestock ranches owned most of the mills; only a few rich indigenous people and *mestizos* possessed mills. Sugar products were sold primarily in the regional market whereas livestock products were sent to larger cities in the colony, especially to Puebla (Romero 1990:136).

Products destined for regional consumption began to increase in importance as Spain struggled with economic and political problems at home and abroad. *Aguardiente* (a potent alcoholic beverage made from sugar) grew popular after the decline of wine commerce. Spanish merchants in the region of Putla most likely exchanged *aguardiente* for indigenous products (Romero 1990:318-319). Putla and near-by communities such as La Concepción, became some of the most important sugar-producing areas in the region. As with livestock, conflicts over land erupted as owners of the sugar mills tried to usurp lands from neighboring communities to expand their sugarcane fields (AGN 1716-1739).

Throughout the colonial period, the principal economic activity of the Spanish in the Mixtec region was commerce. Early on, as the *encomienda* system declined, merchants and *alcaldes mayores* gained control over regional economics.<sup>3</sup> They sought to

monopolize indigenous production and to extract Mixtec products for their commercial enterprises in the mercantile centers of Puebla, Oaxaca City and Mexico City.

Communities in the Mixtec region supported New Spain's urban population by providing meat, agricultural foods, leather, cotton and wool (Romero 1990:136,229-230).

Regional commercial activities did undergo profound changes yet the pre-Hispanic regional marketing system was not destroyed by the arrival of the Spanish. To the contrary, colonial trade reinforced the *tianguis* - "a cyclical marketing organization in which a series of marketplaces operate on a rotating basis on separate days of the week and in different locales" (Cook and Diskin 1976:16). As the population in Putla slowly recuperated from the loss of lives due to the epidemics, it regained its role as an important marketplace - the bridge between the mountainous regions and the coastal lowlands (Romero 1990).

Indigenous groups in the Mixtec region resisted and rebelled against Spanish demands and encroachments using various social, political and economic strategies to help preserve local autonomy and ethnic identities. Mixtec communities maintained communal lands and used Spanish institutions, such as *cofradías* (sodalities), to expand their material base and to maximize communal resources (Carmagnani 1988:109-179).<sup>4</sup> During the seventeenth century, Mixtec and other indigenous groups defended and recuperated lands and 'sacred spaces,' continually reconnecting their communication with the gods.<sup>5</sup> These processes were fundamental to the constant re-creation of ethnic identities - identities that had been eroding under the pressures exerted by the colonizing agents (Carmagnani

1988:50-51,223-226).

The magnitude and scope of production and commercial activities in the Mixtec region varied through time and space. New productive activities arose and declined in importance in accordance with the regional, colonial and global economic agendas. The dialectic between communities' production/marketing and colonial institutions shaped the content and pulse of Mixtec economic and social activities.

In the colony, new economic activities led to new class relations, only now race 'colored' those relations. While pre-Hispanic society was stratified by class and by ethnic divisions, and the divisions between ethnic groups were often profound, social hierarchies were not based on "race."<sup>6</sup> Warring kings in the Mixtec region were often relatives. Invading *Mexicanos* spoke a different language but had the same skin color. During the colonial period, a series of social hierarchies arose based on the intersections of class, race and gender differences.

The racial groupings - Spanish, Indian and African - obscure the complex socioracial stratifications that resulted from miscegenation in New Spain. As Chance demonstrates in his research, the number of racial classifications used to characterize the population of Antequera (Oaxaca City) expanded throughout the colonial period in order to describe the increasing nuances of skin color and to preserve "the social distance between the white power elite and the remainder of society" (Chance 1978:193). The intersection of race and class hierarchies was all the more evident by the late seventeenth century as money could 'whiten' a person's skin color.

Endogamy and hierarchy rigidly separated the polar types of Spaniard, Indian and Negro; but their miscegenated offspring were frequently able to rise within the *sistema de castas* (system of castas) and the class system, thereby becoming partially or wholly white (Chance 1978:196).

With the arrival of the Spanish in the New World, the introduction of race as a new category gave new form and meaning to discriminatory and subordinating practices. Unfortunately, these practices continue to plague the history of Putla, of the Mixtec region, and of Mexico from colonial times to today.

The racialized, violent masculinity of Spanish ruling practices demanded the labor of both indigenous women and men. Native women not only toiled with men in the mines, in the fields, and in sweatshops but were forced to provide sexual services. Sexual encounters between Spanish men and native women that resulted in the miscegenation of the population often took the form of rape. Native women's faces were branded "in order to traffic women through the slave market" (Blea 1992:40).<sup>7</sup>

After the mid-sixteenth century, women from Spain began arriving in the colony whose economic and political power over native women encompassed a racialized moral dimension. White 'purity' and 'virtue' of the 'superior' race which set Spanish women apart from indigenous women, were embodied in the image of the Virgin Mary, the 'civilized' Christian holy mother. The Catholic belief that all women should follow the Virgin Mary's divine example of humility, duty and blind devotion which both Spanish men and women actively supported (men by policing 'their' women, women by living virtuously and by condemning native women's lifeways), made all women subservient to men. Adherence to

the ideal models varied among women of different castes; not all women could afford to dedicate themselves solely to their husbands and children. Most had to work outside the home in order to survive (Lavrin 1985:42). Nevertheless, religious discourses and images helped enforce certain ruling practices. The hierarchy of religious saints served to legitimize the social hierarchy as well.

The production for commodity exchange and a reliance on commodities transformed productive relations in New Spain. Colonized peoples became producers and consumers of commodities which served the colonizers' need for both raw materials and markets (Etienne and Leacock 1980). Key to the transformation was the ability of the colonial powers to control social and biological reproduction. Changing regulations governing marriage, inheritance, labor recruitment, and production resulted in conflicts among the colonizing agents - the crown, the Church, the conquistadors, and other colonists - in asserting control over women's reproduction of heirs and workers. While European women were in short supply, indigenous women used opportunities to defend their collective interests (Nash 1980:145). As Spanish women arrived, the caste system and the patriarchal nuclear family emerged, supported by crown and Church rulings. Women experienced these changes differently, depending on their class position and ethnic identity.

In the *mestizo* and *creole* (Spanish born in the New World) upper and middle classes, women were socialized to dependency in male-dominated productive spheres. To the extent that Indian culture persisted, women continued to reproduce a social system in which kinship-organized labor force prevailed in semisubsistence activities (Nash 1980:136).

## **Independence to Dictatorship**

The founding of the new Republic of Mexico left little to celebrate in Oaxaca. By the end of the colonial period, the production of cotton and sugar in Oaxaca's coastal regions, of maguey and cochineal in the central valleys, and of cloth in the *Sierra Norte* was declining. Two major famines followed by smallpox epidemics at the end of the eighteenth century left many people dead and their survivors malnourished (Hamnet 1971:61). With the removal of colonial institutions and the exodus of Spanish capital, the economic and political situation worsened in Oaxaca as it did in the rest of the Republic. Cattle production decreased along the coast (Greenberg 1989:176). Indigenous towns in the Mixtec region began planting basic food crops on lands that had held their sheep and goat herds (Reina 1988:197). Declining yields of basic foods produced an agrarian crisis that did not recuperate until 1870; wheat had to be imported from Puebla to the Mixtec region for the first time (Reina 1988:228). Conflict and warfare which began in the fight for Independence did not cease until a century later.

As Morelos advanced through the Mixtec region in 1811-1812, the bulk of indigenous peoples and *mestizos* joined him and sacked wheat, cattle, and sugar estates (Hamnet 1971:70). After Morelos left, guerilla warfare continued in the region. In the Valley of Putla, Hilario Alonso, known as "Hilarion," declared himself a leader for Independence. He robbed and killed merchants, local authorities, and Spanish landowners in Putla, Cuesta de Santa Rosa, Canada de Yocoviche and Copala in retaliation for their

injustices and abuses against the indigenous population (Pastor 1987:532-534; Reina 1988:214).

The first time Mexican forces caught Hilarion, Iturbide made him a captain with a monthly salary of sixteen *pesos* with the understanding that Hilarion would stop his attacks. Iturbide then offered him a position guarding tobacco harvests and reporting contraband in the region. Hilarion turned down the offer and continued to fight against the Spanish who stayed after Independence. He kidnapped Tomás Esperón, the Spanish owner of the sugar mill in La Concepción and for this offense, was jailed in 1834. He escaped from jail and reappeared in Putla four years later with 230 Triqui men armed with machetes. They attacked the house of José María Carrasco for charging the Triquis of Copala usufruct rights of lands the Triquis believed were rightfully theirs. The Mexican forces retaliated brutally against the Triquis for supporting and hiding Hilarion until 1839 when Hilarion was caught and executed (Reina 1988:246-247).

Indigenous peoples and *ladinos* (people of Spanish ancestry) of Putla, Juxtlahuaca, Tlaxiaco, and other towns in the Mixtec region were embroiled in local conflicts over land, rents, fees and taxes from the 1830s to the 1850s (Pastor 1987:531-535). In 1843, Antonio Villacosta, leader of a *campesino* (peasant) rebellion in Guerrero, and his men attacked the town of Putla but quickly withdrew as hunger grew among the troops and the men needed to return home to plant their lands. In 1845, *campesinos* attacked and gained control of the garrison in Copala only to lose it soon after federal troops arrived. General Juan Alvarez understood the burdens suffered by the indigenous peoples and tried to

alleviate them somewhat by ordering the termination of fees extorted by local politicians and by priests for doing their jobs (Reina 1980:236-237).

The constant fighting caused numerous deaths but outbreaks of viruses and bacterial diseases continued to ravage the population. In 1833 a cholera epidemic swept over Oaxaca, striking the departments of Jamiltepec, Huajuapán and Tehuantepec the hardest. In 1824, when the state of Oaxaca was reorganized politically into 21 districts within eight *departamentos*, Putla became part of the district of Juxtlahuaca and demarcated the southern border of the department of Huajuapán. Huajuapán experienced a 5.2% population loss in 1833 due to the cholera epidemic. Cholera killed again in 1849 and 1850, only this time it was coupled with a measles epidemic (Reina 1988:222-223).

Political and economic reforms following Independence produced a "series of transformations as massive in scale as any introduced by Spanish colonialism" (Greenberg 1989:185). Foremost was the granting to indigenous peoples of full citizenship and the discontinuation of apartheid legal institutions. New voting rights were supposed to increase democracy but in practice, native peoples did not gain more political power. In Oaxaca, one of the reforms that undermined indigenous autonomy was the reorganization of local government by *municipios* (counties). The switch from indirect to direct rule made native communities lose most of their local autonomy by grouping them under a *municipio* where *ladinos* dominated and served as agents of the state. New *municipios* formed in the Mixtec lowlands included Putla, Juxtlahuaca, Huajuapán and nine others (Pastor 1987:421).

By the mid-nineteenth century, a series of national liberal reforms reduced the power of the church and the military, produced the country's first bill of rights, and prohibited corporate bodies from owning lands.<sup>8</sup> The aim of the last reform was to confiscate the massive landholdings of the Catholic church in order to sell small parcels to indigenous people and *mestizos*. The idea was to make Mexico a country of small landowners but only rich Mexicans and foreign investors had money to buy land. Moreover, many indigenous communities lost their communal properties since these lands also fell under the new law. The result was an even greater concentration of land in the hands of a few.

Loss of lands and autonomy led many Mixtecs to side with the French after they invaded Mexico in the 1860s. They helped build roads through the region for the French army in route to Oaxaca City (Esparza 1988:275, Berry 1981:88). In 1864, after the French suffered a defeat in Huajuapán, they arrived in Putla to recuperate. Volunteers from Putla reinforced the French unit only to be defeated again by a Mexican unit aided by the people from El Rosario, Putla's neighbor. In retaliation, Putlecans attacked El Rosario on Christmas Eve of 1865, killing many townspeople and disbanding the rest. Fighting resumed in 1866 when Porfirio Díaz surprised the Imperial *commandante* in Putla and permanently dispelled French forces from the region. Putla was forced to pay dearly for its previous attack on El Rosario (Martínez 1883:324).

After the exodus of the French, armed conflict in the region of Putla lessened for several years. Local disputes over land increased in the late nineteenth century as Porfirio

Díaz's power and control grew, and as European positivism became the prevailing doctrine in Mexico's political, philosophical, and social life. The commitment to laissez-faire development and foreign investments led to the 'modernization' of industries and of communication/transportation systems at the cost of poverty and misery to the majority of the population. In Oaxaca, new factories produced beer, cigarettes, glass and soap; a new railroad line connected Oaxaca to Puebla, via Tehuacan (Esparza 1988:278-279). But the poor got poorer; the effects of agricultural modernization were calamitous for peasant communities and for subsistence agriculture. Indigenous peoples and *mestizos* lost their lands, lived with rampant malnutrition and diseases, anguished under debt peonage and were tyrannized by Díaz's *rurales* (national police force).

As the case of Santa María Yucuiti (northeast of Putla) illustrates, the continuous defense of communal lands was mostly likely to end in suffering. From 1856 to 1896, the people of Santa María Yucuiti struggled to keep the Esperón family, owners of the sugar estate in La Concepción, from taking lands to expand their sugarcane fields. In the end, when José Esperón became governor, he sent an armed force to burn the town; 203 houses, 37 corn granaries, seven banana orchards, two sugarcane fields and all the coffee plants were destroyed (Esparza 1988:322).

Land conflicts were complicated affairs with the parties concerned using land titles and other documents from different eras to prove their claims. Beginning in the 1870s, the *cacique* of Putla was involved in several land litigations with people in Putla's neighboring communities La Laguna and El Rosario, with a doctor in Puebla and later, with several

Triqui communities. Several of the lands over which Putla and El Rosario disputed were the same lands that the doctor claimed, resulting in a litigation triangle (AGEO 1874, 1888, 1892, 1908).

Liberal reforms opened avenues for change but the reforms became obsolete before they had a chance to take root. By the end of the nineteenth century, laissez-faire capitalist doctrines mixed with Social Darwinism provided the rationale for Díaz' policies which advocated rapid industrialization financed by foreign capital and the expansion of the export economy. In Putla, the intensification of commercial crop production (tobacco and cotton) led to the reduction of lands used to grow basic food crops. National and foreign speculators seized lands to create new *fincas* (estates) as the demand for raw materials by the cigar/cigarette and the textile industries expanded nationwide (Vallens 1978:35-42). By 1907, the production of tobacco equaled one-half million kilograms in the district of Putla, making Putla one of the largest tobacco-growing districts in Oaxaca (Esparza 1988:307). Sugarcane, on the other hand, did not increase in production in the region as it did elsewhere in the nation; *trapiches* (sugar mills) continued producing *panela* (unrefined sugar) and *aguardiente* (alcoholic beverage) for local and regional markets (Rodríguez et al. 1989:173). The introduction of coffee, which resulted in a massive land grab by speculators in the coastal region of Oaxaca during this time, did not greatly impact the region of Putla until after the turn of the century (Greenberg 1989:188; Rodríguez et al. 1989:176-180).

Spencerian Darwinism dominant in Mexican positivism not only played in key role

in justifying Díaz' economic policies but moreover fostered and elaborated racist ideas and attitudes born in colonialism. Evolutionary schemes fit each person into her or his 'natural' niche. Díaz' circle of *científico* advisors believed in the 'natural' inferiority of the indigenous population.<sup>9</sup> Immigration policies encouraged the entrance of white foreigners and prohibited the entry of people of color in order to 'whiten' the population (González 1970:154).

*Científicos* served the interests of themselves, of the creole upper class and of foreign capitalism by enriching all three financially and by justifying the repression of the indigenous masses. However, other writings by social essayists, historians, educators and romanticists during Porfiriato challenged the hegemonic racist ideology. Alternative viewpoints arose from liberal philosophies which asserted *mestizaje* (the fusion of two races) to be the essence of the Mexican personality and the more 'advanced' selection on the evolutionary scale, combining the strengths of the two races. Some writers believed in the educability of the 'Indian' and argued for a uniform, free, obligatory primary education system. They condemned the abject conditions in which indigenous peoples lived. Debates about the role positivists should play in indigenous communities extended throughout Díaz' reign (Stabb 1959).

Workers also challenged Díaz and the *científicos*. Workers' organizations in factories and in mining grew and spread as the country industrialized. Socialist ideas also flowed from Europe, brought mainly by Spanish and Italian immigrants. Radical newspapers helped forge thousands of laborers into mutualist and cooperativist

organizations and from these groups labor strikes were organized. The textile and cigar industries had the largest number of strikes during the Díaz period. Mexican working-class women who comprised the majority of workers in the rapidly expanding cigar/cigarette industry and a large part of the textile industry labor force, assumed active roles in the growing labor organizations and in the strikes (Vallens 1978:51-59).

Women's lives underwent dramatic shifts in what were considered their "proper place" in society during the nineteenth century. Opportunities for women's education which began under the Liberal administrations, grew during the late 1800s as many middle- and upper-class women battled with those positivists who sought to deny them access to education and to professional occupations. Working-class urban women, many of whom had migrated to the cities after having their agricultural lands expropriated or after escaping debt peonage, joined the ranks of factory workers. Supposed feminine qualities such as docility, submission to patriarchal authority, and willingness to work long hours for little pay made them particularly appealing to the factory owners, especially the owners of the textile and cigar factories (Vallens 1978:7-8). A hundred years later, the 'gendered' rationale for using women as a cheap labor force in multinational export-processing industries in Mexico today echos the one used in the late nineteenth century.

### **The Revolution and Aftermath**

Tensions in the countryside and in the cities escalated into the Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century. As the Revolution began, military campaigns ignited in

almost half of Oaxaca's districts, including Putla. In 1911, *Maderistas* in the Mixtec region led by Ramon Cruz in Jamiltepec, Waldo Figueroa in Putla, Febronio Gómez in Tlaxiaco, Francisco Ruíz in Huajuapán, and Antonio Michaca in Silacayoapan fought against the state militia organized by Díaz' nephew, Félix Díaz, then governor of Oaxaca (Ruíz 1988:360). As the war progressed, Putla became the dividing line between the *Zapatistas* in the mountains to the north and the *Carranzistas* to the south. Putlecans solicited help from the Oaxacan governor Dávila who had tried to keep Oaxaca out of the war by proclaiming Oaxaca "a free and sovereign state" in 1915 (Greenberg 1989:191). Colonel Romero of the *Carranzistas* who had family in Putla, fought against the *Zapatistas* several times in the district of Putla and was considered a hero by the local people until his constant demands for money and for supplies angered the townspeople. Many Putlecans united under Isidro Montesinos to defend themselves against raiding from both sides; others joined the *Zapatistas*. Fighting continued for several more years in the district with each side gaining and losing control of the town of Putla (Atristain 1964).

Although people in Putla suffered the loss of many lives, the destruction of properties and the pilfering of possessions during the Revolution, they were fortunate to have good harvests of basic food crops unlike in many parts of Oaxaca where grains had to be imported. Putla ranked third in the state in *chile seco* (dry peppers) production, behind Cuicatlan and Villa Alta (Ruíz 1988:340-341). Tobacco harvests still provided a good income for the wealthier Putlecans.

The new Constitution of 1917 marked an end to Díaz' laissez-faire modernization

with reforms in land tenure, in labor rights, in education and in women's rights. A new kind of revolutionary nationalism emerged which transformed "the Mexican national culture as a *mestizo* culture" and "provided the ideological platform for a protectionist economy and a strong state" (Lomnitz-Adler 1992:9). There is much debate as to how little or how much life changed after the Revolution due to the gap between what was legally on paper and what changes were put into practice. Women, for example, gained the right to divorce, to equal authority in the family and to work outside the home but the new 1917 law was at odds with social reality. "The stigma of illegitimacy and the real barriers to women's access to higher-level professions and business opportunities remained" (Nash 1980:145).

Post-revolutionary reforms in land tenure and in education had little impact on the people in the district of Putla until the 1930s. Between 1920 and 1923, the number of solicitations for land in the district of Putla outnumbered all other districts in Oaxaca; twenty-two groups petitioned the agrarian commission in Oaxaca City for agricultural lands. Not one was granted. Thirty-nine percent of the state's total 133 petitions came from the Mixtec region - more than from any other region in the state. Obregon returned lands to only eleven groups in the state, of which one was in the Mixtec region (Ruiz 1988:408-411).

Agriculture remained the principal economic activity in the state of Oaxaca. The production of basic food crops (corn, beans, chiles and wheat) and of export crops (coffee, tobacco, sugar and bananas) continued comprising the greatest volume of

agricultural products in the decades following the Revolution (Arellanes 1988:75). Lands allotted to the production of coffee increased steadily in the district of Putla in the early twentieth century which obstructed peasants in their petitions for the restoration of lands. In 1932, only six of twenty-nine petitions from Putla had a favorable response due to the national policy of "respecting" coffee estates (Arellanes 1988:122-124).

The first public primary school opened in Putla in 1936. Most Putlecans were illiterate, as illustrated by the 98% illiterate rate of the members of twenty-four *campesino* organizations in the district of Putla in 1934 (Arellanes 1988:67). Previously, only wealthier Putlecans had the resources to educate their families in Catholic schools in Puebla, Mexico City and Oaxaca City.

One of the goals of the post-revolution government was to provide primary education for all citizens. Through education, the national government gained more control over the population by making school programs and rural teachers dominant in everyday activities and thus, diminishing the influence of the church. It was hoped that indigenous peoples would 'modernize' and assimilate into 'Mexican' culture. The incorporation of *indigenismo* into the official orthodoxy of the new regime was part of the nation-building process. Whereas Díaz tried to integrate indigenous peoples in the nation-state by brute force and by eradicating their lifeways, the post-revolutionary government believed that they could be integrated without 'de-Indianization.' "Integration would be planned, enlightened and respectful of that (Indian) culture" (Knight 1990:80).

Paradoxically, *indigenismo* was imposed on indigenous people from the outside, an elite

project which in no way addressed issues of real concern to native groups such as agrarianism which had popular roots. The building of a strong 'Mexican' nation resided in its 'mestization' according to the influential José Vasconcelos, Minister of Education from 1921 to 1924 and paladin of the 'cosmic race.' Both *mestizos* and indigenous peoples would contribute to form a hybrid culture of which the whole would be greater than its two parts (Knight 1990). *Mestizaje* and nationhood were equated.

Even though the romanticized version of the 'Indian' was revered and praised in artistic and literary circles in Mexico and the *indigenismo-mestizaje* doctrines formed a central part of the official state ideology, racist ideologies still permeated and placed blame on living indigenous peoples for obstructing progress and national development. 'Indianness' was, and continues to be, equated to inferiority and to the lack of material goods and of social competence. While native languages are officially endorsed, their use is unofficially discouraged. "Indians have remained subject to informal discrimination, based on anti-Indian prejudice, which is rooted in the subsoil of Mexican culture" (Knight 1990:100).

Discrimination was reinforced by observers from the United States who "attributed the post-revolutionary political disorder in the country to the racial composition of the Mexican people" (Sharbach 1993:13). Theories of racial determinism which claimed to "prove" white supremacy in intelligence, political behavior and stages of modernity dominated in academic circles and in the press throughout the United States in the early twentieth century and strongly influenced U.S. foreign policy for Latin American countries

(Sharbach 1993).

During the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), the national government became responsive to agrarian issues and to the rights of native peoples. The number of hectares redistributed in Oaxaca increased four times over the amount returned in the period between 1916 and 1934. In the earlier period, half of the hectares allotted were located in the state's central valleys. Under Cárdenas, 70 percent of the lands were restored to people in the districts of Jamiltepec, Juchitán, Tuxtepec and Putla. Between 1916 and 1940, restoration of 3602 hectares of land in the district of Putla included 993 hectares of rainfed agricultural lands, 2600 hectares of forested lands, and 10 hectares of irrigated lands (Ornelas 1988:144-147). After decades of fighting, the communities around the sugar estate of La Concepción had their lands restored. The plantation workers formed an *ejido* and changed the name of the community to Concepción del Progreso (AGN 1936).<sup>10</sup> But for many indigenous groups land conflicts continued. In 1937 the Triquis of San Miguel Copala began protesting against the invasion of their communal lands by landowners from Putla and El Rosario (AGN 1937). Their protests continue to this day and include lands that constitute half of the present-day town of Putla. Other Triqui groups from Llano de Nopal and from La Luz Copala have also been fighting with landowners from Putla and El Rosario since the mid-twentieth century (García 1973:176-180,198).

The economic and social conditions of agricultural production in Putla and throughout the state made peasant farmers vulnerable. "A drought, a bad harvest, a

plague, an unexpected accident or sickness, an onerous *cargo*, or death" forced families to find work elsewhere in order to earn the extra revenue needed for daily survival (Ornelas 1988:181).<sup>11</sup> Temporary migration to work on commercial crop plantations became the option increasingly used by peasant farmers; the majority migrated to plantations in Veracruz and in Chiapas.

In the Mixtec region, many families began producing goods woven from palm leaves. The district of Putla marked the southern periphery of the growing palm-weaving industry. While some men and women in Putla wove, most of the weavers were concentrated in Huajuapán, Silacayoapan and Coixtlahuaca where the massive erosion of agricultural lands made agricultural production a secondary activity. By 1937, 65% of palm hats produced in the nation came from the Mixtec region; all family members participated in the weaving of hats and other essentials such as baskets, brooms, fire-blowers, and *petates* (palm mats used for sleeping). *Ladino* agents from Tehuacan monopolized the buying in the region and paid families very little for their products (Ornelas 1988:177-178).

Increasing communications and transportation in Oaxaca bypassed most of the Mixtec region. The region was to be traversed by a railroad line from Puebla to the Chacahua lagoon on Oaxaca's Pacific Coast, but the project was abandoned due to legal problems and to new studies in 1936 and 1938 which refuted the profitability of the carbon/coal resources in the region (Ornelas 1988:140). One's feet and the horse would remain the main means of transportation in the region until the next decade when the use

of biplanes for personal travel and cargo transport began. While in some areas of Oaxaca, especially those with large export-crop plantations, began receiving telephone service, communications in Putla were limited to sporadic mail service and to the telegraph office. The town did have some electricity; a small privately-owned power plant provided enough power for a few hours of light in the evening to most of the town's residents. The residents would wait some thirty more years for the installation of public electricity.

Health seemed to be improving when a national vaccination program put an end to smallpox epidemics. However, malaria continued to kill more than 6000 people a year in the tropical lowlands of Oaxaca (Ornelas 1988:137-138). Still the population not only recuperated from its losses due to the Revolution but began to grow rapidly as life expectancy improved and the infant mortality rate dropped. Although health improvements suggest an improved standard of living, life in the countryside continued to be characterized by grinding poverty as well as lower life expectancies and higher rates of infant mortality than in developed urban centers.

In 1935, women founded the United Front for Women's Rights in Mexico City whose main goal was to win the right to vote. With Cárdenas' help, women did gain the right to vote in several states (Meyers and Sherman 1983:613). Women in Putla were basically unaffected by the women's movement early on. A women's committee was formed to welcome President Cárdenas to the region and Putlecan women seized the opportunity to discuss with him their most pressing needs.

### **The Mexican 'Miracle' ends in Economic 'Crisis'**

The corporatist model of rule institutionalized in the 1930s allowed the conservative regimes of the 1940s and the 1950s to adjust agrarian reform laws under the guise of 'modernization.' New amendments gave protection to wealthier landowners via the courts. Investments in agriculture including the large irrigation projects concentrated in the northern region of the country. Subsidies to modernized farmers and price controls for the major food crops left undercapitalized peasant producers vulnerable and unable to meet their needs. In order to keep peasant unrest curbed, the PRI presidents continued dispensing marginal lands or "paper rights to land that would require years of bureaucratic struggle for realization" (Foley 1995:62). Between 1940 and 1964, Mexican presidents granted a total of 94,438 hectares of rainfed and forest lands to people in the district of Putla (Segura 1988:243).

With the population multiplying and access to land limited, more and more peasants were forced to migrate seasonally to work on plantations as day laborers. Many people from Putla migrated to coffee plantations in Chiapas and in coastal Oaxaca. When the U.S. government initiated the *Bracero* Program in the 1940s and sent recruiters to Oaxaca, men from Putla jumped at the opportunity to work in the United States, believing that they would be able to increase their incomes sufficiently to invest in a small enterprise, such as coffee plants, when they returned home. Some did manage to save enough to build a home but most had their illusions crushed by the hard work and by the meager salaries paid. For many Putlecans, seasonal migration to the U.S. southwest at harvest time

became a way of life which continued after the *Bracero* Program ended in 1964; sons followed their fathers using the same contacts and work connections.

In the 1950s, coffee became the most important export crop in the state of Oaxaca, increasing production by 50% over the previous decade (Segura 1988:209). Coffee replaced tobacco as the principal cash crop grown in the district of Putla. With coffee prices on the international market reaching an all-time high, families planted small coffee orchards on lands that had previously been used for subsistence crops. In 1969-1970, coffee production in the district comprised ten percent of the state's production and one percent of the national (García 1973:47). Coffee producers saw little of the profit, however. Lacking the means to transport their product, producers had to sell to coffee buyers from Tlaxiaco, Juxtlahuaca and Putla.

By the 1960s, three sons of a Spanish merchant in Putla out-competed the other coffee buyers and monopolized the buying. Owning a fleet of tractor-trailers, the brothers carried coffee to Oaxaca, Puebla, Córdoba and Mexico City, returning with cases of beer and boxes of *abarrotes* (groceries and household goods) to sell to the coffee producers and to other people in the region. One son, estranged from his brothers, bought modern equipment to process the coffee beans in order to export coffee directly to the United States (García 1973:93). Owning the largest general store in Putla, he has extended credit for goods and loans to farmers at high interest rates, and has become wealthy by the same strategy used by many coffee buyers in the state: buying cheap and selling high (Greenberg 1989:193). The family also owned a small shop in which tobacco grown in the region was

processed into cigarettes. Most tobacco and cigarettes were consumed on the regional market. The production of tobacco for national companies concentrated in the region of Tuxtepec and in the central valleys of Oaxaca (Segura 1988:222).

Coffee, sugarcane, tobacco, chiles, maize, beans, bananas, rice and livestock comprised the majority of products grown and sold in the district of Putla. Some people boast that the best *arroz con leche* (rice pudding) was made in Putla with fresh milk from El Rosario, sugar from Concepción del Progreso, rice from the Hacienda de Guadalupe and wild vanilla from the Cerro de la Campana. Sugarcane grown throughout the district continued to be processed into *panela* and *aguardiente*. García (1973:103) notes in his research on Triqui communities that a large part of their sparse revenue earned from coffee was spent on *aguardiente*.

Commerce, the oldest and most constant profession in Putla, still centered on the exchange of goods from the Sierra with those from the lowlands. Pottery from the *Mixteca Alta* was traded in Putla for peppers, fish, and other lowlands products (Ravicz 1965:75). The construction of a network of roads in the 1950s in Oaxaca integrated regions and commerce expanded as transport became easier. In the 1940s, the arrival of biplanes made commutes between Putla and Acapulco, Mexico City and other regional towns faster and easier, but only a minority had access to this convenience. Air service declined after the completion of the road from Putla to the Mexico City-Oaxaca City highway in the late 1950s. Vehicle transport spurred the greater flow of goods and people in and out of the district.

During the 1960s, Mexico realized its most exceptional economic growth. The 'modernization' development strategy implemented by the government was touted as the "Mexican miracle." Only the 'miracle' was short-lived and only touched the lives of certain segments of the population. The development strategy produced grave economic problems including "increasing foreign indebtedness, overvaluation of the peso, and growing current-account imbalances" (Davis 1993:50). The priority given to industrialization and to export crop production at the expense of basic food crop production has caused an agrarian crisis that Mexico has yet to resolve.

The effects of national policies are witnessed in changes in production in Oaxaca in the last three decades: the continuing loss of basic crop lands to export crops and to livestock; the displacement of craft production by nationally-manufactured products; and the rapid increase in the exploitation of natural resources, especially the clear-cutting of forests (Piñón 1988:318). The web of changes has further impoverished a large part of the state's population, increasing the number of people under/unemployed and consequently, escalating the out-migration rate of the rural workforce.

Economic and social problems intensified in the decade of the 1970s. Movements by urban workers, peasants, unions and students across the country challenged the PRI government's corporatist control. The then-president Echeverría tried to avert the impending crisis "with moderate redistributive measures (including substantial wage increases) and populist rhetoric," only to be "faced with a revolt from the elites as well" (McCaughan 1993:13). Capital flight and declines in agricultural and industrial production

deepened the economic problems and heightened social unrest.

Ambitious government agricultural programs to help peasant farmers in Oaxaca were never fully executed due to time and money constraints (Piñón 1988:339). Conflict over land boundaries and exploitation of natural resources remained as some of the oldest and most common problems for rural communities in Oaxaca. In the late seventies in the districts of Putla and Juxtlahuaca, the Triquis formed the "Triqui Struggle and Unification Movement" to defend lands against local *caciques* and gain more control over their coffee production (Piñón 1988:365). The southern Sierra region produced more than 50% of the state's coffee production in the 1970s with the most important centers located in Putla, Juquila, Pochutla, Pluma Hidalgo and Miahuatlán (Piñón 1988:328). But the concentration of lands and wealth, and of control over production in these regions have marginalized a majority of the population. Without a means to adequately support the family, people migrate both permanently and temporarily to national cities, primarily the Federal District, and to the United States. Violence stemming from conflicts over coffee lands has also added to the out-migration rate with people fleeing their communities in fear of their lives. The state of Oaxaca has one of the highest out-migration rates in the country (Méndez 1985).

Mexico's postrevolutionary government believed that oil reserves discovered in the late 1970s would alleviate the mounting economic, political and social crises but ironically the dependence on oil aggravated the situation. Export and manufacturing production continued to drop or stagnate (McCaughan 1993:14). In 1982 the international price of oil

fell, cutting Mexico's revenues in half and leaving the country unable to pay on its foreign debt. The economic crisis of 1982 has caused a dramatic deterioration in the standard of living for most of the Mexican population due to spiraling inflation, the devaluation of the peso, the reduction in wages and salaries, and the increase in interest rates (Alvarez and Mendoza 1993:32). To solve the severe crisis, the government prescribed a neoliberal economic strategy - an austere economic adjustment program - endorsed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The results of the strategy

to convert Mexico into a diversified export-driven economy have involved increased subordination of state economic policies to the interests of transnational finance capital, a reduced economic role for the state, further integration into the U.S. market, a reduction of labor costs and greater flexibility in the conditions of exploitation, the abandonment of key features of the old corporatist model of domination, and efforts to free the PRI from the constraints traditionally imposed by corruption, the purchased loyalty of labor bureaucrats, and the power of local party bosses (McCaughan 1993:21).

The goal of the strategy to resolve the 'crisis' for all Mexicans, has yet to materialize.

While new neoliberal economic policies may have revived GNP growth, controlled inflation and renewed profit rates, the 'crisis' perseveres and the price of the structural adjustment program is being paid primarily by the working class.

## **Conclusion**

Since pre-Hispanic times, people living in the region of Putla have actively adapted, negotiated, and resisted political, economic and social changes. Indigenous lifeways were not eradicated by the initial Spanish conquest. To the contrary, indigenous groups continued to pursue their own cultural projectories. As Carmagnani (1988:229-

238) argues, the collapse of indigenous autonomy in Oaxaca was not a slow process but rather a drastic rupture during the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the series of state and national liberal reforms initiated by the construction of the new nation-state. However, even with the loss of autonomy, many ethnic identities have survived and ethnic groups continue to defend their lands and cultural practices.

As new processes impact local, regional, state and national arenas, boundaries and borders transform. The region of Putla has fluctuated in its position in the larger political and economic systems. In pre-Hispanic and colonial times, the region was an important center of production and of commerce. Later, it became more marginalized in the state and national spheres with moments of greater integration, such as during the decades of coffee production. Through the years, however, the town of Putla has sustained its role as an important center of regional commerce, bridging the diverse ecosystems of the Mixtec region and, to varying degrees, connecting the region to national and international politics and economies.

#### Endnotes:

1. During the colonial period, the Spanish used the term "*cacique*" to refer to hereditary indigenous ruler, adopted from the Arawakan term meaning "native chief." During the nineteenth century, the term evolved to mean "local political boss."
2. An *encomienda* was a grant of an indigenous town(s) to a Spanish colonizer, *encomendero*, who held "the right to collect tribute and exact labor services from Indians, presumably in exchange for seeing to their spiritual welfare" (Greenberg 1989:256).
3. *Alcalde mayores* were Spanish officials in charge of regional political districts, the

*alcaldia mayores.*

4. *Cofradías* had their own herds and fields that were worked communally, mirroring the communally worked fields and communal herds of the community's civil government (see also Greenberg n.d.).

5. Sacred spaces included not only temples or shrines within civic centers but also special ritually-significant areas such as caves, rocky promontories, mountaintops, rivers and shorelines. Moreover, for indigenous peoples, land was not a simple commodity, it was fundamentally sacred. Native peoples believed that land, nature and the gods were interconnected; communal rituals served to insure the link between these relations. This cosmological world view required indigenous peoples to defend their territories from the intrusion of outsiders (see Greenberg 1994, n.d.; Carmagnani 1988).

6. As noted in the previous chapter, the homogenization of different indigenous ethnic groups as constituting one 'Indian' race resulted from the processes of their subjugation by European conquerors (see Wolf 1982:380). Racial differentiation was assumed to be the result of biological rather than cultural differences among human groups.

7. The infamous story of "Malintzin," a noble indigenous woman who was given to Cortes and forced to give birth to the new *mestizo* race, epitomizes the situation many native women had to endure. A number of Chicana feminist writers reveal how the story of Malintzin has been manipulated to reinforce gender hierarchies then as well as now. Malintzin became *la Malinche*, the traitor, Cortes' helper in the conquest, symbol of "sexual weakness" and "interchangeability." Malintzin personifies women's openness to sexual exploitation - a belief that continues to mark Chicana women as "abusable matter, not just by men of another culture, but all cultures including the one that breeds us" (Alarcón 1981:184).

8. These liberal reforms were intimately tied to an emerging national capitalism inspired by European and American models.

9. For example, one of the *científicos*, Francisco Bulnes, asserted that 'Indians' are a weaker race due to their diet: wheat-eaters (Europeans) are naturally superior due to the nutritional excellence of the grain; rice-eaters (Orientals) are inferior because rice is inferior to wheat; and corn-eaters (Native Americans) are the most inferior because corn lacks several essential nutrients (Stabb 1959:419).

10. An *ejido* is a type of communal land tenure system that was set up under the agrarian land reform in the 1917 Mexican Constitution. The purpose of the reform was to return common lands to communities, although the use of such lands is not determined solely by

community members, but is subject to regulation by a national bureaucracy, i.e. the *Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios*.

11. Here a *cargo* refers to an office in the civil-religious hierarchy.

## BEFORE THE ROAD: PUTLA AT MID-CENTURY

I was always slow getting up before sunrise. Mother had to yell two or three times before I was awake. Grandmother would be grinding corn and mother making the fire. As the oldest, I had to help them with all the work. My favorite job was watching the fire. I used a *soplador* (palm fan), like this, to control how it burned. Too much air and the wood would burn too fast. Too little, it would die out. Mother and grandmother made tortillas everyday to sell in the market. Dad had some goats near Tierra Colorado and helped grandfather in the *milpa* (cornfield) but he wasn't around all the time. Grandmother always said he couldn't stay put longer than three days. Sometimes he'd go to Silacayoapan, where my grandmother and aunt lived. He always brought me, my sister and brother something special when he was gone a long time. One time he gave us new silk ribbons for our hair and my brother, his first leather belt. We were so excited... When I was thirteen, I'll never forget that morning when everything seemed strange. The sun had risen and as the light came in the open windows of our little house, I could see my uncle and two oldest cousins talking to grandfather. We only had two rooms then, dirt floors and a few chairs and a table that grandfather had made. I was in the kitchen with mother and grandmother who were working in silence. Mom looked worried. Suddenly they (uncle and cousins) grabbed their shotguns and jumped on their horses. Dust flew everywhere as they rode out of town fast. Mother started yelling at Pedro to fetch some water. Pedro has always been a bit *distraído* (absent-minded), but mother never spoke so harshly to him as she did that morning. He shuffled down the dirt path to the river. I slowly rolled up the *petates* except for the one on which Gaby played. Grandfather sat in the hammock motionless with his head cupped in his hands. He had killed two iguanas yesterday for *tamales* and they sat unskinned. Finally grandmother motioned him to come have a cup of hot chocolate and some *pan de yema* (bread) that Aunt Lupita had left over yesterday. Uncle Francisco used to bake wonderful bread which Aunt Lupita sold in the market alongside my mom under the biggest mango tree. She always gave us some bread when we passed by there on the way home from school. Anyway, I later discovered that it was on this day my mother and grandparents learned of my father's shooting. By the time my uncle and cousins got to Chilapa my father was dead. He had gotten into a fight in a *cantina* (bar) and was shot. They couldn't even get his body because no one knew where he was buried or, at least, that's what they said. My mother's heart became sad and even though she was only thirty-four, she was never with another man. She always told us that when you marry it's until you die. We've never had any divorces in our family, and everyone has been married in the church. I think that's why people

respect us. My mother set a good example. She worked hard to raise us... Putla was a much smaller town before the road. Everybody knew everybody and you could count on friends and family to help when you needed it. We didn't have much but it didn't seem to matter. At night we often listened to stories my grandfather would tell about the spirits and ghosts who roam around here or stories about the Revolution which Pedro loved. He (grandfather) was only a boy then but he always managed to put himself in the middle of any battle. My grandmother didn't like him to tell these stories. She said it was bad for children to hear such things. After my father died, he never told another bloody story...  
*(Putleca, early 60s)*<sup>1</sup>

In 1950, less than 3000 people lived in the town of Putla (INEGI 1950). The town's cobblestone and dirt streets were lined with simple wood and adobe homes. A few larger, more elegant houses and the town's public office stood in the middle of the community around the kiosk. There was no public water or drainage system. Some Putlecans had wells in their backyards, but most had to carry water in metal buckets or clay jars to their homes from a river or a neighbor's well. Kerosene lanterns and a few electric lights powered by a privately-owned generator in the Hacienda de Concepción provided Putlecans several hours of light at night. Few people stayed up late, however, since most earned a living by subsistence farming and rose at daybreak to start work.

The Mexican state had begun increasing its influence and control throughout the nation since the Revolution, but Putla was, for the most part, disengaged from the larger political and economic system. Coffee production tied the community to the international market but only through a group of intermediaries; producers sold their coffee beans to local buyers who established and maintained business relations in several cities. The focal point of the local economy remained the *tianguis*.

People came from rural communities throughout the region to sell or exchange locally-produced foods and goods in the weekly *tianguis*. Vendors laid their products on blankets in the open-air market under the shade of large mango trees. Agricultural products comprised the bulk of commodities sold accompanied by a modest range of regional commercial goods, such as *petates*, baskets, *metates* (stone grinding vessels), and ceramic jars, bowls and *comales*. Imported merchandise (e.g. hardware, leather saddles, refined sugar, candles, and manufactured cloth and clothing) was found only in the larger general stores, owned by the wealthier merchant/landowning families. Consumption patterns had changed little since the turn of the century. Corn, beans, chiles and fruits formed the basis of the diet supplemented with milk, breads, sweetened coffee and hot chocolate, and sometimes domestic and wild meats. Most Putlecans wore manufactured clothing or clothes that they made from store-bought fabrics but few owned shoes other than *huaraches* (leather sandals).

Times were slowly changing, however. Before the late 1940s, goods were carried in and out of the town on the backs of mules and people. By the 1950s, biplanes begin bringing more external goods to the region, such as steel machetes made in Monterrey (Tibón 1984:175). For those who could afford it, air transport made personal travel faster and easier. But as a Putlecan pointed out in an interview in the late 1950s, increased accessibility to the region did not modify the way most Putlecans thought or lived.

*Putla, aislado e incomunicado hasta hace poco, se alcanza ahora en setenta minutos de vuelo. Un brinco de sólo 280 kilómetros desde la capital; pero, en el tiempo, la distancia es de dos siglos. Putla es una muestra viviente del México del*

*siglo XVIII...Sólo que ahora los gachupines y los criollos forman un bloque compacto con los mestizos para explotar a los indios.*

(Ricardo Martell, cited in Tibón 1984:157)<sup>2</sup>

Putla was not only a commercial center for the region but was also the seat of political and economic power and control. Following the Revolution, Putla, like the rest of Oaxaca, was "left primarily to tend to its own affairs" (Murphy and Stepick 1991:43). The local elite maintained its position despite the few successful attempts to redistribute their lands.

My father owned a lot of land - all cattle ranches around Mesones, Las Huertas, Putla, and El Rosario. He bought calves and sold them grown in the Mixteca Alta. We lived here in Putla but would ride to the other ranches on horseback with big palm leaves held above my sister and my heads to give us shade. My sister and I would bathe in milk to keep our skin pure. On the *ranchos*, we used to play with *mozos* whose parents worked for our father until we got a little older and it wasn't proper. We would watch them drank milk out of leaves and eat with their hands... Mom died when I was six so Dad sent us to live with our grandmother in Mesones but we hated it so he sent us to a convent in Oaxaca for a proper education. He loved to read and he always bought us lots of books. I wanted to be a doctor but he told me, "only men are doctors" so I learned to sew. I started the sewing school here thirty years ago and I still love to teach. It helped too when times got bad. Many years ago, my father's *trapiche* was stolen from him. He worked hard everyday, sunrise to sunset, and then suddenly the government said he had to give some of his lands to those *indios*. What a terrible day. You know, Cárdenas was not the great president that everyone says he was (*Putleca*, early 60s).

The 1950 Mexican census lists nine foreigners living in the *municipio* of Putla. In the town of Putla, several of these foreigners were Spaniards. They and the descendants of Spaniards, Italians and British comprised the core of the local Putlecan elite. They owned large haciendas throughout the region but lived primarily in their townhouses in Putla alongside or on top of their general stores. A strict separation of classes was maintained

not only economically but also politically and socially. The local elite men controlled the town's presidency. Conflict and fighting pervaded local elections as wealthy families vied for control. Sons and daughters followed their parents' exogamous marriage customs, many seeking mates while in private schools in Mexico City, Puebla or Oaxaca City.

Elite families participated in community festivals and service activities. They often served as *mayordomos* (festival sponsors) of religious celebrations, but they never intermingled with non-elite community members in private social occasions. A daughter of one the wealthiest families recalled the first "mixed" dance (one in which all community members were invited regardless of class) in 1965. She desperately wanted to attend but her father refused.

I don't think any of the (elite) parents allowed their children to go. Maybe a few secretly went. It was a big thing for the town (*Putleca*, late 50s).

When elite families had to perform *tequio*<sup>3</sup> service, they completed their community obligations by hiring other Putlecans to do the work in their names.

Although the elite class and the rest of the *mestizo* population rarely interacted socially, they did share racist beliefs that they were superior to the indigenous peoples in the region. Few indigenous people actually lived in the town of Putla, but many worked on Putlecan *haciendas* as day laborers and in their houses as servants, especially Triquis from neighboring communities. Putlecans did not bother to learn Triquis' names, calling the men "Tatani" or "José" and the women, "María." Parents and children of all classes called Triqui adults by the informal *tú* (Tibón 1984:164).

*Sobresale, en Putla, nuestro lamentable complejo de superioridad sobre el indio... No sólo los mestizos acomodados, sino también los pobres.*

(Ricardo Martell, cited in Tibón 1984:164)<sup>4</sup>

Indigenous people, on the other hand, addressed *mestizos* and *ladinos* by respectful titles: *el Señor, la Señora, or la Señorita*. They stepped to the side of the street or path and cast their faces towards the ground whenever a Putlecan passed by. Few Triquis challenged the local elite even though they were routinely exploited in commercial transactions by these merchants (García 1973:31,99). Protests over encroaching Putlecan landowners have been ignored by local officials. The Triquis did not hesitate, however, to kill animals owned by non-Triquis who grazed on their communal lands, and Putlecans rarely entered their communities for fear of their lives. Putlecans believed the Triquis to be "*salvajes*" (wild, savages) since they had scant material goods and were illiterate and monolingual.

By 1950, almost half of the Putlecan population was literate. Most children started elementary school but many only finished a couple grades. Many parents believed that their children had enough education once they could write their names and the alphabet, and had acquired some basic reading and arithmetic skills. Their labor was needed to help support the family. Boys followed their fathers and grandfathers to work in the fields or to care for the livestock. Girls helped their mothers wash clothes in the river, shell and grind corn to make *tortillas* or *tamales*, and care for the animals in the backyard. They often accompanied their mothers to the market to sell homemade foods or produce that their families had harvested. Parents held absolute authority over their children.

We always obeyed our parents and grandparents, did what we were told to do.

When visitors came to the house, we were not allowed to talk. When my brother was little, he once got mad at our cousin and began yelling at him in the house where our parents were talking. My father took him outside and whipped him - he couldn't sit down for the rest of the day. It was different back then (*Putleca, mid-60s*).

Patriarchal authority along with age marked the social hierarchies of the family.

Family honor depended on women's virtue and men's ability to protect their reputations.

Putlecan women spent most of their time with other women, especially their *comadres*<sup>5</sup> and other female relatives. Rarely was a woman in the company of a man who was not a relative. Young women were always chaperoned when a young man came to visit or when the young couple went to a dance or any other social event.

At the center of the family, Putlecan women were in charge of teaching morals and values to the children. Their actions were scrutinized by community members. Any "improprieties" a woman or her children committed became fuel for community gossip and often led to violence. Men adhering to ideas of *machismo* (manliness) felt obliged to defend his family honor "with a gun if necessary." Men were not subjected to the same standards set for women. They were expected to have illicit relationships because of their "*sangre caliente*" (hot blood). Sexual prowess was an important element in the defining of a man's manliness. In the region of Putla, the practice of having lovers who bore illegitimate children was wide-spread and caused disputes, often bloody, over inheritance rights once the father died. Sometimes properties were distributed among both legitimate and bastard children.

My father had many lovers. That's why my mother took my brother and left to live

in D.F. She couldn't stand to see them pregnant. I lived with my aunt and father here in the big house and worked in his four stores...After he died, everyone started fighting. People I didn't even know came to claim part of his lands and money. I didn't fight so all I got was this house and some land near La Laguna. I should have inherited everything since I'm his only legitimate child in Putla. But the law isn't the law, you know, not now, not then. Now I wished I had fought for it. Not for me, but for my children (Putleca, late 50s).

Even with conflicts and turmoil, the family was, and continues to be, the fundamental social unit in Putla as elsewhere in Mexico. One's identity in the community was to a large extent defined by one's family.

Before the construction of the road which linked Putla to the larger road network, the rhythm of daily life in the community was essentially rural. People rose with the sun and went to bed soon after it set; the agricultural cycle defined the passing of the year. Economic activities centered on crop production, animal husbandry, and limited commerce with agrarian communities throughout the region. As peasant-vendors, their sources for cash were minimal. Wealth was concentrated in the hands of the local elite. As the small town's population slowly grew, more and more Putlecans found themselves without land or unable to produce enough to support their families by subsistence farming. For many, the solution was to migrate. Most joined the multitude of rural citizens who made their way to a big city, especially to Mexico City. For those who remained, changes in Putlecan lifeways were to come at increasing speed once the road was completed.

#### Endnotes :

1. *Putleca* is a Putlecan woman and *Putleco*, a Putlecan man.

2. "Putla, isolated and out of touch until a few years ago, can now be reached by a 70 minute flight. A jump of 280 kilometers from the capital (Mexico City); but, in time, the distance is two centuries. Putla is a living example of eighteenth-century Mexico...Only now it's Spanish descendants in alliance with mestizos who exploit the Indians."

3. *Tequio* was an obligatory system of community work. Families took turns helping to clean and repair public buildings and spaces, such as the cemetery, school, kiosk and roads.

4. "It excels, in Putla, our lamentable superiority complex over the Indian...No only the wealthier mestizos but the poor ones as well."

5. *Comadre* is the term used to mark the relationship between a mother and the women who are god-mothers of her children.

## **AFTER THE ROAD: TRANSFORMATIONS IN PUTLECAN LIVES AND IN THE TOWN OF PUTLA**

### **Introduction**

On a Sunday morning during Mass, the local priest in Putla implores the members of his congregation to take care of the land that God entrusted to them. Two banners hang down on each side of the pulpit painted with vibrant tropical scenery and the words "protect" and "preserve" in bold letters across the bottom. After half an hour of reprimanding the members of the congregation for their flagrant disregard of "God's gift" and for their indiscriminate consumerism, the priest wipes the sweat from his brow and breathless, gives the benediction. The people shuffle out the church doors, anxious to get on with the most important business of the day - marketing.

Sunday is the main marketday in Putla. The streets are lined on both sides with people selling their goods: dried fish and shrimp from the coast; chiles, tomatoes and *cilantro* from the Copalas; plastic containers, chairs and metal cookware from Puebla and the Federal District; bushels of apples from the Tarahumara region in Chihuahua. People pour into the town to join the local residents in their weekly bargaining. Some vendors come as early as Friday evening to find a good spot to set up shop on the town's newly paved streets. By Sunday evening as the last pick-up trucks overloaded with people head out of town, the streets become quiet. Discarded potato chip bags, ice cream wrappers, plastic soda bags and straws, rotted vegetables, fruit skins, and other refuse from the merchants' booths are the reminders of the day's busy activities. Content with their sales

but grumbling about the mess, the townspeople complain about the authorities and their inability to do something about the trash that covers the streets.

When I returned to Putla in 1993 after a two year absence, I was shocked and dismayed by how much trash had accumulated in and around the town. I discovered, however, that a local ecology group, *La Agrupación Ecologista Lugar de Neblina*, had formed in the beginning of the year to find a solution to the growing pollution problem. By the time I arrived, the group was busy spreading their message of reducing consumption and recycling containers in order to clean up the town. The priest had donated the use of the church courtyard as a temporary recycling collection center. Seeing the small piles of glass, cardboard, and metals ready for transport to a recycling center in Puebla made me enthusiastic about the group's plan of action. I became more so while conducting a survey for my own research and inadvertently, gathered information that I thought supported the goals of the *Agrupación*.

One of the questions that I asked residents was to describe the things that they liked and disliked about their town. While I expected a wide assortment of answers, people repeatedly stated that they liked the natural beauty of Putla's countryside and its rivers, and they disliked the trash thrown everywhere which was destroying the area's harmony. Of the families with whom I spoke in the survey, a quarter ranked ecological problems as their number one concern; over half listed trash, *aguas negras* (contaminated waters), and the cutting of forests as three of the town's biggest problems. I believed that if the people are genuinely concerned about the pollution problem, then the *Agrupación*

should be able to get the townspeople rallied behind their ideas and solutions. But it never happened. Only a few people came to their meetings. Many of the townspeople not only failed to support the *Agrupación* but some even belittled the group's efforts. My curiosity as to the contradiction between people's beliefs and desires versus their actions led me to examine how and why people would increase consumption in a time of "economic crisis"; why they would resist a campaign that supported their desire for a cleaner Putla; and what, if any, were migration processes role in these paradoxes.

### **Increasing Integration into the Nation-state and the Global Economy**

**"After the road, everything changed..."**

In the late 1950s, after the completion of the paved road from Putla north to the Mexico City-Oaxaca City highway and south to Pinotepa Nacional, movement of goods and people in and out of the region increased as trucks, buses and cars began replacing the costlier air service and the slower pedestrian and equestrian forms of transport. Trucks carrying nationally-manufactured goods began invading the town. Many of the cheaper products eventually out-competed locally-produced goods. Factory-made sodas put an end to the local family-run *gaseosas* (carbonated fruit drinks) business. Pre-packaged foods filled stores' shelves along with bundles of synthetic cloths, factory-made clothing and plastic shoes. Mattresses replaced reed mats. Hand-made *tortillas* which took hours to prepare were replaced by *tortillas* that pop out of a machine in minutes. The promotion of metal pots, glass dishes and plastic containers as more durable and more sanitary reduced

pottery sales. Homes made of concrete and steel rods began replacing those made of adobe and tile. Promises of increased harvests by the use of new chemical fertilizers and pesticides drew farmers to the credit lines.

Public works initiated in the town in the 1960s included the installation of electrical power, the piping of water from the rivers to private holding tanks and the construction of a small hospital. In the 1970s, a drainage system was laid to carry sewage from the town underground to the river; new telephone lines expanded service to private homes. As vehicle transport grew, new mechanic shops and tire service stores emerged while leather saddles, bits and other horse supplies withered. Car and truck owners began demanding better roads; concrete streets started replacing the old cobblestone and dirt streets.

Putla serves as the political-administrative center of the district (the *cabecera*) as well as the link with Mexican national society. It is the center of regional commerce and public services. The town now has dozens of permanent specialized stores covering a wide spectrum of products including hardware, clothes/shoes, toys, furniture/appliances, groceries, stationary, agricultural supplies, music/videos, and so on, unlike the smaller villages in the district which typically have only one or two small general stores. Putla is the center for education in the district with schooling beyond the elementary level: two junior high schools, one high school (*COBAO*), a teachers college (*Escuela Normal*) and an adult education program. Judges, police, doctors, dentists, veterinarians, tax officials, electricity, telephone and postal services, and registrars for marriage, birth and death certificates, and property deeds are concentrated in Putla, connecting the people of the

local district with the state and the nation.

Public services have unsuccessfully struggled to keep pace with the needs of the growing population. The population of the district of Putla has doubled in the last three decades. The *municipio* of Putla has had the highest growth rate in the district, culminating in a population of around 25,000 people by 1990 (Table 1).

The dramatic increase in population is due to higher birth and lower infant

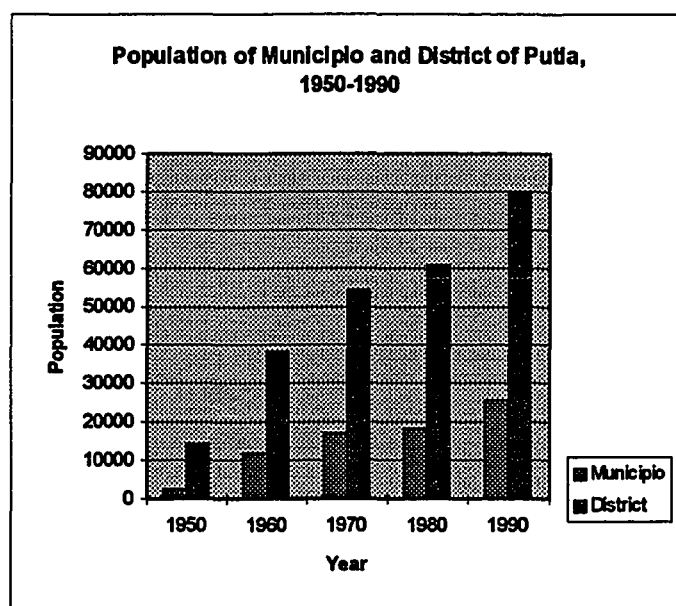


Table 1 Source: INEGI 1992, 1984, 1972, 1963, 1950

mortality rates within the community and to in-migration from the surrounding region, especially from the *Mixteca Alta*.<sup>1</sup> Ecological deterioration of agricultural lands, lack of access to water, increasing landlessness, shortages of firewood and other communal forest resources, and under/unemployment in the region forced families to seek alternative ways to support themselves since subsistence and semi-subsistence farming alone could not. The

agrarian crisis became more acute in many districts in the state including Putla as the world price for coffee plummeted in the 1980s compelling families to abandon their coffee orchards.

The solution for many families in the Mixtec region was to send members to other areas for work. Many Triqui families began their annual migration to Sinaloa or to Sonora to work in commercial agriculture harvests. Other people in the region left to find work in the cities or in the United States. Some husbands who did not want to be so far from their families and their lands came to the "city" of Putla. Compared to their hometowns, Putla seemed to be a bustling urban center.

Finding work in construction and in other daily-wage jobs in Putla, some men began setting up make-shift homes on the edges of town and were soon joined by some members of their families while other members stayed in their hometowns to continue tending the fields. Alternating between their hometowns and Putla became possible as a result of the increase in the number of pick-up trucks which now provide relatively quick and inexpensive transportation in the region.<sup>2</sup> Land invasions, under-the-table deals with local politicians who sold sections of land belonging to the town, and the division of crop lands into minuscule lots made land accessible to newcomers - land on which they built small homes piece by piece. Building in these new housing areas has quickly out-paced the provision of water and drainage services, and many lots lack street access.

The rapid growth of the town has caused not only infrastructural problems but also divisions among the townspeople. Even though many families living in Putla today are

descendants of Mixtecs and of *mestizos* from communities outside the district who moved to Putla in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,<sup>3</sup> people mark the completion of the paved road as the dividing line between those who are "authentic" Putlecans (pre-road) and those who are "outsiders"(post-road).

Before the road, the town was tranquil. Everybody knew everyone else. If a stranger arrived in town, the town president would find out why he was here. Now we have violence, murders and drugs - all brought here by the ignorant people from the countryside (*Putleco*, mid-50s).

Comments such as this one are constantly repeated by many of the "authentic" Putlecans. In the 1980s, "outsiders" invaded the section of Putla where the airstrip and the cemetery are located and formed an *ejido*. The owner of the land who lives in Oaxaca City, failed to prove that the land was in use, since air service had ended long ago and the land stood empty. Wood shacks now cover the hill from the road up to the flat airstrip. Many townspeople scorn the members of the *ejido*, saying that these "outsiders" stole the land. They fear that no land is safe. Framed as unscrupulous and as *gente sin razón* (people without reason), "outsiders" pose a threat not just to one's lands, but to the overall safety of the town. "Outsiders" are blamed for bringing drugs into the community, for gunfire at night, and for murders. Single, male day-laborers from the region who sleep in the town plaza and who are seen drinking in public at night, reinforce these ideas that are applied uniformly to all "outsiders" - even though most come to find work to support their families, and maybe to earn enough to send some of their children to junior high school. Moreover, conflicts, shootings, and theft occurred frequently in the town before the new

road, although people forget that part of the town's history when discussing the new arrivals, creating a romanticized version of their past.

### **Migration within the Mexican Republic**

For many people from villages in the region, the town of Putla is viewed as providing numerous opportunities even though the entire region is one of the poorest in Mexico. While husbands are working as day laborers, wives sell sandwiches, popcorn, flavored waters and other home-made foods on the street to supplement their mens' paltry earnings. Others wash clothes or work in the string of new taco stands along the main road. "There's plenty of work and money in this town. Everything sells here," women told me repeatedly. Compared to the dire situation in their hometowns, Putla is a place of hope. As one woman commented, "We are poor but at least we can eat well here. At home we only ate a few *tortillas* with a little *chile*."

The "outsiders" perspective of Putla as a place of opportunities is quite different from the town residents' views, especially since the 1982 economic `crisis' swept across the nation. In 1982 when the world price for oil dropped and Mexican capital fled, the De la Madrid administration accepted the conditions and structural adjustment criteria required by the IMF and the World Bank "for a minimally sufficient infusion of credit" (Goldrich and Carruthers 1992:100). Economic neoliberalism became orthodoxy, resulting in a substantial reduction in social welfare spending. The structural adjustment program's impact on the standard of living for all Mexicans was severe. Real income, social services,

and material resources declined. In the countryside, the average daily wage dropped forty percent (Calva 1988:76). Decreases in guaranteed prices for basic crops further impoverished farmers; foreign investments in agriculture flowed to commercial export growers making subsistence farmers even more marginalized. As Goldrich and Carruthers summarize,

Structural adjustment policies were designed (1) to cut government spending, so environmental, health and safety programs were sharply reduced, and (2) to boost exports and foreign-exchange earnings, so workers and the natural-resource base were rendered more accessible to exploitation. Just at the point where Mexico needed stronger support than ever before for environmental protection and sustainable development, structural adjustment undercut both (Goldrich and Carruthers 1992:102).

Agricultural production in the region fell to an all time low in the 1980s, forcing families to develop new strategies to survive. The inability of agricultural production to support families resulted in sons and daughters of farmers searching for alternative occupations. In my survey in the town of Putla, over half of the parents work(ed) in agriculture whereas only five percent of their children do. Many children have left to make a new life in a larger city or in the United States. Two-thirds of the families in Putla have members living in another city within the Mexican Republic. Three-quarters of these members now reside in Mexico City; the rest moved to Oaxaca City, Puebla, Acapulco, Monterrey, Villahermosa, Cuernavaca, Veracruz, Guadalajara and Ciudad Juárez to work primarily in industries and in jobs spurred by tourism. While many left hoping to continue their education and work at the same time, most have had to abandon going to school due to a lack of money and time. Over half of the Putlecans had family and/or friends to help

them get started in their new setting; around forty percent had no contacts, however.

Many Putlecans have ended up working in the informal market.

For those who remain in Putla, commerce and service jobs employ more people in the community today than work in the primary sector. With the opening of the *Escuela Normal* (teachers college) in 1979, for the first time in the district people had a chance to study a profession in their hometown. Ten percent of the working population who live in Putla are teachers. Some teach in the town of Putla while others commute daily to teach in pre-schools and in elementary schools throughout the district.

The tradition of commerce in the town has assumed an even greater importance over the past decade and a half. Putlecans look to the families that owned commercial enterprises and see "business as usual" - spurring the idea that the impact of the 'crisis' was not as severe for them as it was for most of the population (even though the merchants disagree with this belief). Several families that were once poor, now own large stores full of merchandise. Rumors that maybe drug money or "pacts with the devil" were involved have waned as people come to believe that commerce is the only way to get ahead financially.<sup>4</sup> The major obstacle to opening a business, however, is raising the necessary capital. With the national 'crisis,' townspeople believe that finding a good job with a decent salary in Mexico is now practically impossible. Siblings and cousins living in Mexico City complain about the lack of jobs, or decent-paying ones, and how expensive the city is. People have lost what little faith they had in the government and in its ability to resolve the 'crisis.' They look to the north, to the United States, and question Mexico's

situation. Numerous Putlecans told me repeatedly, *el peso ya no vale* (the peso is worthless now).

We have everything here - lots of land, water, oil and all other resources. We work hard yet earn nothing. The *peso* is worthless; only dollars have value (*Putleco*, mid-40s).

### **Migration to the United States**

In the mid-1980s, the town seemed empty. All my friends from school left for *el norte* convinced that they were going to become rich. They tried to get me to go but my sister and brother have left here and I couldn't leave my parents alone. Still I wonder what it would be like, you know, to go and live in *Atlanti* (Atlantic City); they say it's incredible (*Putleco*, late 20s).

The people of Putla have a long history of migration to the United States, beginning some fifty years ago when U.S. agents of the *Bracero* Program contracted Putlecan men to work in U.S. agricultural fields. Circular migration to and from the United States became a way of life for many men and their sons who followed in their footsteps. Once in the United States, some Putlecans made contacts with other employers and moved east to live permanently, working in factories and in service jobs in Chicago and in New York. While Putla has had a relatively high out-migration rate since the 1960s,<sup>5</sup> quantitative and qualitative change has marked migration patterns following the 1982 crisis: the number of people migrating from Putla has more than doubled; many wives and daughters have joined their husbands, fathers and/or brothers in their journeys to the United States; young people, both male and female, have begun migrating to the U.S. on their own, many times against the wishes of their parents; and two-thirds of

migrants after crossing the border in Tijuana fly directly to the East Coast. Almost eighty percent of the families in Putla have at least one member living temporarily or permanently in the United States.

In the past, the bulk of Mexican migrants to the United States worked as agricultural laborers in rural areas.<sup>6</sup> During the last two decades, a shift in destination areas has resulted in over eighty percent of migrants going to metropolitan areas (Portes and Rumbaut 1990). Once established in an U.S. city, Mexican enclaves, like other ethnic communities, serve as magnets for new arrivals from their hometowns.<sup>7</sup>

On the East Coast, Putlecan men and women are concentrated in the New York City area, in Atlantic City and in other beach towns along the New Jersey coastline.<sup>8</sup> Many Putlecans leave Putla in April or May, work the summer season and return in October or November as beach businesses in the United States close for the winter. The summer season corresponds with the rainy season in Putla - a time when there is less work in general in Putla and when people call the town *triste* (sad), referring to the lack of social activities and interaction.

Atlantic City has become the principal receiving area in the United States, with thousands of Putlecans now residing there permanently, and many more migrating seasonally. When public officials in New Jersey began a revitalization project in Atlantic City, recruiters in the New York City area spurred Latin and Asian migrants to move to Atlantic City with promises of better paying jobs.<sup>9</sup> Several Putlecan families moved early on. After having lived in Atlantic City for over ten years, they have now opened their own

small businesses (restaurants/grocery store) in the six-block area known as "little Putla."

The restaurants serve Oaxacan-style food and Mexican sodas. In one restaurant, they bake *pan de yema* - the type of bread people make in Putla. The grocery store sells a variety of basic foods and goods, including *tortillas*, *chiles secos* (dried peppers), *crema mexicana* (Mexican heavy cream), *queso cotija* (similar to string cheese), *chiles la Morena y San Marcos* (Mexican-brand of various types of canned peppers), *cobertores San Marcos* (Mexican-made blankets), and other Mexican/Oaxacan products. The owners of the store also act as travel agents, selling national and international airplane tickets. The businesses are doing quite well since there is little competition. Moreover, as Alvarez notes in his research on *chile* commerce,

The increasing demand for ethnic produce in the urban markets of the United States, as exemplified by the City of Los Angeles, stems from the continued multiplication of immigrant communities settling in urban centers (Alvarez 1994:256).

Not just the demand for produce but the demand for other Mexican foods and products has made Putlecan businesses in Atlantic City successful.

Upon arrival in the United States, many Putlecans find work in factories sewing buttons on coats, assembling toys, pressing suits, and so forth, but the work is *pesado* (hard/tedious) and pays little. They try to find other work as quickly as possible. Industrial jobs, including construction, currently employ about ten percent of Putlecans. Most migrants prefer work in service jobs; over half are employed as busboys, cooks, dishwashers and waitresses in restaurants, pizza shops and bakeries, as maids, gardeners

and janitors in hotels, private homes, and public facilities, and as casino workers. Of the migrants who stay on the West Coast, the majority work in agriculture (in a variety of harvests in California and in the apple and cherry orchards in Oregon and Washington) and the rest, in service jobs in and around the Los Angeles area. Three-quarters of all migrants have family or friends in the United States who help them get established. Social networks are instrumental in finding work and in getting work visas; they provide general "survival" information in the new setting. These networks "are at the core of the microstructures that sustain migration over time," integrating people across spaces (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:231). But they can also cause conflict when expectations and social obligations are not met (see next section).

Putlecan migrants reported that crossing the U.S.-Mexico border is the most dangerous part of their journeys. Once they arrive to their destinations in the United States, few recounted stories of being in adverse or injurious situations. Most migrants who have lived in the United States eagerly expressed how much they enjoyed living there yet, at the same time, they did miss Putla. Wanting to see their family, friends, and *novios y novias* (boy/girlfriends) is the most common reason given for not staying in the United States permanently. Many migrants dream of transplanting certain aspects of U.S. lifeways to Putla, such as better infrastructure and more jobs, comforts, and material resources. They migrate circularly to realize a part of their dream such as a home with in-door plumbing. Putlecans whose first trip was after 1990 are more disillusioned with the United States, however, saying that it was much more difficult to find a job than they had

expected and that the cost of living was too high. Only half of them are thinking about migrating again due to the lack of job opportunities in Putla.

Although many Putlecans cross the border undocumented, very few worry about the police and the U.S. border patrol (INS) once in the United States. To the contrary, Putlecans who live on the East Coast praise the police for keeping order, helping people, and being honest.<sup>10</sup>

The police work for the people, not against them like in Mexico. If I have a problem I know that I can call them and they will help me (*Putleco*, mid-20s).

Many migrants report that social security cards and work visas are relatively easy to obtain, especially for casino employees. Recreational activities, such as going to the movies, parties, clubs, restaurants, the beach and parks, are limited by financial concerns rather than a concern for *la migra* (INS). The Mexican-American Unity Council has expanded out of New York City to form a Southern New Jersey branch; the Council organizes sports programs and 'cultural' events for Mexicans living in the United States. Participation in sports programs is high; Putlecans never fear that any law enforcement agency will come to the events and bother them - not even when fights break out.

### **Migrant Remittances**

August 28th: Juan's cousin brought him an answering machine from the U.S., and he's asked me to translate the manual... (Several months later...) Having translated several telephone, antenna, and VCR manuals, I'm gaining expertise on the workings of modern technology. But today it's a new challenge: assembling a Nautilus weight-lifting machine. I guess by now I shouldn't be surprised by the things people bring back....(Fieldnotes 1993).

While working in the United States, two-thirds of migrants send remittances to their parents or spouses in Putla although the frequency and amount of remittances vary substantially. The majority of remittances are used for food/family maintenance, house construction, and consumer goods. The largest local furniture/appliance store owner told me that when he first opened in the mid-1980s, he sold beds and more beds; today, beds and wardrobes are his top-selling items, followed by kitchen appliances: blenders, stoves and refrigerators. His sales correspond with remittance expenditures reported: people first buy bedroom furniture, followed by kitchen appliances, and lastly, sofa sets for the living room. Few people still sleep on *petates*, but hammocks are still the most popular living room seat.

Most migrants have saved to open a *tienda de abarrotes* (little grocery store); some have used their money to purchase livestock or land. Several migrants who worked as cooks in restaurants in the United States, have used their new skills to open restaurants with a "gringo" flavor, offering Sunday "all-you-can-eat" buffets or adding pizzas and other atypical foods to their menu. Several offer catering services.

Before the 1990s, a few *tiendas de abarrotes* dotted the streets; the town now has hundreds of these little grocery stores in which one can buy canned goods, snacks, sodas, beer, liquors, dairy products, cigarettes, household goods (light bulbs, candles, soaps, detergents, lotions, etc.) and other national-brand products. The stores are run primarily by women who can tend the store and do household duties at the same time since the store is located in a part of the home. In the smaller shops, customers tend to be neighbors,

friends and relatives who yell for the owner as they enter the stores; in other larger stores, family members (immediate and extended) take turns attending the clients.

Profits are minimal for most store owners. After the initial investment, migrants' remittances are often needed to re-stock the shelves. The smaller stores are more a form of savings than profit-generating in that families invest remittances in products that they use such as household goods and snacks. They save by not purchasing these items at another store for a higher cost and by converting their money into consumer goods, hedging inflation or monetary devaluations. Women can support their families during their husband's absences or between remittances by consuming store items and by using the few *pesos* earned through sales to buy other essentials.<sup>11</sup> The larger stores, on the other hand, generate a greater income, depend less on remittances, and provide the 'model' for many smaller store owners whose goal is to increase the amount and variety of goods sold so that their commercial enterprises can support their families and end their need for migration. It is these goals that conflict with the message of the local ecology group. While people agree that trash is a major community problem, the solution proposed by the ecology group to stop buying packaged goods is considered to be an attack on merchants' and shopkeepers' livelihoods.<sup>12</sup>

Some families that own pasture lands invest remittances in livestock. Livestock products yield a greater profit than crops. For hundreds of years the region has supported the production of both crops and livestock, but in the past two decades, there has been greater pressure to convert farming lands into pasture lands - a practice observed in other

rural Mexican communities (Reichert 1981; Mines and Massey 1985; Dinerman 1982). In the late 1970s, only four or five stalls in the market in Putla were *carniceros* (butchers); by 1994 butchers occupy forty-five stalls. The growth in vendors is not only due to market incentives but is supported by the belief that the eating of meat and other livestock products is healthier than the consumption of vegetables and/or fish. Mothers worry about having enough milk for their children to drink daily. Beef, the most expensive meat per kilogram, is also a status marker. Wealthier Putlecans comment on the fact that they eat beef every day and would never have a *fiesta* without serving it as the main dish.

Besides sending remittances, migrants return from the United States with a variety of consumer goods, especially electronic equipment. Most bring at least a new television and new clothes, and from subsequent trips, VCRs, boomboxes, stereos, video cameras and other consumer items. Even the few migrants from the poorest families have brought back televisions. Most migrants desire to buy a car or a truck although only a few save enough to purchase a vehicle and to pay the taxes for Mexican license plates upon their return. More often, migrants who work seasonally in the U.S. circumvent buying Mexican plates by re-registering their vehicles every six months at the border.

### **The More, the Better: Increasing Consumption**

Some of the best people of our time speak now only in this dark language. Their grave voices have to compete with the jingle of happy consumption, the only widespread form of contemporary optimism (Williams 1985:21).

In the late 1980s/early 1990s, *coyotes* (smugglers) in Tijuana charged

approximately three thousand new *pesos* (U.S. \$1000) to smuggle a person across the border and fly him or her to New York from San Diego, although some Putlecans have paid as much as five thousand new *pesos* when more stringent border control operations were in effect. Fees charged to only cross the border ranged from two hundred to seven hundred U.S. dollars.

Research shows that almost half of the undocumented Mexican migrants to the U.S. are not "impoverished peasants" but rather urban dwellers who are literate with thirty percent having at least some secondary schooling (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:11). The backgrounds of U.S.-destined Putlecans coincide with the national figures. Most have completed junior high school. Few migrants are from the poorest segment of the Putlecan population. Class plays an important role not only in differentiating who will come to the United States, but also in influencing their choice of destination area once in the U.S. For the most part, migrants from families with greater resources fly to the East Coast whereas those with less, remain on the West Coast. Primarily working in agriculture on the West Coast, migrants earn less than those working in service jobs on the East Coast but their initial investment is less, also. However, in terms of the amount invested compared to family resources available, both are quite an investment and risk, especially for a first-time migrant who most likely has borrowed the money for his or her journey from relatives or friends.

Researchers argue that is not absolute deprivation but rather relative deprivation that drives migration (Cornelius 1977; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). As the world becomes

"smaller" via advances in technology, people living in 'third' world countries have become increasingly aware of living standards in industrialized countries and of the economic opportunities absent in their own countries.

For skilled workers and small farmers, migration is the means to stabilize family livelihoods and meet long-desired aspirations - a car, a TV set, domestic appliances of all sorts, additional land and implements. For urban professionals, it provides a means of reaching life standards commensurate with their past achievements and to progress in their careers. Seen from this perspective, contemporary immigration is a direct consequence of the dominant influence attained by the culture of the advanced West in every corner of the globe. The bewildering number and variety of today's immigrants reflect this worldwide reach and the vision of modern life and individual fulfillment that goes with it (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:13).

Many teachers in Putla have requested a year of leave to see what opportunities they can find in the United States. Many who have done well financially in the U.S. have abandoned teaching as a career, replacing it with circular migration as the means to earn a living. "Our (teaching) salaries are miserable; you can't afford to buy your children the little things that they ask for and then you feel bad," explained one teacher. Many of these teachers have saved their remittances and have started their own commercial businesses or have joined with family members in their Putlecan enterprises. Other teachers have returned to teaching after their journeys to the U.S. "Yes, I made more money in *el norte* but I missed my family too much; children need their father or else they will start getting into trouble" explained another teacher.<sup>13</sup> Often a family's emotional needs take precedence over economic concerns, although almost everyone is constantly seeking new ways to increase income. Families in which both the wife and the husband teach, combining income and security, rarely migrate.

Putlecan women and men living in the United States witness and experience new modes of thought, feeling and action. For many, it is the first time that their home is equipped with in-door plumbing and numerous modern appliances - refrigerator, stove, microwave, dishwasher, washing machine and so on. Putlecan women comment on how much easier life is for U.S. women "who have machines to do all their work." Earning dollars, migrants have more buying-power. They judge how successful their journey has been by listing all the consumer goods that they have purchased. "My nephew works as a waiter and now owns a new car and lots of expensive clothes. We're very proud of him" stated a Putlecan in Atlantic City. Shopping at yard sales, several women remarked on how cheaply one can buy "nice" things in the United States. The abundance of consumer goods coupled with relatively inexpensive prices, turns most migrants into eager shoppers - not all, however, since personal habits affect a migrant's money management. Migrants who "drink all their money" or who "don't know how to save" are a source of family disgrace. These migrants express remorse for not helping the family. The social pressure to send remittances is so strong that some Putlecans in Atlantic City, state that they cannot return to Putla, not even for a visit, because they have not sent their families any money or goods. For some this has meant staying in the United States for over ten years. They have yet to save any money.

Migration processes have uprooted people from their families and their communities, and from their conventional ways of understanding the world. They enter a new terrain filled with new people, new images, new lifeways, and new experiences. They

return from urban centers in the Mexican Republic or from the United States as agents of change. Arriving with different ideas and material goods, they stimulate the desire for the consumption of 'modern' goods, i.e. national and international consumer goods. The urban-Western way of life is re-constructed as superior to the "backwards" ways of life in the rural Mexican provinces. Part of this inference of superiority is connected with beliefs that equate 'modernity' and 'progress' with increased consumption of material goods (i.e. the more things one owns, the more 'modern' the person is). Migrants reinforce these constructions with their stories about the United States and its vast array of material goods and resources.

### **Information and Expansion of Technologies**

To portray migrants as the solitary cause of increasing consumption in Putla would be too simplistic. While I do argue that they are responsible for stimulating much of the desire for increasing consumption, they are one of several sources for the transmission of new ideas and for the yearning for new material resources and consumer goods. Public education, the mass media, and other new technologies are also important sources which have actively promoted and supported changes in Putlecan attitudes and consumption activities.

### ***Public education***

From the Mexican Revolution to mid-twentieth century, the government promoted national unity, particularly in its education policies. Officially, the role of education was to

"form a nationalist spirit" and to be "devoid of all foreign influence" (Lacy 1994:234).

However, after World War II, the official stance began to change and policy followed the pronouncements of international agencies, particularly the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Lacy 1994:235). Education became tied to the government's goals of economic and social development. Literacy campaigns were accompanied by community improvement activities such as agricultural and livestock programs, health care, road building, and construction of homes and community centers. In the 1950s, the government began building thousands of new schools and training thousands of new teachers, giving priority to technical and vocational education allied with national development plans (Lacy 1994:236). Modernization theories have accompanied nationalistic ideologies in educational policies for some forty years.

In the list of education objectives published by the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) in 1993, the goal "to teach national values and love of country" remains, but, rather than scorning "foreign influences," the government promotes the "understanding of diverse national and international processes" that have made Mexico the country that it is today (SEP 1993:14). The general guidelines for education and the schools' textbooks emphasize the need to develop strong "individuals" that will help the country "develop" into a more Western-like nation.

*Resolver esos problemas (la pobreza, el deterioro de la ecología, democracia, economía) es tarea de los mexicanos de hoy... Es la historia que te toca vivir y hacer, cambiar y mejorar. Es tú lugar en la historia de México* (SEP 1992:79).<sup>14</sup>

The fostering of individualism (as opposed to communalism) has played a pivotal role in

changing students' attitudes and practices. In Putla, parents complain of their children's lack of respect for elders and their declaration of "rights" that they learn in school - their right to playtime or their right to toys and to snacks. A Putlecan mother compares childhoods,

Children today don't have to help out the family like we did as kids. We had to get up before sunrise and do many chores. We never questioned our parents. We did what we were told to do. Kids today, they have it easy, too easy, if you ask me. Not only do they not listen, sometimes they even tell me what to do!

The spread of the federal rural school system magnified educational differences across generations due to the widening participation of children from all classes in formal education and their increasing number of years of schooling.<sup>15</sup> The changes in the structure and in the content of formal schooling have helped shape differences in attitudes and in practices of the younger generation by providing knowledge of an alternative way of life - the urban-Western way of life. As discussed in section VI, a contradiction persists between official national educational policies which on paper endorse the multi-cultural Mexico and which in practice try to streamline students into "one" Mexico - a modern, more Western-like nation.

As Gramsci (1971) pointed out, it is in the arena of civil society that consent to certain forms of domination is produced and public education in Mexico has played a pivotal role in shaping everyday reasoning. This is not to say that all students are programmed to be 'ideal' citizens, but they have internalized certain ideas about 'modernity' and 'progress'. Some students in the higher levels of education, such as the

*COBAO* and the *Escuela Normal* in Putla, learn to critique their government' actions for failing to adhere to the ideals of participatory democracy; they call for the end of corrupt, paternalistic practices. But very few of these students rebuked Mexico's overall 'development' plan and economic goals.<sup>16</sup> Most students told me that they wish that Mexico "was more like the U.S." and that someday they would like to own a "big" house with modern appliances, a "new" car and "lots of clothes."

Public education provides much of the schooling of Putlecans but children and adults today learn as much, if not more, outside the walls of the classroom. The steady deluge of information, images, ideas, and attitudes from modern media places 'education' within the expanding systems of global communication. The multiplicity of mass media sources - news coverage, magazines, comic books, advertising, popular music, television, film - supplies information that directly influences people's everyday thoughts and actions.

### ***Mass media***

With the rapid expansion of technology and communication systems globally, the mass media has begun penetrating people's lives as never before. In Putla, watching television has become the most popular leisure activity replacing the visiting of friends and relatives which was the most common leisure activity some twenty years ago. New technologies, such as VCRs, satellite dishes and computers, have brought national and transnational imagery to homes in what were once relatively isolated areas. With marketing and propaganda strategies, new messages are quickly and easily dispersed to

the general public.

Mass media first appeared in Putla in the form of film during the 1930s; the cinema was so popular that the family who owned and ran the theater opened a second theater, *Cine Mundo*, by 1965. During this time, the "Golden Age" of Mexican cinema, actors and actresses such as Jorge Negrete, Dolores del Río, Pedro Armendariz, María Félix, Mario Moreno Cantinflas and Pedro Infante, captured the hearts and minds of Putlecans, as they did with most Mexicans. People followed the cinema closely and shared the frustrations and desires of their idols. The cinema was more than simple entertainment. It offered "itself as a unifying space where the deep convictions of the audience coexist[ed] with the beliefs imposed by modernity" (Monsiváis 1985:239). It became another source of national unity, incorporating the illiterate masses into the nation-state in a way that education alone could never do.

The cinema is a crucial element in the process of national integration. Its importance increases because of its status as intermediary between a victorious State and the masses who, lacking any democratic tradition, find in their sentimental education their most visible source of unity (Monsiváis 1985:239).

The foundation of Mexican cinema re-created the idea of the nation as an extension of the family (Monsiváis 1985:239). The nationalist focus helped to reinforce nationalistic themes in education, in political campaigns, in economic policies (such as import-substitution), and so forth, during this time. But soon the cinema and its nationalist sentiments would find itself competing with another form of mass entertainment, the television.

During the 1970s in Putla, the popularity of the cinema was slowly replaced by the introduction of television and later, by VCRs.<sup>17</sup> Television program content in Mexico has been, and continues to be, commercial in nature. Mexico has only one public station (out of 24) and access to that station is limited to urban areas. The town of Putla receives one station, *Televisa*.<sup>18</sup> The programs and practices of *Televisa* are heavily influenced by U.S. broadcasting companies (ABC, NBC) - as are most Latin American television companies. The companies imitate U.S. programming styles, purchase U.S. programs and copy U.S. advertising practices; their main emphasis is "the sale of 'modern' sector goods" (Wells 1994: 208).<sup>19</sup>

Program content, the linkages with advertising and U.S. consumer manufacturers and the strong commercial nature of the operations in general, are each contributing factors which fashion the medium into a powerful conduit for widespread consumerism (Wells 1994:203).

Ninety-three percent of Putlecans own a television and typically spend three to four hours daily watching it.<sup>20</sup> Due to the limited channel reception, satellite dishes are becoming popular in the town with a total of ninety-four dishes atop of people's homes in 1994. Television is a key site of information, images and debates from which people make sense of the world. Television programming does not simply reflect lifeways; it delivers "careful, deliberate constructions" (Douglas 1994:16). The messages and images produced are often contradictory, dramatizing or magnifying certain features of life while ignoring or collapsing others.<sup>21</sup> The television programmers' goal is to reach as many people as possible and they often offer homogenized, romanticized images which can be inconsistent

with what is happening in the daily lives of people. In Putla, half of the women who told me that they follow the night *novelas* (soap operas), believe that life in Putla is like life in the *telenovelas*. While watching a soap, a Putlecan woman commented,

Maybe Putla doesn't have all those fancy homes and cars, and we aren't rich like they are (the characters) but we face the same problems. You know, husbands fooling around, even wives too, like Maria in the market who....

She, like many others, shares in the characters' lives, disregarding their differences and envisioning problems as being the same for everyone. Not all soap opera watchers share this view, however. About a third of them believe that the shows are pure fiction and often stupid; they watch them because it is the only channel.

Putlecans receive almost all of the current news from television which, except for the satellite dish owners, means their main news source is *24 Horas* (24 Hours) on *Televisa*. Although privately-owned, the news show is pro-PRI government and one-sided in its reporting.<sup>22</sup> Alternative interpretations of current events can be found in some newspapers. Only fifteen percent of Putlecans report reading a newspaper, however. Half read *Excelsior* from Mexico City (also pro-PRI) and half read the Oaxacan paper, *El Imparcial*, for more regional news coverage.

The programs and commercials on television reinforce and elaborate the ideas of consumer capitalism. Images and symbols of luxury and abundance, of privilege and franchise are reproduced on the screen. These images seduce people into believing that by purchasing a particular hair product or detergent or brand of clothes they can join the ranks of the 'elite.' Most of the media stars are light-skinned as are the advertising models,

suggesting that one can 'whiten' one's skin by using 'modern' consumer goods. Children in Putla are especially influenced by cartoons and by toy ads; they tell their parents how they "need" Ninja Turtles or Barbies or mega-plastic trucks and how they cannot live without a certain brand of *papitas* (potato chips) or candies.

The newest addition to mass media sources in Putla is the radio station, Radio 890 a.m. XEPOR, founded in 1991. Ninety-eight percent of Putlecan families own a radio and most listen to it regularly. The station is commercial, selling advertising time to local merchants and national companies, and is staffed primarily with Putlecans from wealthier families who have received degrees in journalism, communications or marketing from universities in Mexico City. The program content also includes news and modern music. The owner of the station brings in popular groups from Acapulco and Mexico City for an annual money-making concert. Held outside on the large coffee-drying patio, the event is a time for wealthier Putlecans (especially those who work at the station) to display the latest fashions. Women dress in elegant evening gowns, spiked heels and gold jewelry which they have purchased outside of Putla; the men dress more casually. Poorer Putlecans stand outside the chain-link fence watching the display, many wishing that they were on the inside. As one woman asked,

Even if we could afford to buy tickets, what would I wear? I'd be embarrassed to wear my best dress. Next to them (the other women), it would look like a rag.

Over 2500 people attended the concert in November 1993 but the owner complained of low attendance and blamed the townspeople for being ignorant about

"good" music rather than recognizing how cost prohibitive it was for most of them. Community members listen to contemporary Mexican and U.S. pop music all the time, blaring it out of their homes or cars for all to hear. The most popular concert-festivals, however, are those in which *La Furia Oaxaqueña* play.<sup>23</sup> A Putlecan-based band, *La Furia* plays regional music, highlighted by *chilenas*, a regional-style music and dance known for its *zapateo* (rapid foot-stomping). Putlecans love to *zapatear*.<sup>24</sup>

Magazines are another mass media source growing in popularity. The main newsstand owner told me that sales have been rising slowly but steadily in the last ten years. Just over half of the people in my survey reported buying magazines regularly. The most popular magazines, such as *Eres*, *Estrellas*, *TVnovelas*, *Somos*, *Televista*, *Mujer*, *TV-Guía*, *Furia*, and *Chico*, are about television, movie, or musical stars. Home, cooking/dieting and women magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Vanidades*, *Activa*, *Oye*, *15 a 20*, *Hogares*, *Ideas*, *Kena*, and *Dietas*, are read earnestly by teenage to mid-30s Putlecan women and some men. Magazines dealing with history, politics, or current affairs, and professional journals are read primarily by teachers and other professionals, and by some people with education beyond the elementary level. Ten percent of Putlecans subscribe to *Selecciones* (Reader's Digest) and around five percent receive Catholic magazines.

The images and advertisements in magazines (except the religious ones) are similar to those in television. They appeal to people by showing what is 'modern' and 'progressive.' Several readers told me that magazines teach them what is *a la moda* (in

style); many times I watched young women sit and discuss new fashions or hairdos page by page. The ads for national-brand, and more recently U.S.-brand products, try to convince the readers how much better their lives would be if they bought brand X or ate processed cheese. No 'modern' woman is 'complete' without Tupperware: *quieres saber como mejorará tu vida con Tupperware, llámanos hoy mismo* (if you want to know how to make your life better with Tupperware, call us today). Glass, plastic and metal containers are depicted as 'superior' and more sanitary than locally-produced pottery.

*Vitro Envases Norteamérica: Por ser el material mas higiénico por excelencia, el vidrio mantiene intactas las propiedades de los productos...Además el vidrio se recicla. Compare y luego consuma. Verá que el vidrio es la mejor opción.* (Advertisement in TVnovelas 15(23):37).<sup>25</sup>

Advertisers throw in words in English to show their 'first'-worldliness: *Dico Muebles con aplicación safety shield* (Dico furniture with an upholstery protective spray) or *Con Modern Schools adquiere una formación en la comodidad de su hogar* (with Modern Schools acquire an education in the comfort of your home).

As new products arrive in Putla, women have begun to experiment with different vegetables like broccoli and apples; recipes for 'modern' cuisine call for a wider range of foods, especially processed foods, in their list of ingredients, and for new kitchen appliances. For example, blenders have become a "basic" necessity for cooking. When I told women that I prefer to use a *molcajete* (stone bowl with grinding stone) to make salsa rather than a blender, they thought that I was crazy.

### ***Other new technology***

Computer classes are now offered in the town, taught privately by a Putlecan who studied computation in Mexico City. With about a dozen computers, his classes stay full. Students are encouraged to get computer skills by teachers and most young people in the *COBAO* and *Escuela Normal* consider computer training "a must" for "getting ahead." Several professional people own a personal computer. Younger professional people were very interested in my laptop, and I was frequently asked for my opinion on various models and software programs.

FAX machines also link a few Putlecan businessmen and branches of national banks with the outside world. The telephone has become a vital link between family members in Putla and those who have migrated. Two hundred and fifteen families have private lines; many more have placed orders and are waiting to be connected. Several families with *tiendas de abarrotes* offer phone service to clients for a fee and there is one public phone service in the center of town. Families without phones arrange specific times for their kin outside of Putla to call them at one of these stores. The local radio station is also used as a medium to connect kin. The person outside Putla will call the radio station and tell the DJ what time and where he or she will call a particular family member; the DJ announces the message on air.

### **Migration and Consumption**

The fostering of the consumption of urban-Western goods in the region of Putla

has been supported by the 'modernizing' attitude spread by migrants, public education, the mass media, and other new technologies. Although a contradiction exists between the economic reality of most families and their ability to buy, their list of desired goods continues to grow. Market integration has generated a vast spectrum of change in people's daily lives. As Arizpe (1981:633) points out, market integration has resulted in a "total reordering of economic and social relations" throughout Mexico. Declining production, the diminished use of goods produced locally or regionally, the rise of cash needs for new services and goods, the increasing mobility of family members, and the growth of individualism have led to greater social and economic inequalities within families and within the community. Some community members are disenfranchised from the consumer culture with little hope of ever buying more than basic needs to survive. Others, no longer satisfied with their social position, devise various strategies to earn more money and more prestige through consumptive display. Migration is one such strategy, one used by numerous people to attain their goals. Wealthier Putlecans use their social and economic capital to amass more goods for conspicuous consumption.

While it may seem that the urban-Western lifestyle rules in the hearts and minds of the people, it is certainly not exempted from criticism. People who brag about the things they have, those who refuse to help in community fiestas, or those who return with a handful of cash ready to party and race around in their New Jersey-tagged cars, are subjected to gossip and slander by community members. Putlecans who remain in the town scorn those who return with stories of how they "live like kings" in the United States. A

young man stopped me on the street one day to "help me with my research" and gave me a five-minute speech on how "most" U.S.-destined Putlecans end up with nothing and the town would be better off if people stayed and "developed what we have here."<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, when I asked people what they would do if they received an abundance of money, half of the people said they would spend it on someone other than themselves, either to help *los pobres* (the poor) and *los huérfanos* (orphans) or to "improve the community" by providing better public services and infrastructure, more recreational activities, and bigger community festivals.

As consumerism expands, people invest more in the private sphere. The importance of the local community does not, however, automatically disintegrate simply because one invests more in material goods or because one no longer lives in the community. Migrants who have lived in New Jersey for many years still call Putla "home." Between 1990 and 1993, twenty couples who currently live in California and New Jersey returned to Putla to have their babies baptized; this practice is even more common for Putlecans who live in the Federal District. Outside Putla, migrants still serve as *mayordomos* (fiesta sponsors) by mailing their share of the expenses. *El Carnaval*, the largest town festival, has been growing in size and in content over the past two decades. When several disgruntled Putlecans complained of the growing appearance of factory-made costumes and foreign themes,<sup>27</sup> *mayordomos* pushed for the return to traditional straw and clay masks and costumes. Many responded positively. Putlecans living in the U.S. have also sent money for the church restoration project. From 1990 to 1993, the

restoration committee raised over \$80,000 (U.S.) to renovate the church and office buildings. The priest had no exact figures as to how much Putlecan migrants have sent but he said that they have contributed a "notable" amount. The priest announces the names of people who have given money each week in the Sunday mass. Migrants renew their social ties to the community through such practices.

Some Putlecans who have migrated resist what they perceive as the rigid control of their time in the United States. "You earn better, but you never stop working" or "all you do is work" were frequent comments about the working conditions in the U.S. For them, the pace of life is slower and more appealing in Putla. While one must earn a living, the need for money does not solely drive people's decisions about migration.

Putla is a commercial town and has been an important marketplace in western Oaxaca since pre-Hispanic times. Consumption of goods beyond basic necessities is not necessarily evil, nor are people passive pawns of advertisers' wiles. Many goods have made life a little easier for people such as blenders or tortilla-making machines for women. I wished that I could give every wife a washing machine, after the first time scrubbing my own clothes on a stone washboard. Telephones have allowed family members to stay in touch in a way the Mexican postal system never could. Several professional people commented that without cars, satellite dishes and computers, they probably would not have returned to Putla after studying in Mexico City because they would have felt too isolated, too out-of-touch with the rest of the world. If they had not returned, the community would have lost much-needed medical knowledge and other skills. Increasing

consumption can have both negative and positive effects. Douglas and Isherwood (1979:12) sum it up, "Goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as bridges or fences."

The lack of investment of migrant remittances in productive activities which could lead to greater local development versus the spending of money on consumption has been a focus of scholarly debate. Community economies throughout Mexico have become dependent on migrant remittances (Grindle 1988). This dependence process has been described as "*nortización*" (Alárcon 1988), "migration syndrome" (Reichert 1982), "relay migration" (Arizpe 1982), and "crisis-induced, income-maintenance migration" (Cornelius 1978:29); migrants have been called "economic refugees" (Stuart and Kearney 1981:7). Lack of employment, economic development, and a productive base would place Putla among towns dependent on migration.

Most small commercial businesses (*tiendas de abarrotes*) in which a majority of remittances are invested still require remittance infusions after their initial establishment. Store owners are fully aware that their businesses depend on *migradolars* (migration dollars). Restaurant and bar owners earn almost all of their annual income in the three winter months when many migrants return or when they normally send greater amounts of remittances.<sup>28</sup> The infusion of U.S. dollars into the local economy has resulted in local prices rising faster than the national average. Land prices and rents have skyrocketed; lots sell for more in Putla than in middle-class neighborhoods in Oaxaca City.<sup>29</sup> The planting of traditional crops continues to decline as more land is used for livestock. As Mines and

Massey (1985:116-117) note, many migrants are absentee landlords who consider any income earned in their home community as supplemental to their migration earnings. The same is true in Putla for some migrants who invest in livestock, purchasing animals one by one and leaving lands under-used until they can afford more livestock. In order to buy more animals, they continue to migrate. The construction industry which employs numerous in-migrants and is the only booming industry in Putla, is supported primarily by remittances.

The dependence on migration is heightened when remittances are "consumed" since most are used for food, housing, and consumer goods. Researchers have tended to emphasize the negative effects of this process - the dependency and lack of development fostered by out-migration. But this emphasis on the structural results overlooks individual actions and the reasons for social spending patterns. Obviously, food is necessary to survival but what about other expenditures in housing or consumer goods?

As land and rent prices rise, agricultural production declines, and people seek cash-generating activities, most Putlecans have only their home and lot as spaces in which to invest. Families build two-story homes to rent extra bedrooms to boarders, to set up their *tienda de abarrotes* on the first floor, and to accommodate growing extended families since newlyweds can not afford to buy or rent their own homes. Housing is an important repository of investment. Furthermore, as Heyman (1994:136) shows, housing can also be a "value-holding investment." The replacement of locally-made construction materials (adobe, cane and mud roofs) by more expensive, more durable, externally-

manufactured materials (cement blocks, galvanized sheet metal roofs) saves families time and money in the long-run and allows them to take "an active role toward their social standing when in the past the status referents had largely been rigid" (Heyman 1994:134).

Durand and Massey (1992:28) point out that most migration studies that examine expenditures fail to take into account the life-cycle stage of the people involved. The largest group of migrants are younger (between 18 and 40); their circular migration corresponds to the time when couples are having their own families.

During this phase of the life cycle, demands for family maintenance, housing and medical care are greatest, and it is not surprising that migrants channel most of their earnings into current consumption (Durand and Massey 1992:28).

Later on in life, as families mature and children become adults, migrants invest more in productive activities than in consumption (Durand and Massey 1992:28). Both of these points are true for migrants in Putla. Several Putlecans who began migrating as *braceros* and then continued as undocumented workers after the program ended, used remittances for family maintenance for some fifteen to twenty years. Only after most of their children were grown did they begin investing in commercial enterprises such as butcher shops or cement-pipe manufacturing businesses.

## Conclusion

The commodity has acquired, in late consumer capitalism, an aura beyond just its function. The commodity now acts on the consumer, endows him/her with perceived qualities which can be displayed in widening public contexts...It is the difference between buying an object mainly for its function, and acquiring an item for its style. Motor cars or jeans, for instance, are produced and consumed as more than functional means of mobility or clothing (Tomlinson 1990:9).

Consumption is a social process, one which channels resources and draws lines of social relationships. When migrants send remittances to families back home, they are helping their families materially but they are also maintaining and renewing their social relationships, their connections with their home community. "Material goods are embedded in social relations" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992:10). They speak to the social success of their kin living in new contexts and link the fabric of daily life across borders.

The process of migration integrates families across "borders" - geographic and cultural borders. These connections provide individuals and families access to new forms of information and resources which are used in everyday decision-making processes. New information, technologies and resources create new patterns of differentiation on material and social levels. Consumption becomes a critical factor in these patterns and in definitions of the self. It permeates our bodies, the spaces in which we live, our daily activities.

Even when people remain rooted in one place, changes in beliefs and actions occur between generations. But as people move between spaces, change comes with increasing speed. New constructions of identity emerge in the migration process mediated by the global political and economic environments. The next chapter will examine the constructions of fluid and multiple identities and how this process affects social relations within the town of Putla.

Endnotes:

1. See Aguilar (1979), Kearney (1986), Méndez (1985), Sanders (1975), and Stuart and Kearney (1981) for studies of out-migration from Mixtec communities.
2. In 1994, seventy-seven pick-up trucks were registered with the office of transportation in Putla to legally transport people and goods in the *municipio*. The truck owners earn a living as full-time chauffeurs.
3. Marriage records from 1852 to 1944 in the Catholic church's archives in Putla list the couple's birthplace (except for one book which recorded marriages from 1923 to 1931). Almost half of the men and women from Putla married a person from outside the district. Another twenty percent of marriages both the wife and husband were from communities other than Putla.
4. The idea that people make pacts with the devil to become wealthy is shared by other Oaxacan groups. For example, the Mixes place monetary transactions in a moral framework. They contrast "good" money which is earned by hard work and in a relationship with nature with "evil" money which is made by "selling one's soul to the devil." "Money earned in harmful ways - such as selling land to outsiders, cheating, stealing, gambling, or charging exorbitant interest rates on loans - is likely to be seen as evil" (Greenberg 1995:71). See also Nash 1995:13,14.
5. In the 1960s and 1970s, the district of Putla had a higher out-migration rate than coastal districts in Oaxaca, yet had a lesser rate than those in the *Mixteca Alta* (Aguilar 1979).
6. Mexican immigrants worked throughout the Midwest and in industries in Chicago as early as the beginning of this century but the majority were concentrated in southwestern agriculture (see Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:21).
7. As Portes and Rumbaut point out, the lack of mobility of immigrants once in the United States contradicts what assimilation theory would predict. For the assimilationists, "this pattern is irrational because economic opportunities are often greater elsewhere. Individualistic aspirations should lead to dispersal because upward mobility often requires spatial mobility" (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:53). What the assimilationists fail to recognize is that immigrants would lose "a range of social and moral resources that make for psychological well-being as well as for economic gain" by leaving their ethnic enclave (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:53).
8. During the Reagan administration, a sharp increase in the value of beach properties along the East Coast led many local families to sell their beach cottages and land to people who tore down the old cottages in order to build large, expensive second homes. Summer business owners which depended to a great extent on university students as a seasonal labor force, found themselves short of labor since many students could no longer find affordable housing

on the beach and had to look elsewhere for summer jobs. Migrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries have begun suppling the seasonal labor shortage.

9. Atlantic City, the once famous beach resort, became run-down and crime-ridden in the 1960s and 1970s. To revitalize the city and to attract visitors, officials approved gambling and large casinos and hotels were built along the boardwalk. Revitalization cleaned-up and renewed oceanfront properties but left the rest of the city where the working class population lives as it was.

10. Their perceptions are strikingly different from migrants who go to the West Coast. They fear the police and worry about the INS deporting them since it costs them a couple days work and extra money to re-enter the U.S. and travel back up the West Coast. Their comments are similar to those made by Mexican migrants living in California reported by Rouse (1992). The different perceptions of the same U.S. institutions suggests the need to look at the political economy of particular states within the U.S. and their histories of ethnic/race relations in order to understand the differential treatment of immigrants and the immigrants' responses/actions.

11. Kaiser and Dewey (1991) have noted in their research on migration and diet in Mexico that wives economize expenditures during their husbands' absences by substituting processed foods for traditional foods, such as pasta for beans which require more fuel to cook than pasta.

12. When the priest tells the people to stop sucking their *mamila* (referring to the drinking of sodas in plastic bags with straws), store owners see *pesos* flying out the doors. The growth in the number of *tiendas de abarrotes* has made competition fierce. Store owners fear that if they stop selling sodas in a bag, customers will go to another store to get them. Sodas and snacks constitute an important part of daily sales in many stores.

13. Many U.S.-destined migrants have teaching degrees although they have never worked as teachers. The *Escuela Normal* is the only option for higher education in the town; many students study teaching because their parents cannot afford to send them to a university in another city. The primary impediment to teaching for many is the year-of-service requirement upon the completion of the teaching degree. Typically one gets sent to poor, isolated villages up in the *Sierra* (mountains) for one's service. The thought of living in one of these communities depresses some students, so they opt for migration to the U.S. instead.

14. "To resolve these problems (poverty, ecological deterioration, democracy, the economy) is the assignment of Mexicans today...Now is your time to live and to build, to change and to improve (the country). This is your place in the history of Mexico."

15. The first public elementary school opened in Putla in 1936 although only a small percentage of children in the town attended it during its first few years of operation. In 1970, the first *secundaria* (junior high school) opened. Of the generation born in the 1960s and the 1970s, 90% have completed elementary school and 69% junior high school. Of the people born between 1930 and 1950, only 34% completed elementary school although many more studied a year or two of elementary school. Less than 10% of this cohort received education beyond the elementary level by attending schools in Puebla or Mexico City; all were from wealthier families.

16. A few students declare that Mexico needs to rid itself of Western influences but they comprise a tiny minority. Most students in and out of the classroom ridicule indigenous people, especially the Triquis, for the way they talk and dress: "*pinches indios, ni saben hablar*" (stupid Indians don't know how to talk, i.e. speak Spanish). The pro-indigenous students glorify the native roots of Mexico in their romanticized version of pre-Conquest Mexico - a "time of peace, prosperity and equality," as one student explained to me. They do not recognize that their sentiments re-produce part of the larger Mexican nation-building process which also extols Mexico's indigenous past but, at the same time, tries to 'modernize' living indigenous peoples by eradicating their customs.

17. In 1994, approximately thirty percent of families in Putla own a VCR.

18. The town sometimes receives two channels but both are owned by *Televisa*.

19. U.S. broadcasting companies also own major interests in Latin American television corporations (see Wells 1994).

20. Television has become pervasive in the district of Putla. Even in communities that have no road access, no running water nor electricity, people own televisions and use car batteries to run them.

21. Douglas (1994:14-19) in her research on the mass media in the United States illustrates this point. The U.S. media has bolstered the image of Americans as 'rugged individuals' while, at the same time, fostering the idea of the American woman as passive and dependent. Is she the Bionic Woman or June Cleaver?

22. When the Chiapas revolution began in January 1994, *24 Horas* news coverage was appalling. It tried to minimize the event and never discussed what the government troops were actually doing. All killing was blamed on the revolutionaries. In order to counter the 'official' version, a schoolteacher from the Chiapas highlands made a videotape of the initial take-over by the revolutionaries and the first two weeks of the government's military response which included torturing and the random killing of numerous Chiapan peasants. This videotape was sent to Mexico City where friends added statements made by Salinas and by

24 *Horas* commentators to underscore the lies of the 'official' version of events. The tape was copied and sent (via teachers) to communities throughout the nation. A Putlecan teacher received a copy about a week after it was made. I was amazed at the speed of the grassroots network to distribute the videos. It struck me just how far-reaching new technology, such as video cameras, can be as "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985) especially in exposing people in positions of power who think that they are untouchable.

23. Whenever one of the schools has a dance fund-raising event, they always try to book *La Furia* because they know that they will have a big turn-out.

24. The *chilena*-style music and dance was brought to the region by merchants from Chile during colonial times (see Castro Mantecón 1982:8).

25. "North American glass bottles: the most sanitary material, glass keeps products intact and fresh...Furthermore, glass is recyclable. Compare and then consume (the product). You will see that glass is the best option."

26. About a third of the people that I interviewed expressed the same beliefs as this young man. Another third believe that the town has improved due to migration: new houses, more stores, more money circulating. A couple respondents didn't know whether the town was better or worst off. The rest said that it was both: individual families' economic situations have improved which is good for the town but morals and traditional values are eroding.

27. During *El Carnaval* of 1992, a group of young men dressed up like U.S. Gulf War soldiers.

28. There seems to be greater pressure to send more money around Christmas time. Family members who have not heard from their kin in the U.S. during the entire year, will typically receive money in December. Mother's Day (May 10th) is also a time when more remittances are received.

29. A 660 square meter lot with a small, abandoned adobe house in the center of town was for sale for N\$300,000 (US\$100,000) in 1994. Land prices in general become cheaper the farther one moves from the center of town, but still lots on the edge of town measuring 10 x 20 meters averaged N\$30,000 (US\$10,000). Several lot prices were greatly overpriced compared to other lots in the same *barrio* (neighborhood); owners told me that they were not anxious to sell and would wait until "someone returned" with enough money to pay their price.

## CONSTRUCTING, CONTESTING, DEFENDING IDENTITIES: THE INFLUENCE OF MIGRATION

### Introduction

Urban migration is the prime way to "move up" within the rural hometown but simultaneously, within the cities where they go to live, most people from rural peasant backgrounds find themselves back down on the lowest rung of the ladder (Turino 1993:28).

The town of Putla is largely inhabited by *mestizos* and by families descended from the *hacienda* landholding class who collectively refer to themselves as *gente de razón* (people with reason).<sup>1</sup> The wealthier landholding families have maintained their economic, political, and social power in the town and district, even though some of their lands have been redistributed during this century. Besides owning land, these families have inherited and expanded lucrative commercial enterprises, controlling most of the buying and selling of commodities throughout the region.<sup>2</sup> They dominate political affairs to the point that very few other Putlecan of voting age are politically active.<sup>3</sup>

One of the greatest shocks to wealthier Putlecan women and men who migrate within the Mexican Republic is their reception by strangers in the new place. Called *Oaxaquitos* (meaning little Indians) by city residents, especially by those from the nation's capital, Putlecan feel the discrimination and racism that they themselves direct towards indigenous people in and around their hometown. Their class and ethnic identities become homogenized as "poor Indian" through the identification of their birthplace, the state of Oaxaca. By changing spaces, they lose what Adams (1975) calls "social power" - their

ability "to use the things that they control in order to have their way in spite of the resistance of others" (Turino 1993:25). Their display of urban-Western clothing, homes, and cars to mark their wealth and power in the hometown becomes muted in the city. The practice by many wealthier Putlecan of finding non-Putlecan spouses and boy/girlfriends to differentiate themselves becomes pointless in a city where almost everyone is from some other place.

Changing spaces and negotiating borders are practices which recreate forms of self-identification as well as the identities of outsiders. Migrants entering a new terrain not only encounter 'others' who are strangers but begin to realize that they too are seen as strangers (Williams 1958:299-300). New tools of negotiation are required as migrants learn how to re-present themselves in the new context with the marketplace of consumer goods as their main guide. The constructions are contested terrain (Glick Schiller et al. 1992:4-5). Not only the migrants but the leading class forces have a stake in these constructions since capitalist profits from migrant labor depend on the establishment of a double labor market and the maintenance of efficient discriminatory ideologies (Meillassoux 1981).

The migration process is inherently political. In the process of defining and redefining their 'selves,' migrants compete for economic and symbolic capital, and reproduce themselves as political and social subjects. In this chapter, I examine how Putlecan women and men create, modify and defend their constructions of identities by exploring these constructions along several of the major axes of social relations: ethnicity,

race, gender, class, sexuality, and religion. Social relations shape the processes of socioeconomic differentiation which in turn shape social relations - a feedback process.

### **Ethnic and Racial Relations**

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time (Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye).

What hurts Indians most is that our costumes are considered beautiful, but it's as if the person wearing it didn't exist (Rigoberta Menchú 1983:204).

*Cuantos detestan al gringo y quisieran parecerse a él! Cuantos dicen que no necesitamos inmigración europea y quisieran casarse con una güera para "mejorar la raza!" Nacionalismo a ultranza y autodenigración, en boca del mismo individuo (Ricardo Martell, cited in Tibón 1984:158).<sup>4</sup>*

Peoples' sense of `self' is grounded in space and in time. When migrating to the United States for the first time, Putlecans discover that they are lumped together with other Spanish-speaking people and are referred to as "Hispanics" by the dominant society. Putlecans never use this term to refer to themselves and resist this homogenization.<sup>5</sup> They recognize differences in nationalities and in historical experiences of those comprising the ethnic category "Hispanic." They say with pride that they are *Mexicanos/as* (Mexican) or among Mexicans, that they are *Oaxaqueños/as* (Oaxacans). Men play on local soccer teams with other Putlecans and Mexicans against their `rivals': *los Salvadoreños* (Salvadoreans), *los Colombianos* (Colombians), *los Peruanos* (Peruvians), etc. Putlecan women and men identify other people from Latin America with whom they work by their nationality, e.g. *el Guatemalteco* (the man from Guatemala). Like other Latin American

immigrants, Putlecans recognize their shared linguistic and cultural roots, but this recognition seldom serves to create a feeling of Latin American unity or oneness.

"National experiences are too divergent and national loyalties too deeply embedded to yield to this supranational logic" (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:137).

Living in working-class neighborhoods that have higher poverty and crime rates, many Putlecans associate darker skin color with unacceptable behaviors such as theft, drug and alcohol use, prostitution, and gangs. Their world becomes further turned upside down when they encounter *paisanos* (fellow Mexicans) who do not extend what they have grown up to define as normal customs of hospitality. Pretending to not speak Spanish, failing to *prestar* (loan) money, closing the door when one needs a place to stay and negating other ways of giving a helping hand have caused Putlecans to be wary of their fellow Mexicans and angry at some Putlecans who have now settled in the United States.

I couldn't believe when they (two Putlecan women) said they didn't have room for me. We were best friends in school and now they acted as if they hardly knew me. Finally they said I could stay for a couple days while I looked for a place but the situation was very uncomfortable. A woman at the (Catholic) church helped me (find a place) even though she didn't know me. She even gave me some furniture. You all (white northamericans) are good people (*Putleca*, late 20s).

When I asked how often Chicanos refused to speak Spanish and why, a Putlecan woman answered,

Oh, its real common for them (Chicanos) to pretend that they don't speak Spanish. It makes them feel superior. But even I could tell that their English wasn't like the way you speak. They think they're so cool but I'd tell them they're stupid and leave.

Putlecans who have migrated to the New York City and New Jersey areas told me

repeatedly how one cannot trust someone just because they speak the same language, especially Puerto Ricans.

I was working alone in a *pizzeria* (in Atlantic City) and as soon as I saw them (group of Puerto Rican youths), I knew there would be trouble so I called the police. Lucky I did because from the moment they entered they started *haciendo desmadre* (causing problems): turning tables over, cursing, throwing stuff, and then they began threatening me. Was I happy to see the police arrive. Who knows what they would have done next. You know, I had to call the police three different times because of these kids (*Putleco*, mid-50s).

Gang violence and drug use frighten many Putlecan mothers when their sons or daughters start talking about their desire to go to the United States, many times causing heated family arguments.

I worry because when kids leave here, they are good kids. And when they return, if they return, many are drug addicts. They get mixed up with gangs. I told Juan (her son) not to go but he left anyway. Now it's been two months since I've heard from him. I wish he would call. When he doesn't call, I worry (*Putleca*, early 40s).

While Putlecan men and women differentiate Latin Americans by their nationalities and historical experiences, they categorize *los negros* (African-Americans) and *los gringos* (white U.S. citizens) as comprising two separate homogeneous racial groups.<sup>6</sup> Putlecans describe *los negros* as *malos* (bad) and *peligrosos* (dangerous). Living in impoverished neighborhoods, often near large public housing projects, they deduce "how African-Americans are" by those who they see hanging out or living on the streets and by news stories. The indigent, the alcoholic and the criminal form the basis of their construction of African-American identity, merging race with poverty. While few Putlecans' homes have actually been robbed in the United States, accounts circulate (and become more

dramatized as they are told) in Putla from "eye-witnesses" who describe robberies by African-American "gang" members.<sup>7</sup> These impressions of African-Americans are based on superficial visual contact, hearsay and fear since language barriers and limited social interaction impede other types of communication which could counteract their negative racial stereotype. Moreover, most Putlecans that I interviewed do not recognize African-American historical experiences as being different from any other *norteamericano's* (U.S. citizen).

I just don't understand why *los negros* are so poor and have so many *vicios* (vices). They are legal and can get any job they want. We come without papers, find jobs, work hard and progress. If we can do it, why can't they? (*Putleca*, early 30s).

While Putlecans divide *norteamericanos* into white and black racial categories, they focus on our shared legal status for employment opportunities, uninformed of the social histories of the two groups and especially ignorant of the discrimination African-Americans have suffered. For most Putlecans who migrate for one purpose (to earn money), the United States is the 'land of opportunity' once one can acquire work permits (either genuine or forged). In their minds, one is hindered in the U.S. only by one's legal status.

While all African-Americans are stereotyped negatively, *los gringos* are described as *buena gente* (good people), *limpios* (clean), *sanos* (healthy), *educados* (educated), *civilizados* (civilized), *progresistas* (progressive).<sup>8</sup> When I asked people how they know this, they explained how *gringos* "smile at you," "dress nice," "have big, modern homes," "work in clean jobs," "help other people," "know more than we do," "don't hit their kids,"

"are organized and everything is orderly," "stop for firemen" and "even stop for animals in the road." These impressions stem from little intimate contact but rather from what they have seen or heard living in the new setting. In urban areas, most Putlecanos do not live in white neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup> Few Putlecanos work directly with *gringos* or have *gringos* as their immediate bosses. Most of their supervisors are Latin Americans who are bi-lingual and serve as the intermediary between white owners/bosses and "Hispanic" laborers.

One Putlecan, a junior high school teacher, did speak negatively about white people. He said that at first he had the same positive impression of *los gringos* that most Putlecanos have. However after living in Chicago for a couple years, he began to realize that many white people are racist against Mexicans, but "because of their education, they know how to hide it better."

Housework is one of the few jobs in which Putlecan women deal with *gringa* bosses directly. However since most do domestic work on a "job work" arrangement, once the negotiation of the fee is settled, they only interact with their bosses occasionally.<sup>10</sup> Most employers are outside the home working when Putlecan women perform the house cleaning duties. The women who do this type of work have seldom expressed feelings of exploitation because they feel that they have more control over their time and have a voice in the negotiation process.

If I need more money, I can clean more houses. There's always more work. I earn well. If I don't like how much she (the employer) offers, I just smile and shake my head no. Normally, she'll offer more. And often, the work is easy, just a little cleaning here and there. Dishes, laundry, all by machines, you know. You people (referring to my *gringa*-ness) are very clean so I guess that's why your houses

aren't too dirty (*Putleca*, mid-30s).

Not every Putlecan woman liked performing housework, but of those who complained, the majority had a live-in arrangement rather than a job work arrangement. Paid very little for their work and having no free time, these Putlecan women felt trapped and wanted to return home. One woman complained of having a boss who expected her to scrub all the floors of her "large" house everyday besides all the other work. She stayed two months while searching for another job and then left when she found work in a factory. She told me that though the factory job was also tedious and exploitative, it paid more and she was free from the demands of that *loca* (crazy woman).

Owners of restaurants, *pizzerias*, and bakeries with whom Putlecans often have direct contact in New York City and in towns in New Jersey are often Italian-Americans who Putlecans consider closer to 'white' than Latin Americans, but still more Latin than Anglo.<sup>11</sup> In part, this is due to their construction of Italian-Americans as simply "Italians" and to the similarities of their languages: owners "give orders" in Italian; Putlecans respond in Spanish; and *más o menos* (more or less) they understand each other. As one Putlecan told me, "at least it (Italian) doesn't sound as *extraño* (strange/foreign) as English." These workers discuss their exploitation by Italian-American owners and are constantly shifting between restaurants and pizza shops for better pay. "You have to demand more money or *los Italianos* will work you to death for nothing," a young Putlecan man who worked in three pizza shops in one summer told me.

When traveling in the United States, migrants were impressed by how "clean" the

country is. In their interpretations, cleanliness results from education and a more 'advanced' civilization.

I had just arrived at my sister's in New Jersey; it was hot so I decided to get an ice cream. I came out of the store and threw the wrapper on the street when this *gringa* picked it up and started telling me something in English. I don't know what she said but I was embarrassed; I felt stupid. I never threw trash on the street again. You can't do that there. They're much more civilized than we are (*Putleca*, early 40s).

Several Putlecans remarked on the difference between their neighborhoods, where people of color live, and the "rest" of the country.

There (U.S.) everything is clean and lots of trees and grass. Only where we lived with *paisanos* (Mexicans) and *los negros* (African-Americans) it was dirty. We don't know how to take care of things like *los gringos* do. No trash along the roads, the beach is very clean. I guess they're just more advanced. They're all educated (*Putleco*, early 20s).<sup>12</sup>

Cleanliness and skin color are marked on the surface of the body. In advanced capitalist society, the site of the body is manipulated to re-produce mainstream ideologies and middle-class values. In order for new immigrants to be 'presentable,' a multitude of consumer goods are offered to help them become "whiter."<sup>13</sup> As Putlecan migrants learn to re-present themselves in the new bicultural context (often by trying to distinguish themselves from some of their neighbors), one of the first things that they buy are new clothes and *lociones* (perfumes, lotions, aftershave). In the U.S., their new ways of cleansing and dressing their bodies allow them to feel more "modern" and more "in style" with middle-class *gringos* whom they emulate. Even though their income level may make them poor by U.S. standards, they use dress and bathing habits to create an illusory

transcendence of class with the hope that they will succeed in achieving their desired economic gain and change the illusion into reality.

Rouse discusses how migrants in California are indirectly encouraged to adopt more U.S. styles in clothing, cars and homes due to "disciplinary influences" by the INS and the police in California (1992:35). Most Putlecan migrants, however, view the police as helpful rather than harmful, and their consumerism is driven from their negotiations of images and constructions of identities rather than pushed by the fear of apprehension. This does not mean, however, that Putlecans are completely 'free' in their decision-making. Social institutions of the dominant society structure how these choices come about and are defined in the first place.

Clothes and *lociones* are used by Putlecans in their hometown to differentiate themselves from Putlecans who have never migrated to the U.S., to make a statement about their 'success' in the U.S. landscape, and to construe themselves as persons who have become more 'modern' due to their migratory experience. They gain access to resources that otherwise would be unavailable to them in Putla and they use these resources to imitate the actions of the wealthier Putlecans who use clothing, cleanliness, and other material resources to display their economic potency. Through consumptive practices, many migrants believe that they are now on par with those peers whom they used to conceptualize as being "better" than them. Few of their wealthier peers agree, however. Buying-power does not necessarily translate into social power.

Migrants' constructions of the 'other' (U.S. white and black citizens) do not begin

afresh once their plane has landed in the new setting. These first impressions and living experiences re-invoke and reinforce racial ideologies that have been handed down from generation to generation in their hometown.

In Putla, migrants grow up in a society where *los indios* (indigenous people) and their lifeways are routinely deprecated; where *mestizos* from more rural communities are also called *gente sin razón*; where people in the wealthier classes describe Mexicans as a whole as "lazy" and *sin cultura* (without culture). Everyday activities fuel racist ideas. For example, on the weekends when indigenous people come to town to sell their produce, there are no public facilities for them to use. Thus, some wash and many relieve themselves along the sides of houses in the center of town. When they leave, waste is discarded around the *kiosco* (kiosk). While they wait for buses, they are often denied access to restrooms, so they go in public spaces. They eat alongside the road, sitting in a squat-position to which I have heard young boys yell, "*mira, los changos*" (look, monkeys) and other disrespectful comments. No shoes and dirty clothes, homes with dirt floors, and other scarcities of material resources nourish racist images.

In nationalistic events such as the Independence Day parade which are to supposed to glorify all ethnic groups, hierarchies are reinforced. The float carrying the 'beauty queens' representing 'Mexico's plural society' had the young indigenous women dressed in their native garb (one Triqui, three Mixtecs, and one Amuzgo) placed around the feet of "Miss America" (a lighter-skinned *mestiza*) who rode in the center in a Western-style evening gown. However, the point that the society in which Putlecans grow up is racist,

does not mean that everyone is a blatant racist. Many people from different classes believe that one should treat everyone with respect. Still their beliefs about love for all humanity do not necessarily erase other beliefs that rank people's superiority/inferiority by skin color. *Pobres inditos* (poor little Indians) may be a statement of empathy but it also has an underlining sentiment which marks indigenous people as inferior. One Putlecan woman told me with great earnest how,

we need to help the Triquis because they're uncivilized. They would live like animals if we didn't teach them better.

Her tone was not hateful but rather journalistic, one of reporting the "facts." Hegemonic ideas, values and attitudes about urban-Western lifeways fostered by public education and heightened by mass media images, have shaped personal consciousness. The migration experience, in turn, supports homespun beliefs about class and racial hierarchies, i.e. that white people are wealthier because they are smarter and *más civilizados* (more civilized).

While most Putlecans construct *los gringos* positively, they are still aware of discriminatory practices in the United States. In their minds, it is the U.S. government who is responsible for these practices. They separate *el pueblo* (the people) from *el gobierno* (the government) as they do in their own country.<sup>14</sup> It is in what Putlecans consider to be strictly family affairs that they resent the U.S. government the most. Several people repeated to me that if you hit your children, the U.S. government will come and take them away from you. Others complained of government interference.

Children need to learn to respect their parents. But there (U.S.) they don't have to because of the government. They can go and complain and the government will

take them to live with a different family (*Putleco*, mid-30s).

I came home after my son was born. I couldn't take care of him and work enough to pay the rent and buy food and things. I was afraid to leave him with someone because the government would say that I'm not a good mother and would take him away (*Putleca*, late 30s).

When I responded that many women work in the United States and leave their children in day care without any problems from the government, she rebutted, "Yes, they can. They're *gringas*. The government respects them."

Their disdain for the United States government also stems from what they see as its role in Mexico's economic calamities. The *Tratado de Libre Comercio* (TLC) or North American Free Trade Agreement is a current source of ill feelings. While some Putlecans argue that it will be good for states in northern Mexico and others disagree, they all agree that it will be bad for the state of Oaxaca and its people.

Only states that already have contacts, roads, and industry will the TLC be beneficial. Oaxacans will continue to migrate to be *la mano de obra* (laborers) like they are doing now (*Putleco*, mid-20s).

With the TLC, more companies will come and steal our resources like they're doing now. Cutting down all our trees and now it doesn't rain like before. No, it's going to be bad for us (*Putleco*, 60s).

It's like asking a cat and a mouse to play together. Sooner or later, the cat's going to eat the mouse (*Putleco*, mid-40s).

The continuous news about NAFTA has intensified many townspeople worries about the Mexican economy and their dislike for the U.S. government. By separating the U.S. people from the government, people see no contradiction in their conclusion that *los gringos* are good and *El tío Sam* (Uncle Sam) is bad. "Uncle Sam" discriminates and

oppresses Mexico and its people under its mighty economic and political strength. Several students and teachers in the *COBAO* and the *Escuela Normal* build upon these anti-U.S. government sentiments to push their students to continue studying and look for a professional job in Mexico rather than migrating "for fast money." "We have to keep our young people here. It's the only way Mexico will develop and progress" explained one teacher.

The migration process has reinforced hierarchies in the constructions of ethnic and racial identities for most Putlecan men and women. While they may challenge the U.S. government, most often they accommodate and reinforce the ranking of people based on skin color in the new setting while renewing their hopes of becoming 'whiter' by moving up the class ladder. In studies of immigrant settlement in the United States, researchers have shown that immigrant groups have resisted or reworked their placement within the ethnic/racial hierarchies of the dominant society in part, by promoting ethnic pride.<sup>15</sup> Allegiance to the home country remains especially strong among first-generation immigrants who recognize that they are "in America, but not of it" (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:140). Time plays a critical role in influencing migrants' responses to these hierarchies. Putlecans who maintain relations in both their hometown and in the new setting but who see Putla as their 'home,' emotionally invest much less of themselves in the new place than Putlecans who have settled permanently in the United States. Their loyalties are tied to Putla and to Mexico. As one Putlecan man told me when I asked about discrimination in the U.S., "Who's got time to worry about these things, I'm here to

work as much as I can so I get back home as soon as I can." The seasonal migrants' observations remain on a more superficial level. With time and increasing fluidity in the new social setting, these migrants may become more critical as the junior high school teacher did, or they may remain unaware of or indifferent to the premises of their subordination in a place where they do not intend to stay.

Some non-migrating Putlecanos blame those who do migrate as "destroying" the Mexican family and community values. Besides their aversion to migrants who return boasting and showing off their new clothes or cars, their primary critique centers not on "U.S. imperialism" but rather on changing gender roles.

### **Gender Relations**

Even though *los gringos* as a 'racial' group are perceived positively, for many people *las gringas* represent a problem. Part of their constructions of *los gringos* as educated and advanced includes what they call "liberal attitudes" referring to equal rights for men and women. Many Putlecan men and several Putlecan women resist the idea of men and women sharing power especially in the home.<sup>16</sup> Social life in Putla has been organized according to the principals of patriarchy - though with much variation among families as to how absolute.

Traditional patriarchal ideals which relegate women to the private sphere in Mexico have been changing in the past few decades as greater numbers of Mexican women actively participate in politics, in wage work, and in education.<sup>17</sup> Many younger

people in Putla, especially those who have been educated in a city, have begun accepting and supporting women's rights. But the ideology of *machismo* (manliness) is still strong in many families.<sup>18</sup>

Infidelity is construed as "men being men" and women are supposed to tolerate it. Many Putlecan men have had one legal wife and family along with one or more *casas chicas* (parallel families with lovers) throughout this century.<sup>19</sup> Women, on the other hand, are supposed to be virtuous and self-sacrificing for their families. When women step out of these bounds, they provoke severe criticisms from both men and women in the community which often results in violent confrontations between their husbands, their lovers and themselves.<sup>20</sup> Single women must be careful to not date too many men or risk being viewed as "used goods."

If she dates too many men, no one will want to marry her because, well you know (pauses). You can't feel secure that she won't take off with some other guy later (*Putleco*, mid- 20s).

Husbands' reputations hinge on their ability to control their wives and children, which for some men means physical abuse so "they know who's boss." One woman told me that her husband does not allow her to bathe until he comes home in the evening.

He (her husband) thinks that if I bathe in the day that I must be fixing myself up to see another man or that I've been with him and am washing away the smell (of sex). He's crazy (*Putleca*, late 20s).

Control is exercised through women's bodies. Men who "lose" this control or those who do not adhere to what they consider "old-fashioned" ideas, are the subject of jokes, even ridicule, about being *mandilones* (husbands who are ordered around by their wives).

For many men, part of their problem with *gringas* comes from their fear of losing control over "their women." Sharing power becomes emasculating. Many Putlecan female migrants have incorporated into their sense of identity "liberal" ideas of women's rights. For example, an unwed mother from Putla told me that before she migrated she was ashamed of having a child out of wedlock. She felt that people looked at her as if she were *sucia* (dirty/polluted), so she left Putla with her child to live with her cousin in Hoboken. While working to support herself and her child, she met several unwed mothers who felt no shame about having a child out of wedlock. After four years, she returned to Putla and opened her own *tienda de abarrotes* with the money she saved. She remarked,

Never again will I let someone treat me like a dog. I am a human being and I deserve respect. And now, can you believe that the father of my child wants to marry me but I told him no. I don't need some drunken fool in my home.

Fathers, husbands, or brothers who resist "liberal" ideas and do not want their wives, sisters or daughters exposed to them, manipulate the meaning of "liberal" to imply "anti-mother" and "whore." "Liberal" women fail to follow the example of the Virgin Mary who suffers silently for her family. The teachings of the Catholic Church are central in the lives of most Putlecan women; men use this to keep "their women" in Putla when they ask to go to the U.S. with them. Sadly, some men have even used the stories of two different Putlecan women who were murdered by their husbands while living in the U.S. as an "example" of what happens to a woman when she becomes too "liberal."<sup>21</sup> They claim that they are "protecting their women" by keeping them away from "evil" influences, and in the process, they defend their position of power in the family.

*"Los hombres para trabajar y las mujeres para servir en el hogar"* (men to work and women to serve in the home), as a young Putlecan man who continually denies his sister's request to go to the U.S. told me, "are the proper places for men and women." Not only in the home, but in community events "proper" roles for women and men are expressed. Preparations for Independence Day celebration involves men stripping pine needles and weaving them together with ropes to decorate the municipal buildings and women serving trays of drinks and food to the men while they work. An elderly man told me that the decoration work is hard on the hands that's why it's "men's" work.<sup>22</sup>

*Mujeres para servir* not only in the home, in the plaza, but also in the *cantinas* (bars) where women serve more than drinks and where men can articulate their *macho*-ness to the fullest.

The better man is the one who can drink more, defend himself best, have more sex relations, and have more sons borne by his wife (Madsen 1973:22).

The male drinking culture which includes drinking *hasta atrás* (to drunkenness), having sex, and getting into a fight, is one of the leading causes of conflict and tension in couples' relationships. An assertion of men's independence and authority, these actions hurt wives and children emotionally and financially, draining precious resources.<sup>23</sup>

Many Putlecan women are becoming less tolerant of *macho* ideals. Several women in their twenties told me that they have not married because they do not want to spend their lives with *viciosos* (men given to vices). They go out at night to restaurant-bars with their girlfriends to drink and to socialize, something they started doing while studying in

Mexico City or Oaxaca City, or while working in the U.S. Many times they are joined by young couples. These younger men who prefer to go out with their wives rather than to the *cantinas* are chided by some of their male friends as having "wives who beat them."

With the *macho* image under attack, some Putlecan men have begun actively denying that they are *machos* while often keeping *macho* ideals. Several men would preface their responses to my questions with *no soy macho pero...* (I'm not 'macho' but).<sup>24</sup> While these men loathe physical abuse, calling men who hit their wives "animals," they still believe that a woman's place is in the home having babies and serving them. They naturalize their reasons telling me, "that's how God made men and women" or "that's why women give birth and men don't." They conflate biological reproduction and social reproduction so that child-care is "naturally" women's responsibility. To defend their position further, they cite church doctrine.

Struggles over the meaning of gender and the rights and obligations of men and women have resulted in a loosening of social norms. Women exhibit greater freedoms; men are increasingly participating in housework and in child care. Migration has played a central role in changing people's attitudes and behaviors. When I first came to Putla, I was surprised to hear several women say that they were happy that their husbands and brothers migrate to the United States - not only because of the money but more importantly, because of the changes in the behaviors of their men.

He (her husband) came back (from the U.S.) much more respectful. Before he left, he was really *grosero* (uncouth) but now he's much more loving and helps me with the children (*Putleca*, late 20s).

I didn't like being around my brothers sometimes. They were always saying *groserias* (vulgarity) and teasing me. But since they returned from *Atlanti* (Atlantic City), they treat me well and they help mom around the house. I couldn't believe it (*Putleca*, late teens).

I wondered at the time if these were permanent behavioral changes or temporary actions because these men had missed their families. When I returned a couple years later, I visited these same women who happily reported that their men are still respectful and continue to assist with housework and/or child care. As the husband of the Putlecan woman quoted above told me,

You never know what you have until you leave for a couple years. My kids were babies when I left but not when I returned. I watched fathers with their kids in the park there (U.S.) and missed mine even more. You know, to love and *cuidar* (take care of) your children doesn't mean that you're not a man.

Almost half of the women in my survey responded that their husbands returned from the United States more respectful and responsible, harder-working, and more cooperative with housework and child-care. Several men have stopped drinking. The wives still perform the majority of household labor whether or not they also have income-earning jobs, but they do not mind because they feel grateful that "God" has given them "good men."

When Putlecan men migrate to urban centers in the U.S. and share an apartment, they have little choice but to cook, to clean, and to wash clothes for themselves. They learn that housework is work.

I always thought that my wife just watched soap operas all day while doing a little cooking and washing; I never knew how hard it is to keep a house clean until I lived with a bunch of guys in Long Branch (N.J.) (*Putleco*, late 20s).

Even when couples migrate together, most husbands eventually learn to do housework. The majority of Putlecan women who migrate plan to work outside the home so that the couple can earn more money in a shorter period of time. Women complained to me of their "double day" in the United States. When couples first arrived, husbands expected their wives to continue taking care of the house (and the children, if they go) and cook as they did before, even though their wives were working full-time jobs.<sup>25</sup>

I just couldn't do it all. I was exhausted and in a bad mood all the time. Finally I told him (her husband) that he had to help me. Thank God, he's a good man and understood. He started cooking dinner since he got home earlier than me (*Putleca*, early 30s).

Women's responses vary as to what extent men perform household tasks and to the magnitude of their consent. While some husbands were sympathetic and did what their wives asked, others argued repeatedly with their wives over housework and reluctantly gave assistance. Several couples returned to Putla because these arguments were tearing apart their relationships. They felt that gender roles in the United States are too ambiguous.

It's easier here (Putla). I work and my wife takes care of the house. It's not that I'm a *macho*, I love my wife and children very much. We decided together that it would be better to go back home. We earned enough (money) to set up my shop. We're much happier here (*Putleco*, mid-30s).

Migration to the United States does not automatically result in the creation of more balanced and better relations between men and women. To the contrary, migration can tear families apart. I heard many stories of men abandoning their families in Putla once they arrived in the U.S. For some, it was temporary: no communication or remittances for

two, three or five years, then the phone call announcing their return. But for others, the abandonment is permanent. Left to survive on their own or rely on extended kin, many wives of these migrants have become poorer and their children hungrier.<sup>26</sup> Some of my most difficult moments in Putla were when women asked me to find their husbands upon my return to the United States; few women had addresses and of those who did, they were from several years ago. One abandoned wife told me how her husband boasted about having a new Chicana wife and then had the audacity to bring her to Putla for a visit. Furious, the wife tried to force her husband to pay child support (which she is entitled to under Mexican law) and to get title to their agricultural lands for their sons. The husband paid off the police and the judge, paid no child support and returned to the U.S. without signing over the lands.

About half of the women in my survey who have U.S.-destined husbands, fear that their husbands will not return due to accidents and/or other women.<sup>27</sup> The other women said that they have no fear because they trust their husbands. One woman explained, "He's always come home before. I know he will again." Another wife told me that her husband hates leaving Putla; he calls her every two weeks even though it is expensive because he misses her and their children terribly. A few women admitted that they feel no trepidation about their husbands' return because they do not care whether they come back or not.

When he's here (in Putla), he's never here (in the house) so why should I care if he returns or not? (*Putleca*, early 20s).

Another young wife remarked,

If he returns, fine. If not, who cares? I've got more important things to do than worry about him.

Several women commented that the worst consequence of out-migration is what they see as the rise of *madres solteras* (unwed mothers). As the feelings of the unwed mother that I discussed earlier highlights, women who have children out of wedlock are stigmatized. Women are not branded if they get pregnant before they are married which is a common occurrence and the reason why many couples have married young. There may be some gossip but they are not branded as *sucia* (polluted), unlike the women who deliver their babies with no men there to claim 'responsibility.'

Older women say that younger women are confusing what it means to be "liberal." As mothers, they worry when they hear their daughters talking about their rights with girlfriends: "whatever men can do so can we." They try to prevent them from going out drinking, having sexual relations, and ending up pregnant often to no avail. For these mothers, young Putlecan migrants with cars have corrupted the town.

These boys return for the winter in their new cars and the girls go crazy. They are so easily impressed and they think these boys have money. And that's all they care about - finding a boyfriend who has money, who can buy her little gifts. In the evening when it starts to get dark just walk around and look in the cars, you'll see them doing it. They think that men are a way to *sobresalir* (get ahead). But what happens, the boys go back to the U.S. and a couple months later, the girls are pregnant and alone. The boys are far away and they don't care. Often boys run north as soon as they find out that their girlfriends are pregnant. They don't want a family, they just want sex (*Putleca*, late 30s).

Cars are replacing horses as the principal symbol of male virility in Putla. In the past, older people commented on how a young man would ride his horse *para robar una*

*mujer* (in order to 'steal' a women) with or without her consent. Parents constantly watched their daughters to prevent them from eloping or from being taken against their will - a futile practice in many cases. Now parents watch out for young men in cars.

Single, young men repeatedly told me that their desire to go to the U.S. stems to a large degree from their "need" to own a car. If they stay in Putla, they believe that they will never earn enough money to purchase one. The young Putlecan migrants who drive their cars around the town, do so for 'manly' display since one can easily walk from the edge to the center of town in minutes. For young Putlecan men, cars are a symbol of economic well-being, of sexual liberty, of freedom, and of power. As Bayley notes in his study on automobiles and images,

A fast car has reserves of power. The very suggestion of power has in itself a strong erotic content...The relationship between sex and speed has been a powerful tool in (automobile) marketing in the U.S. and Europe" (1986:7,31).

These images are also re-marketed in Mexico.

*Madre solteras* are not a new phenomena in Putla. I spoke with several older women who never married and raised their children on their own. They all agreed that it was very difficult especially "back then" but most believe that they made the right choice. Having sexual relations out of wedlock is also not new. While they may be "doing it" in cars today, couples have always found places to "do it." Church documents do show, however, that the average age of women marrying in the church is rising. More younger, unmarried couples are using birth control and thus, do not have to marry in their teens as a result of pregnancy.

Increasing availability of birth control and the growing social approval of its use are altering the lives of younger women. The Mexican government began a comprehensive family planning program in 1974 in response to the rapidly growing population rate. To avoid direct confrontation with the Catholic Church, the government constructed the idea of family planning around the slogan "A small family lives better" (Riding 1985:225). Top priority was given to disseminating information to rural areas through a media campaign. As Simonelli notes, the campaign extended to "Mexican-made *novelas* or soap operas in which the heroine is usually depicted as a contraceptive user" (1986:163).

As one Putlecan in her fifties put it, for her generation family planning consisted of having "all (the children) that God sends." Women under thirty-five years old invariably said that they want a small family. Many of these women already have two or three children and use birth control to have no more. Younger women without children agree that to have two is best. They cite financial concerns as the primary reason.<sup>28</sup>

Women before had kids and more kids without thinking of how they were going to feed them. Not me. Two and no more (*Putleca*, late teens).

Parents feel obliged to provide more goods and more education for their children than they have had.

We were poor and ever since I was a boy, my brother and I worked to help the family. We studied hard, too, so that when we grew up we could give our children all the toys and things we never had. I want my kids to be able to study and become professionals. We're only going to have one more child (they have one son). It's the only way to live better (*Putleco*, early 30s).

Younger women who are determined to have small families, expressed the need to

increase control over their bodies along with their pocketbooks.

All those kids and what happens. Your body is over. You look fifty when you're only thirty. Poor and fat. The only way to get ahead is to have one or two children, no more. Otherwise, your life is over (*Putleca*, early 20s).

After women start having children, most find themselves more confined to the home. They stop participating in activities which provide physical exercise such as playing on local basketball and volleyball teams. Many Putlecan women gain weight with each pregnancy and feel like they have lost control of their bodies, decreasing their self-esteem. Younger women are especially conscious of their physical appearance. Images on television and in magazines re-produce and reinforce urban-Western ideals of female beauty: thin, tall, light-colored (the whiter, the better), soft skin and hands, and shiny white teeth.<sup>29</sup> Fatness is associated with 'backwardness.' Many women told me that *gringas* are more beautiful than they are because "*gringas* know how to take care of themselves" (i.e. better educated, more 'modern').<sup>30</sup> U.S.-style aerobic classes are now offered in Putla. The image of the round Mexican mother who can cuddle all her children on her lap is under attack as women began to internalize media images of the "ideal" woman.<sup>31</sup>

Several older women agree with their daughters' desires to maintain their figures and to give birth to a few children. One woman told me that she would have liked to have had two or three children instead of nine. It would have made her relationship with her husband better.

After you have a lot (of children), you start to lose the *cariño* (affection/love)

between you and your husband. You have so many to care for, you don't have the energy to be as loving and attractive as before. And your husband doesn't put the attention to the kids like you do, so he doesn't understand and begins to *buscar en otros lados* (look in other places for a lover). If you have a couple (children), you can keep the *cariño* with your husband and live a better life (*Putleca*, mid-50s).

Other older women believe that it is morally wrong to regulate pregnancy for any reason; they strictly adhere to the declarations of the Catholic Church which bans the use of birth control.<sup>32</sup> Many of these women blame the "bad influences of the U.S." or of television for the greater acceptance of birth control.<sup>33</sup> One woman explained that this why U.S. women are "weak."

They don't have all the children that God intended them to have. That's why they get pains in the stomach, breasts and back. I don't have one pain, not one, because I have eleven (children). Now God doesn't want me to have anymore, but if he did, I would (*Putleca*, early 60s).

Her husband was convinced that in the United States, it was against the law to have more than two children. If you do, the government comes and takes them away. His friend agreed.

The (U.S.) government is strict and controls your family. When our people go there, they come back different, more controlled. No more this and that, strict like there (U.S.). They lose their passion for life (*Putleco*, late 60s).

The cost of birth control impedes many poorer women from taking the pill or using other forms of birth control; these women are continuing to give birth to large families. Lack of finances is coupled with ignorance about birth control. Several poorer women remarked that they "fear" the pill because "it will make you sick" or "it will make you more manly." Only recently have two OB-GYN specialists set up practice in Putla. When

the doctors first came, they offered gynecological examinations (pap-smears) for free, thinking that women did not have the test done due to financial constraints. But few women accepted their offer for fear of the examination and of town gossip.<sup>34</sup>

Many younger women stated that they also want smaller families so that they can have a career. They want to finish their education and not duplicate their mothers' situations, "always cooking and washing." They want to work, stopping only while their children are young; once the children are in school, they plan to continue with their careers. They see education and wage work as a way to enrich themselves and to gain personal as well as financial independence. Mothers who wanted to study and to have a career but were denied the opportunity by their fathers due to patriarchal ideas, are supportive of their daughters' desires, as are many younger husbands. Several young fathers commented that they enjoy taking care of their children; several of these men have renounced drinking so that they can spend more time and money on their families.

Traditional gender roles are modifying in Putla, but the changes are not absolute. The most common wage work jobs for women are teaching and commercial enterprises.<sup>35</sup> Both of these activities have a history of women's active participation and allow women to continue their duties as wives and mothers. Teaching and caring for children are an extension of 'motherly' duties. The numerous *tiendas de abarrotes* and other stores that women run are located in a part of the home sphere.<sup>36</sup>

Migration processes have increased women's participation and decision-making in commercial activities. Starting with the contracting of Putlecan men for the *Bracero*

Program in the 1940s, men began migrating out of the region for months at a time and women started gaining more control over family resources and deciding how to use those resources.<sup>37</sup> Putlecan women began managing family budgets - monies from local production and remittances from their men in the United States. As local agricultural production became less and less profitable due to changes in the national and world economies, commercial activities and migration have assumed greater economic importance in the town. Remittances have helped women set up small businesses, a process accompanied by an ideology of women being *más listas* (more astute) with money and better at bartering.<sup>38</sup> Putlecan women who run family businesses have become more assertive and share greater equality in the home. They also have greater prestige and mobility in the community.

The number of women participating in wage work is increasing in Putla as is the number throughout the country. Official figures estimate a twenty-five percent increase between 1975 and 1990 in the number of rural Mexican women performing wage work (Stephen 1992:79). Hard economic times in Mexico have pushed single and married women into much needed cash-generating activities. Several studies show that one of the results of this process is the enhancement of women's own sense of strength and competence (LeVine 1993; Mummert 1988; Peña 1981; Stephen 1992). Women who perform wage work have greater access to other activities which bolster their own sense of empowerment. Putlecan female teachers have shared information on women or family "self-help" programs offered in Oaxaca City. Female *comerciantes* (merchants) have

served as presidents of the Putlecan market association. Other working women have joined the *Comité de la Integración de la Mujer* (a relatively new women's group that assists women in economic need, especially single mothers). Putlecan women have taken active roles in the local ecology group, in church activities and in other community groups.

The changes that many Putlecan women (especially those born post-1960) are experiencing in the division of wage work, housework and community work, in control over their bodies and minds, and in their relationships with husbands, children and other family members are complex and often inconsistent. Increasing access to opportunities coupled with growing social approval of those opportunities enhance women's empowerment in the home and in the community. As other scholars have shown, migration processes often lead to greater gender equality in housework, in spatial mobility and in family decision-making (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Mummert 1988; Pedraza 1991). Patriarchal reins are loosening but not without resistance from both Putlecan men and women. A woman's self-identification is still firmly tied to her reproductive abilities. Motherhood and child-rearing are eminently valued by both men and women, as I quickly learned from women warning me to *apurarme* (hurry up) and have a child if I want to keep my husband. *Suegra-nuera* (mother-in-law/daughter-in-law) relations are often rocky as mothers baby their sons and criticize their sons' wives for asserting "liberal" ideas and for not following "traditional" gender roles. Several *nueras* complained to me about their *suegras* constant disapproval of their cooking as not being "good enough" for their sons.

The transformations in gender relations vary among families. It is difficult to

'measure' these changes since patriarchal authority in the family is, and has been, renegotiated on a day by day, year by year basis. However, the trend towards more egalitarian relations between men and women is strengthening in the community. The constructed meanings of self-identification as gendered beings, are created, modified, and defended in response to migration processes, daily struggles, ethnic and class relations, and religious beliefs.

### **Religious Beliefs**

Around ninety percent of Putlecans are Catholic and two-thirds of these go to church regularly. The Catholic church's influence in the construction of personal consciousness is strong, as exemplified in the debate over birth control. However, official religious doctrine is mediated in the local context by particular priests. Their attitudes and interpretations of orthodoxy play a leading role in how community members negotiate religious beliefs with daily actions (Simonelli 1986:161).

The current priest in Putla is well-liked. Unlike many of his predecessors, he has gained the respect of the townspeople through his bounteous community service that extends well beyond his sacerdotal functions. Since his arrival in 1990, he and the *Equipo de Trabajo* (restoration committee) have raised over \$80,000 for the renovation of the dilapidated church. He preaches about ecological issues and is a leading figure in the ecology group in Putla. He has donated church space for the recycling center and has spurred ecological movements in many other communities in his parish. When my husband

organized the first conference on AIDS in Putla, the priest asked me for a copy of the information so that he can "advise the congregation better." While unable to endorse the use of condoms as a means to regulate birth, he believes that they can be used "to protect lives." His more liberal interpretations of church orthodoxy provides enough ambiguity to help change attitudes about contraceptives, among other things, for many church members.<sup>39</sup> The townspeople, in response to his "good works," organized an enormous *fiesta* to celebrate his fifteen years of clerical service in March of 1994.<sup>40</sup>

Putla has been described to me by community members as a "*fiesta* town" - a town in which life is organized by the cycle of festivals. "When one *fiesta* is over, you began planning for the next" remarked a Putlecan women who has often served as *mayordomo*. Most of the *fiestas* are in honor of neighborhood, town (*Virgen de la Natividad*) and national (*Virgen de Guadalupe*) saints, and other religious holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, Ash Wednesday and the Day of the Dead. Only during the three summer months when the rains fall hard is the town quiet except for some bull riding and horse races.

*Fiestas* unite community members and renew feelings of social solidarity for people living in and outside the community.<sup>41</sup> Participation in festivals through *mayordomo* service (sponsorship) increases family honor and highlights people's sense of communal obligation. At the same time, however, they are a space in which Putlecans can demarcate their social position in the community through the display of material resources. During the week celebration in honor of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, many women wear indigenous clothing to symbolize their 'shared humbleness' with the Virgin Mary.

However, wealthier Putlecan women do not wear just any indigenous clothing; they buy elaborately, hand-sewn beaded blouses that Amuzgos from Ometepepec, Guerrero sell for the equivalent of one hundred to two hundred U.S. dollars apiece. The blouses are stunning and while they are "indigenous," they serve to underscore the economic status of the women wearing them and to differentiate them from the 'real' indigenous women.

Religious pilgrimages to the *Basilica* in Mexico City and to the Virgin of Juquila near the Oaxacan coast are made by Putlecans annually. The apparition of saints continue to occur in the town, leaving their 'images' not only for townspeople but for everyone throughout the region to come see and to pray to.<sup>42</sup> As economic times become more difficult, many people told me that they are spending more (rather than less) on religious offerings in hopes that the "*Virgencita* will answer our prayers."

Other poorer community members have turned to Evangelism in hopes of improving their life economically as well as spiritually.<sup>43</sup> The greatest concentration of Evangelists are in the *Campo de Aviación*, the poorest *barrio* in Putla and the one that has the highest concentration of 'outsiders' (new arrivals to Putla). The Evangelists from the United States give food and medicine to people who are interested in converting; they often serve food to their followers after Sunday services.<sup>44</sup> The leaders claim to have nothing against the Catholic Church; they are in Putla simply "to spread the word about Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior." In the services that I attended, nothing was said that could be considered a direct attack on the Catholicism. However, the literature produced and distributed by the Pentecostals attacks the worshiping of saints and their images.

Less than five percent of the people claim to be *evangelistas* in my survey.<sup>45</sup> The Evangelist migrants are unwanted by a majority of the townspeople who see them as a *una molestia* (nuisance), annoyed by their attempts of conversion. The association of Evangelists with recent immigrants ('outsiders') in *el Campo* reinforces the negative stereotype that many 'authentic' Putlecans have about these people, as "always causing trouble." But the overall presence of the Evangelists in the community has yet to cause the type of conflicts seen in other areas in Mexico such as in the state of Chiapas (see Tangeman 1995). The Catholic priest commented on how he sees *evangelistas* at many Catholic religious festivals and how many are *compadres* (godparents) for Catholic family members. Conversions have caused heated family arguments in a few cases, but not to the point of bloodshed or the breaking of family ties.

Several Putlecan men became Jehovah Witnesses while in the United States and have continued practicing their new faith upon their return to Putla. One of these men's wives reported that after seeing how her husband had changed (stopped drinking; spends time with the family) she decided to convert, also, so that "he wouldn't return to his old habits." Migrants, however, comprise only a few of the new Evangelist members; most members are people who have never left Oaxaca.

Even though *gringos* are delivering the Evangelist message, they are not perceived in the same light as *gringos* in the United States. Evangelism is not considered a more 'modern' or more 'advanced' form of religion, to the contrary, people find it constraining and oppressive. The denunciation of the saints, their images and the religious festival cycle

goes against people's senses of community and of time. Putlecans invest a substantial amount of their time and their personal trust in the Catholic church. Religious beliefs are deeply ingrained in one's sense of identity. Moreover, I believe that due to the less conservative attitude of the local priest and his bountiful community service, the Catholic Church seems more accessible and responsive to changes in the community and to people's problems. Had he been unwavering in church orthodoxy and inactive in the community, people might have been more receptive to other religious ideas.

The Evangelist advance in Putla still lacks continuity. Pastors come and go with years passing in between their visits. Their churches have yet to grow strong roots but as the economic crisis worsens who knows how many will convert - desperate to find a solution to their hunger pains.

### **Health and Sexual Relations**

Migration is one of the major demographic processes affecting world populations today. However, knowledge of how social and cultural discontinuity affect health remains poorly developed (Janes 1986:175).

A New York Times article (3/8/92), woke me up to one issue of migration and health with the headline, "AIDS is following Mexican migrant workers back across the U.S. Border." The article discussed migrants from a small town in Michoacan who are returning home HIV-positive and infecting other community members.

The article struck home again one morning in Putla while I was reading *El Imparcial* (8/26/93). An article focused on 111 AIDS cases reported in the Central

Valleys of Oaxaca. I asked some of my neighbors what they thought about the article but they became "too busy" to discuss it. During the next few weeks, I found that many people resisted talking about it, even those whom I had come to know well. Some Putlecans spoke about AIDS in a whisper and blamed it on what they consider "indecent" sexual behaviors, such as male homosexuality or bestiality between "*los negros* and monkeys in Africa." They see themselves isolated from the disease, locating it in big Mexican cities, in the United States, and in Africa. Most AIDS cases reported in Mexico are in large urban areas and tourist resorts (Carrillo 1994:130). By 1989 the majority of Mexican people infected were "homosexual" and "bisexual" men, and the growth rate of the disease has been highest among these groups (Bronfman et al. 1989).<sup>46</sup>

Putlecans assign the disease to the 'other' who lives in 'other' places like Guadalajara or Mexico City, where there are large gay communities and where foreign gay men visit. Many also believe that "you can tell by looking at someone" if he or she has the virus, even though it takes years for AIDS to manifest. While medical doctors in the town recognize the frightening effects these beliefs have, most of them have also contributed to the misinformation that people have with their own homophobia.<sup>47</sup>

Ignoring the disease and/or assigning it to some 'other' have not prevented the spread of the virus into the community. A Putlecan chemist who does most of the medical laboratory analyses reported that during the summer months in 1993, four people out of 98 tested HIV positive. Most of the people tested had been living in the United States and identify themselves as heterosexuals. While I was shocked by the high percentage (almost

4%), I was reminded by my chemist friend that only a few people get tested, and "those who know that they should (referring to those who have unprotected sex with multiple partners in the U.S. and in Mexico), are the last ones to walk into my office."

In Putla, several gay men, on the other hand, who have taken the responsibility to be tested, are HIV negative.<sup>48</sup> The gay men with whom I spoke had the most accurate information about the disease and they stay informed through connections with gay organizations and friends in Mexico City.<sup>49</sup> Several of these men had lived in the New York City area and were very concerned about their HIV status.

New York City and Los Angeles are two of the seven cities with highest number of AIDS cases reported and current research indicates a high correlation between "seropositivity and geographical closeness to these high-risk areas" (Carrier 1989:132). Most Putlecan migrants spend time in these two cities as either their final destination point or when in route down the New Jersey coast or up the West Coast. Seasonal migrants to the United States have become one the primary concerns of AIDS officials in Mexico who have detected,

what appears to be a shift in regional patterns: the increase in the number of cases in large cities appears to be slowing down, while smaller cities and towns with fewer cases have increasingly higher rates (Carrillo 1994:131).

Migrants comprise one-third of the AIDS cases reported in the state of Michoacan (Carrillo 1994:131). Officials fear that the disease is spreading even faster than predicted in the short-term projection models due to circular migration between the U.S. and Mexico, and between cities and towns within the country (see Mohar 1992; Romieu et al.

1991).

Living in a high-risk area, does not mean that one will contract the AIDS virus. One can become infected in any town or region, whether gay or straight. The problem lies in people's sexual practices. As Heise (1989:117) points out, the high prevalence of "bisexual" practices among Latin men has increased the spread of AIDS among women and children in Haiti, Trinidad, Tobago, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras.

Health officials fear that other Latin American countries could follow Haiti's lead. In Brazil and Mexico, for example, bisexuals account for 23 percent of reported AIDS cases; in Ecuador, for 40 percent (Heise 1989:117).

A man's sexuality in Mexico is not defined by who his partner is but rather by the role he plays in sexual relations.

Feminine males, generally believed to have a preference for playing only the receptive role in anal intercourse, are labeled 'homosexual' by Mexican people...Masculine males, on the other hand, generally believed to be interested only in playing the insertive role in anal intercourse, are not stigmatized as 'homosexual' by Mexican people (Carrier 1989:133,134).

Masculine males consider themselves strictly heterosexual even though they participate in what Anglos would label "bisexual" behavior because they play the 'masculine' role in intercourse with other men and with wives or girlfriends. Because they identify themselves as "not homosexual," many feel that they are not at risk in contracting the virus since, in their minds, AIDS is a "gay disease." Lack of preventive measures results in the transmission of the virus across genders due to their sexual practices (Carrier 1989:138-139).

The denial of the possibility of contracting HIV is problematic in Putla as well as in

the rest of Mexico.<sup>50</sup> In Putla, people do not want to discuss this possibility or even think about the disease. Most men resist using condoms because "it doesn't feel as good." Some fear, as one Putlecan stated, "that people will assume that I have it (AIDS) or something (another disease)." Condom use is associated with venereal diseases.<sup>51</sup> Whether with gay men, prostitutes or lovers in the United States or in Putla, most men refuse to use condoms. One young man who told me secretly that while he does have unprotected sex with women during his stays in the United States, he cannot use a condom to protect his wife and future children when he returns because, "she would know that I'm unfaithful there."

The backlash from the political right against the government's safe sex campaigns, has further hindered AIDS prevention efforts by promoting the idea that 'good' people do not get AIDS, only social degenerates do. The media campaign developed by *CONSIDA* (National Council of AIDS) has backed off the promotion of condoms for protection, replacing it with a more ambiguous campaign of "parental responsibility" due to pressure exerted by the Catholic Church, by the National Action Party (PAN) and by *Provida*, the group that opposes family planning (Carrillo 1994:142-144). While the promotion of marital fidelity and abstention from pre-marital sex are probably the two best ways to stop the spread of the disease, they are completely out of touch with Mexican reality - especially in the case of Mexican migrants who typically migrate during their younger years when they are more sexually active, have more cash, and have easy access to male or female sexual partners.

In 1988, Mexico officially reported 1502 AIDS cases (Heise 1989:116); by January 1993, reported cases rose to 12,540 (Carrillo 1994:130). The official reports are considered to be a fraction of the actual total number (Carrillo 1994:130). The campaign to increase knowledge about the disease worldwide has led to marginal changes in sexual practices (Heise 1989:123). In Putla, the only segment of the population who has responded to the information has been among those who identify themselves as homosexual.<sup>52</sup> The self-identification of one's sexuality plays a key role in people's responses to the AIDS epidemic.

I have no figures as to how many Putlecans are HIV positive. Those who have the virus or who have an HIV positive family member are too scared of the community's response to openly admit it. Fear has driven the disease 'underground' which in the end is only going to increase the infection rate. I heard only of one case in which a man after getting drunk stated that he has *SIDA* (AIDS). The men in the *cantina* quickly grabbed him and threw him out of the town, threatening that if he ever returned, they would shoot him on the spot. Similar stories of intolerance were reported in the New York Times article mentioned.

I worry that the virus is spreading rapidly in the town and throughout the district because of the high circular migration rate in the region and of people's attitudes and sexual practices. Moreover, since the presence of HIV magnifies existing epidemics by weakening immune systems of its hosts, other diseases will become more onerous.<sup>53</sup> In districts, such as Putla, where medical resources are minimal and access limited, curable

diseases still kill thousands. With the ramifications of people's beliefs about AIDS and their current sexual practices, the current situation suggests to me that the town and its people are going to have to deal with a lamentable health situation in the not too far future.

## Conclusion

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural  
 able to slip from "How's life?"  
 to "*Me'stan volviendo loca*,"  
 able to sit in a paneled office  
 drafting memos in smooth English,  
 able to order in fluent Spanish  
 at a Mexican restaurant,  
 American but hyphenated,  
 viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,  
 perhaps inferior, definitely different,  
 viewed by Mexicans as alien,  
 (their eyes say, "You may speak  
 Spanish but you're not like me")  
 an American to Mexicans  
 a Mexican to Americans  
 a handy token  
 sliding back and forth  
 between the fringes of both worlds  
 by smiling  
 by masking the discomfort  
 of being pre-judged  
 Bi-laterally.

(Pat Mora, "Legal Alien")

The critical perspectives of Putlecans about their own sense of identities and their differential experiences in particular places and times reveal how identities are grounded in the nexus of unequal relationships of class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. Alliances and divisions are challenged, negotiated, and defended based on the heterogeneity and the

multiplicity of individual subjectivities. While family and other social networks connect people across spaces, these networks are also re-created in new contexts as people's needs and desires change. Migration studies have tended to emphasize the positive aspects of social networks often to the neglect of the conflict and the contradictions that they can produce in people's lives.

Racial hierarchies work to create false differences among peoples and to mask very significant ones (Quintanales 1981). Putlecan constructions of race contribute to their own subordination and oppression within the hierarchies yet, at the same time, provide a space in which people can contest and renegotiate their social locations. Putlecans manipulate spaces through migration in order to challenge their current social positions. They can become more 'modern' and maybe 'whiter' from their experiences in Mexican cities or in the United States, yet they can leave these places when they grow tired of the 'foreignness' of the new setting or of the control over their time exerted by foreign bosses. Returning home, they struggle with differences in how they see themselves and how family and community members now see them.

Feminist scholarship has emphasized that families and the 'household' are not homogenous sites of sharing and cooperation though those activities do often transpire in the home. Gender hierarchies and other relations of domination are contextually expressed, contested and defended in the home and in the community. Migration processes, religious beliefs and forms of global communications have played an active role in these negotiations. What can be a source of liberation for one, in turn, can be a source

of conflict for another.

Social relations do not change in a unilineal manner. Identities, meanings, and practices are redefined and re-presented in a relational process on local, national and global levels. The next chapter will examine the connections between the broader socioeconomic and political transformations within Mexico and the international community, and the constructions of identities, migration processes, and social changes in Putla.

#### Endnotes:

1. They view themselves distinct from *gente sin razón* which is applied to indigenous people or to recent arrivals in Putla. Almost all the wealthier Putlecan families are descended from one or two foreign-born grandparents or great grandparents. Most have lighter skin color and consider themselves to be *criollo* rather than *mestizo*. Though both terms refer to mixed ancestry, *criollos* have more European ancestry (which they emphasize) than *mestizos*.
2. The wealthiest family in the town (family of the main coffee buyer discussed in section VI) is the dominant wholesale distributor of beer, construction materials and goods sold in the *tiendas de abarrotes*. They accept dollars for payments and exchange them for *pesos*, paying a lower rate than the official exchange rate. The male head of the family has political contacts on the state level and ignores municipal laws, social customs, and anything else that prevents him from exploiting local resources as he wishes. Almost all the townspeople despise him, pointing out that not only does he never contribute to the community, he has killed people who have tried to get in his way and will do so again. Some say "he's the devil himself."
3. In my survey, 81% of the people reported that they are politically inactive; 10% stated that they were active sometimes. Sixty-eight percent support no political party, 26% the PRI; 5% the PRD, and 1% the PPS. Most people believe that there is no reason to participate because the political system is worthless and corrupt. I was told repeatedly that "justice" is reserved for the rich. A small group, *Comité en Defensa de los Derechos Humanos de los Putlecos* (the Committee for the Defense of Putlecan Human Rights) was

formed by a group of schoolteachers and other citizens several years ago to demand the people's rights to clean elections and to social justice. Unfortunately, their efforts have had little effect on the political and judicial systems in the town. Fighting and dissention engulfed the last municipal elections as has happened in most elections in the past. The person who most people believe won the town presidency was not allowed to take office. The PRI governor stepped in and named the new president for the town. "It was dirty politics as usual" explained a committee member.

4. "How many detest the *gringo* yet want to look like him! How many say that we do not need European immigration yet want to marry a person with whiter skin in order to make the race better. Nationalism to the utmost and self-denigration, from the mouth of the same person."

5. Oboler (1992) in her research on cultural identities, found that Latin Americans living in New York City also reject the uniform label "Hispanic." See also Alonso and Koreck (1993:110-112) for a discussion of the development of the category "Hispanic" in U.S. cultural and political struggles.

6. *Los negros* and *los gringos* refer collectively to men and women, unless otherwise indicated. *Gringa* or *gringas* refer specifically to white U.S. woman or women.

7. Putlecan men who described the robbery events to me, called the groups of young men *bandas* (gangs) but whether or not they were part of an organized gang or just a group of youths stealing is unclear. When I asked them privately for more details about the events, it also became unclear (to me) as to whether they actually witnessed the robberies or heard about them from other people while living in the United States.

8. When they say "progressive," they mean it in the sense of advancing, of gradual betterment - not in the political sense.

9. Several Putlecan families that have settled in the Atlantic City area talk about wanting to "move up" by moving south to Ventnor or Margate City where mainly white people live. These towns have well-kept houses and townhouses with manicured yards - quite a contrast to most of the run-down working-class neighborhoods of Atlantic City.

10. Romero (1987:205-216) distinguishes housework done on a live-in basis from "job work" - housework done on a weekly or biweekly basis, in exchange for a flat rate of pay. The domestic worker cleans several houses each week, negotiating separately with each employer for the rate of pay. See also Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994:152-153).

11. In the New York City area, most Putlecan migrants live and work in Hoboken.

12. The irony here, of course, is in the fact that it is due to the labor of circular migrants, immigrants, and African-Americans that much of the "rest" of the country stays clean.

13. As Ewen notes, "In this transition, the problem was invariably who one *was*. Who one could *become* was the solution. In the finding of solutions, the emerging consumer culture would gladly oblige" (1988:74, italics in original text).

14. Most Putlecan migrants are nationalistic. They love their country but dislike their government/the PRI. As one Putleco told me while we were discussing what it means to be Mexican, *soy cien por ciento Mexicano pero eso no significa que soy Priísta* (I'm 100% Mexican but that doesn't mean I support the PRI government).

15. See for example Alvarez (1987), Bottomley (1992), Calagione (1992), Glick Schiller et al. (1992), di Leonardo (1984), Oboler (1992), and Portes and Rumbaut (1990).

16. There are clear generational differences in people's attitudes towards equal rights. The majority of older male and female community members tended to be against equal rights whereas the majority of younger men and women are in favor. Across generations, however, there are both proponents and opponents.

17. For women in politics, see Carrillo (1989, 1990). For wage work, see Arizpe (1977), Fernández-Kelly (1983), LeVine (1993), Mummert (1988), and de Oliveira (1990). For education in urban Mexico, see LeVine (1993:201-202). In Putla, the percentage of women attending school, especially past the elementary level, has increased over the past several decades. When the *Escuela Normal* first opened, men comprised the majority of students; over the past few years a shift in gender ratios has occurred so that women now constitute the majority.

18. Some scholars assert that *machismo* has become stereotyped as something negative and destructive whereas originally, it signified positive behaviors: responsibility, esteem, generosity, and loyalty (see Mirande 1988). The meaning of the term varies among Putlecans. For some men, *machismo* is something to be proud of. For other men and women, it is associated with backwardness and should be eliminated. Still other people are in the middle of the road, approving of certain *macho* behaviors and spurning others. None of the people with whom I spoke, however, associated *machismo* with esteem, generosity, or loyalty.

19. Lomnitz-Adler (1992:128) attributes the practice of polygyny in Mexico to "the proletarianization of the peasantry" in which men have lost much of their authority over their wives and children, "and so seek the satisfactions of manhood in polygyny or other conventional signs of manliness." He suggests that this practice increases men's power by keeping the families in a constant tug-of-war for their husbands/fathers' affections and

resources. In Putla, I talked with several women who live in this type of situation, but there are also many wives who have kicked their husbands out of the home for trying to play this game. Women's separation from their husbands for infidelity is not an entirely new phenomena although this practice has increased in the past two decades. Two women with whom I spoke who chose to raise their families without their husbands once they discovered that their husbands were having children with other women, were over 65 years old.

20. See Greenberg (1989:208-209) for a discussion of *machismo* and family honor in Oaxaca.

21. Both women had separated from their husbands after living in the United States. In one case, the Putlecan husband after hearing that his wife was seeing someone else, stabbed her to death in front of their son.

22. Women also serve food and drinks in all the neighborhood *fiestas* as well as town festivals. In town parades, spaces are segregated by gender. For example, in the procession for the town's patron saint, *la Virgen de la Natividad*, women and children walk 'protected' in the middle of the procession with the men encircling them on their horses. The image of men as guardians of the boundary between women and the 'outer world' is re-produced.

23. Besides the money spent on alcohol and on women, fighting often results in a large debt. The fights get bloody and families have to pay off the injured party in order to have peace. Otherwise, the injured party would seek revenge and the fight would escalate into a bloody feud between families.

24. I knew that because I'm *gringa* (i.e. "liberal"), some Putlecan men told me what they thought I wanted to hear and others felt the need to defend their views on gender relations if they did not believe in equal rights. But I also heard the negation of *macho* in many discussions among friends.

25. Most couples who have no intention of settling in the U.S., leave their children with one of their parents in Putla and send remittances for their expenses. These practices are also common for single mothers who migrate.

26. As Stephen (1992) demonstrates, women shoulder most of the responsibility for the reproduction of labor power in Mexico due to the gendered division of labor. Migration is another process that can increase women's responsibilities and hardships even when husbands migrate but do not abandon them. For decades rural women have worked the fields and/or engaged in wage work while continuing with their own duties during husbands' absences. See also Crummett (1987), Simonelli (1986) and Stephen (1991).

27. People told me of several cases of Putlecan men dying in car accidents in the U.S., often because of driving under the influence of alcohol.

28. As Simonelli concludes from her research in a small town in northern Mexico, "faced with economic crisis and the social consequences of modernization, women will elect to reduce fertility" (1986:172). Women confront the "daily task of matching assets to needs" and have "little difficulty visualizing the relationship between family size and dwindling resources" (1986:171).

29. See also Alonso (1992) for a discussion on feminine beauty and 'whiteness' in a rural Chihuahua community.

30. Many young Putleca women are becoming what Blea (1992:92) describes as "coconuts" in the Chicana community: women with brown skin and a 'white' middle-class mentality.

31. See Ewen (1988) for a history of how the mania for thinness developed in the United States commercial landscape and the absolute destructiveness that this mania has for women. The absurdity of this ideal lies in the simple recognition that "the insatiable passion for thinness is, at bottom, antagonistic to the body's natural need to be fed" (1988:180).

32. When Pope John Paul II visited Mexico in 1984, he repeated "the Catholic Church's hardline stance" against all birth control, including natural methods "when used expressly to avoid conception" (Simonelli 1986:160).

33. Several men also criticized soap operas as being a bad influence on women, making them *más libres* (loose/morally lax).

34. Many women worry that people will think something "dirty" is going on if they go to the male doctors and show their genitalia. Only when one is giving birth is it acceptable to "open your legs that way" because one has no choice.

35. Here I am referring to legal or what is considered 'honorable' wage work. Prostitution is also one of the most common types of employment for women in Putla, and drug (marijuana) production and smuggling is a growing income-earning activity for women as well as men.

36. For the Isthmus Zapotecs, marketing is considered to be "women's work," and is not distinguished from other housework duties (see Chiñas 1976:173).

37. See Arizpe and Botey (1987) and Stephen (1991) for examples of Mexican women in other rural areas performing what is considered 'men's work' after their husbands migrate.

38. "The marketplace in particular has been a traditional workplace for Latin American women from pre-Columbian times to the present" (Yeager 1994:xv).

39. One day when I was walking with the priest, two older men approached him to say hello. As they talked, one man said, "we are bad sinners, no *Padre*? The priest responded, "No, we are basically good, only sometimes we sin." This response highlights the priest's distance from hardline Catholic doctrine which teaches what the old man asked.

40. Women served chicken *mole* (a labor-intensive chicken with a pepper/chocolate sauce dish), beans, rice, *tortillas*, and two eight-tier cakes to the entire community so that everyone could "break bread" together. The festival began at 10 a.m. with mass and continued with music and dancing until well into the night. People came from throughout his parish and most people gave him gifts to show their gratitude.

41. Migrants renew social ties to the community through *fiesta* participation (see section VIII).

42. While we lived in Putla, the Virgin "appeared" on the wall of one of the taco restaurants leaving a yellow stain that according to everyone "looks just like the Virgin." One year before, a saint "appeared" in the road to *la Cureña* (one of the neighborhoods in Putla), leaving his image on a rock. Putlecans who live in this neighborhood and the priest held a procession and *fiesta* on the anniversary of his appearance, as they plan to do every year.

43. Pentecostals are the largest evangelist group in Putla, numbering some thirty or forty active converts (i.e. those who attend services and try to convert others). The first Pentecostal came to Putla in the late seventies but left a few years later. The current pastor arrived two years ago. There are also Jehovah Witnesses in the town. Although *testigos* have been in the region over the past several decades, they have converted fewer people than the Pentecostals. I refer to them collectively as "Evangelists" following the majority of Putlecans who do not differentiate the separate sects.

44. Often when I arrived at one of the homes of the recently converted, they wanted to know what I was going to give them. I would explain that I had nothing to give, that I am an Anthropologist not an Evangelist. It didn't seem to matter, however. Many still assumed that because I am *gringa*, I must be an *evangelista*. Their assumption was reinforced by my own actions since I often attended Evangelist services to learn about their impact on the community.

45. I believe that some very poor people may have responded that they are *evangelistas* due to their hopes that I was going to bring them food and medicine.

46. The terms homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality do not have the same meanings in Mexican culture as they have in Anglo culture. For Anglos, when two people of the same-sex engage in sexual intercourse both are labeled homosexual; people who have sex with both sexes are called bi-sexuals. In Mexico, two same-sex people can engage in sexual relations but both are not necessarily labeled homosexual, nor are those who have sex with members of both sexes, classified as "bisexual." Mexicans define a person's sexuality by the role a person plays in sexual interactions, not by one's partner. I discuss Mexican constructions of sexuality further in the text. See also Alonso and Koreck (1993) and Carrier (1989).

47. One doctor said to me that "if we didn't have all these *jotos* (gay men) here, we wouldn't even have to worry about it."

48. Most of the gay men went to *CONASIDA* (Mexico's National Council of AIDS) offices in Mexico City to be anonymously tested for fear of discrimination and hostility in Putla. The test results were mailed to them in Putla but were in English. I became privy to this information when they asked me to translate the results. I have no idea why they were in English except that *CONSIDA* receives all its funding and resources from the World Health Organization and other international organizations.

49. Carrier in his research on AIDS in Mexico notes that, "From 1983 to date, gay liberation organizations have continued to be a major source of accurate information for bisexual and homosexual males interested in learning about the transmission of AIDS through high risk sexual practices, and how changes in sexual behavior can minimize the risk of being infected by the AIDS virus" (1989:137).

50. Villagrán (1993) did a study of over 3000 Mexican university students who supposedly were more informed about AIDS yet perceived the risk of infection as very low. Moreover, these students did not associate condom use with prevention.

51. This man pointed out that in a small town like Putla, word passes quickly as to who buys condoms in the pharmacy.

52. These men never engage in sexual relations with women.

53. For example, researchers have found a link between HIV and tuberculosis which they believe is propagating the deadly TB world-wide. This connection "is especially worrisome in the Third World, where poverty, overcrowding, and lack of access to treatment make tuberculosis more lethal than in the West" (Heise 1989:119).

## PUTLA, THE STATE AND THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY

### Introduction

The Mexican authorities have never attributed an agricultural recession to erroneous economic policy. Instead, they always blame the heavens; adverse climatic factors cause these crises, especially insufficient rains (Calva 1991:104).

Standing on top of *la Loma*<sup>1</sup> looking across the valley floor at the maze of rivers, I kept thinking about the statement a local agronomist had made, "*Putla no es productivo, es porque somos pobres*" (Putla isn't productive, that's why we are poor). Yet I stood there staring at the lush tropical valley with its abundance of resources. Rivers, forests, and wide stretches of agricultural land lie in striking contrast to the dry, eroded lands of the *Mixteca Alta*. Putla, as well as the nation in general, have had good annual rainfall since the late 1970s (Calva 1991:104). During the mango season, mango trees droop with the weight of so many fruits clinging to their branches as do bananas, *zapotes* and other tropical fruit trees throughout the *municipio* of Putla. Yet people are rapidly abandoning agrarian production, especially since the 1982 'crisis' began. Followed by falling coffee prices in the 1980s, Putlecans lost hope of being able to support themselves by farming.

Calva (1991:104) argues that the current agrarian crisis in Mexico is caused by three interrelated factors, none of which are environmental: the decline in internal demand for foods, the decline in profitability of agricultural investments, and the initiation of structural adjustment policies by the government which have caused a sharp decline in public investments and in the terms of trade of the agricultural sector. For medium and

small farmers, survival of the 'crisis' has depended on a reduction in consumption. Millions of rural and urban Mexicans, many of whom were already suffering from nutritional deficiencies, have had to further decrease their food consumption, resulting in a widespread national nutritional crisis (Calva 1991:110-113).<sup>2</sup>

According to Mexican and U.S. government officials and to leaders of international financial institutions (IMF and World Bank), every year Mexico's economy is "healthier" and is on the road to recovery. But when is "the recovery" going to take place? The Mexican people have had to endure yet another major devaluation of the *peso* in December 1994, cutting their purchasing power in half. Most people with whom I spoke in January 1995 felt betrayed by the past president, Carlos Salinas, for telling them that the country's economic and political situations were improving. People are worried about the rapid increase in crime, the desperation worn on so many faces. The situation made me wonder about peoples' ability to tolerate the drastic declines in their living standards, especially when so many are already suffering from chronic hunger. How long can they wait for the promised recovery?

If we compare the national economic situation in which Putla is situated with the goals and practices of Putlecans, an obvious contradiction emerges. People want to consume more not less. People struggle daily for their children to have healthier and happier lives than they have had. They are tired of working harder only to receive less for their toil. I empathize with their frustrations. What is perplexing to me, however, is how people continue to live with the striking contradiction between their own everyday

struggles to survive the never ending 'crisis' and the official discourses which continue to tout Mexico as one of the 'model' countries in its progression up the neoliberal 'economic ladder'.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, the current exodus of Mexican people from their country to the U.S. is a major response to this contradiction. But it is not the only one. Most people remain in their country. They continue to struggle to earn a living in their hometowns or by moving back and forth between two towns. Others migrate within and across regions and states. Peoples' decisions are dynamic and change through time. Yet few, if any, of the coping strategies that people have devised attack the validity of the austerity program imposed by the government in accordance with international financial institutions' interests.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, they have personally "adjusted" to the austerity program which has caused a deterioration of not only health and educational standards, but also in the overall quality of life with increasing crime rates and pollution problems.<sup>5</sup> How bad does the situation have to become before people unite with the *Zapatistas* and demand social, economic and political justice?<sup>6</sup>

Living in Putla when the revolution began in Chiapas in 1994, I became more intrigued by Putlecans' relationship to the Mexican state,<sup>7</sup> and how the Mexican state actively defends, modifies and re-creates its legitimation so that it can continue to 'state'.<sup>8</sup> Current migration processes are a result of the draconian policies of debt collection that have produced a staggering net transfer of financial resources from Mexico to 'first' world institutions, and to other macroeconomic and political policies that fall under the rubric of

development/modernization. However, peoples' responses to development processes are not determined solely by structural factors. They are continually negotiated in multiple arenas (local, regional, national and international) in which relationships between political and non-political power are played out. By examining these negotiations, some of the reasons why Putlecans, through their own practices and ideas, support the interests of the dominant social order in Mexico are elucidated.

### **The PRI Government and International Financial Institutions**

The (world) crisis that was tipped off by sharp rises in oil prices in the middle of the 1970s and culminated in the debt crisis of Third World countries in the 1980s differs from that of the 1930s because of three major changes: (1) the growing integration of the world economy, (2) the shift from industrial production to financial capital as the principal basis for accumulation, and (3) the diminishing resources available for subsistence production throughout the world (Nash 1994:10).

Mexico has been governed by a single political party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), for the past seventy-five years.<sup>9</sup> The party has experienced many periods in which its legitimation has been questioned and fought, but through effective strategies of co-opting dissenters and of selectively repressing those unwilling to be bought, the party still controls the government, however tentatively (McCaughan 1993).<sup>10</sup>

The PRI party, though powerful, is only one facet of the Mexican state. Different interests (national industrialists, finance capital, technocrats, labor leaders, peasant organizations) have realigned forces in times of crisis and prosperity, resulting in complex and heterogeneous Mexican state formation processes. Before the initiation of the 'crisis'

in 1982, the ruling bloc was dominated by national industrialists' interests, but since then a breakdown in the traditional order resulted in a realignment of economic and political power (McCaughan 1993:14). A shift in the relationship between forces yielded to transnational finance capital, especially U.S.-based, increasing power and control (Alvarez 1987:95).<sup>11</sup> The selection of De la Madrid and his successor, Salinas de Gortari, advocates of neoliberal economic theories, insured that state agents would serve the interests of finance capital.

The Bretton Woods institutions (IMF and World Bank) have assumed substantial power in directing economic policies of many 'third' world countries, including Mexico. In order to receive loans, countries must accept their demands which include the privatization of state enterprises and the "transfer of resources from production for internal consumption to export sales aimed at debt payment in currency that has international backing" (Nash 1994:11). These institutions insist that their structural adjustment policies are necessary steps in the longer road of economic development. They claim that the social costs will wane as the benefits of "sustainable" economic growth "trickle" down to all citizens. However, as many scholars have pointed out, these policies have not only failed to achieve their desired results, but they have further deteriorated the living standards of most 'third' world peoples.<sup>12</sup> George notes,

The most obvious aspect of this failure--or success, depending on your point of view--is financial. Every single month, from the outset of the debt crisis in 1982 until the end of 1990, debtor countries in the South remitted to their creditors in the North an average \$6.5 billion in interest payments alone. If payments of the principle are included, then debtor countries have paid creditors at a rate of almost

\$12.5 billion per month--as much as the entire Third World spends each month on health and education (1994:29).

The implementation of structural adjustment policies in Mexico is mediated by the PRI government. The pursuit of the export-oriented economy has undermined the livelihoods of millions of citizens and has greatly weakened the PRI's image of the "party of the revolution."<sup>13</sup> Since the 1968 student movement, the party has faced an increasing crisis of legitimacy, and the 1982 rupture has exacerbated this "crisis of authority."<sup>14</sup> However, even with the loss of support of the popular classes and of some sectors of the bourgeoisie, the PRI continues to wield substantial power and "the project of transnational capital articulated by the economic policies of the PRI remains dominant" (McCaughan 1993:27).<sup>15</sup>

Faced with the politicoeconomic crisis, the PRI government with the help of private capital, has reworked its nationalist rhetoric and practices in order to

establish a common discursive framework that sets out central terms around which and in terms of which contestation and struggle can occur...This discursive framework operates not only in terms of words and signs but also necessarily involves a material social process; that is, concrete social relations and the establishment of routines, rituals and institutions that "work in us" (Joseph and Nugent 1994:20).

Through the "project of moral regulation," the Mexican ruling circle seeks to unify what are in reality diverse experiences of groups within the society.<sup>16</sup> The current crisis is constructed to appear as part of the 'normal' and 'natural' process of development - a process that every country must undergo if it wants to 'evolve' into a 'modern' nation. The unilineal evolutionary perspective presents the process as if it was following the 'natural

laws of progress.'

Linking recurring themes of open-market economy, modernity, and progress with 'first' world countries who have democratic governments, an abundance of consumer goods, and higher living standards works to justify the claim that neoliberal economic development policies are "good" for Mexico. The unstated assumption is that there is only one evolutionary path for Mexico to follow in order to overcome the 'crisis.' Alternative development policies, such as the PRD's social democratic model of growth or Goulet's (1983) pluralistic development model which are set in the domestic arena, are actively submerged by the state's discursive framework which centers the terms of discussion in the international realm.<sup>17</sup> As Salinas stated while president,

We live in a world market. It has risks but also new opportunities for countries like Mexico, who are secure in itself, its culture and history, and thus, can participate in the world market with confidence (Salinas 1990::524).

Or in the words of his predecessor in 1984 when the 'crisis' continued to deteriorate living standards,

It is in this uncertain and dangerous world that we Mexicans must move. These are times of storm and risk, but of struggle and opportunities as well... We are proceeding with the realistic reordering of our economy. These changes are aimed at rebuilding a firm foundation for sustained and efficient economic development within the framework of a more egalitarian society (De la Madrid 1984:104).

The theme of 'equality' is expressed repeatedly by the use of the 'we' pronoun in official discourses. 'We Mexicans', united as one nation, must battle the international 'other' - the "uncertain and dangerous world" as De la Madrid called it. This theme negates the existence of differential access to opportunities which are determined by one's

class, gender and/or ethnicity; it works to create the belief that all citizens are making sacrifices for the good of the nation.<sup>18</sup> The manipulation of social identity is key for the legitimation of the state's new agenda. As Corrigan and Sayer argue,

To define 'us' in national terms (as against class, or locality, or ethnic group, or gender, or religion, or any other terms in which social identity might be constructed and historical experience comprehended) has consequences. Such classification are means for a project of social integration which is also, inseparably, an active disintegration of other focuses of identity and conceptions of subjectivity (1985:195).

### **The *Solidaridad* Project**

The re-creating of a national identity, expressed through the theme of equality, is underscored in a recent national project called *Solidaridad* (solidarity). To supposedly soften the blow of declining public services and investments, Salinas initiated *the Solidaridad* program which has formed a critical component in the government's attempt to regain popular consent.<sup>19</sup> The program's slogan, *unidos para progresar* (united for progress), emphasizes the "collective will" of the Mexican people to overcome the country's current economic and political problems. Based on the principle of self-help, individuals donate their time, labor and money in order to obtain basic services, to build recreational facilities, and to receive financial credit or land titles. The government, in turn, promises to 'support' and 'assist' these self-help efforts.

The program is a nationally-defined project in which each individual has an important part to play. The program links ideas of unity, equality and progress with the improvement of the material conditions of life. Its discourse strives to constitute new

subject positions - changing an alienated people in a 'crisis' into "progressive" citizen workers who are building a strong nation. The package has been sold to the Mexican public primarily through the mass media.<sup>20</sup>

In the numerous television advertisements for *Solidaridad*, the scenario always follows the pattern of changing something negative into something positive. In the commercial for a new health clinic built by *Solidaridad*, a boy is saved from a grave illness. His parents will work in the clinic to pay for their child's medical bill, happily becoming new "medical assistants" in the process. In another ad, a grandmother loses her husband and is afraid that she may lose her home, too, but is saved by friends working under *Solidaridad* who obtain her land title. She becomes a proud "landowner." A mother who wants to start a small business but does not know what to do with her children, learns about a day-care center organized by women in her neighborhood through *Solidaridad*; she can now become an "entrepreneur." Individual success is coupled with the 'traditional' value of honor. In each commercial, the people and *Solidaridad* are united by *la palabra*, "*la palabra se respeta*" (the word, one's word is one's honor). One gains in an honorable manner, not by hurting anyone else.

A closer look at the targeted population of the program reveals that the 'we' who are going to provide labor and resources are the poorer, more marginalized sectors of the Mexican population. In none of the media campaigns are wealthier Mexicans depicted as part of the *unidos para progresar*. The program's self-help philosophy is designed to keep resources in the hands of the dominant group; the subordinated peoples must use their

own resources to 'progress.' The project's construction of a national identity, however, masks the country's unequal social relations.

Putlecans often spoke about *Solidaridad*; many believe the program will help solve some of their economic problems. Under *Solidaridad*, numerous streets in the town were paved. While critical of the costs for this service,<sup>21</sup> most people were happy to have new concrete streets which have lessened the amount of dust and dirt entering their homes. Townspeople reiterated themes from the program's media campaign in general conversations. For example, one Putlecan said she would survive the 'crisis' by,

*La unión de todas las personas y la solidaridad, de esta manera se establecerían soluciones para todos los problemas.* (Everyone united and together, this is the way to finding solutions to all our problems, my emphasis).

In August of 1993, the governor of Oaxaca arrived in the town of Putla to pledge support for *Solidaridad* projects in fourteen communities in the *municipio*. A total of 58,890 new *pesos* (less than \$20,000 U.S. at the time) was allotted for the construction of bridges, schoolrooms, restrooms, roads, basketball courts, drainage systems, street paving, and water systems.<sup>22</sup> Putlecans were promised funds to finish the construction of a sports park on the edge of town.<sup>23</sup>

It had been many years since a governor or another high ranking official had visited the region.<sup>24</sup> The people felt honored by his visit even though most consider themselves apolitical.<sup>25</sup> With government funds, they built a stage, decorated the plaza, and prepared food and drinks. Most wore their best clothes. Local bands played. People applauded the governor's words and chanted "*unidos para progresar*" and other cheers.

People commented on how they were not forgotten, how things were going to change. Some older Putlecans even recalled Lázaro Cárdenas' visit to the region some fifty years ago. With all the pomp and circumstance that normally accompany government ceremonies, a feeling of unity and empowerment was created, absorbing even the small group of protestors who came with banners to denounce the imposition of the current PRI town president by the governor. The protestors told me that while they hate the PRI and all its officials, they believe that the *Solidaridad* program is a "good idea."

The *Solidaridad* project is an example of a practical and theoretical activity that disguises inherent problems in the new state's agenda by propagating itself "throughout society and creating a new form of national-popular will for some immense historical task," i.e. overcoming the 'crisis' (Hall 1988:55).<sup>26</sup> The emphasis on 'progress' and 'unity' inspired many Putlecans. The theme reached out to their sense of communal responsibility and civic duty, and to their desire for more 'modern' living standards. As a young student said,

It's now in our hands. We can stay here or we can do something in order to progress.

Furthermore, by associating self-help with democracy and equality, the government eludes its responsibility to provide basic services to all segments of the population and to all regions within the nation. The self-help philosophy supports the mandate for less public spending by the Bretton Woods institutions.

### Development as a 'Civilizing' Process

I briefly discuss the *Solidaridad* program for two reasons. First, I believe that the program has been quite effective in penetrating the population and regaining popular support for the PRI during the Salinas' presidency. The program illustrates how one facet of the Mexican state (the government) must continually re-create its legitimacy in the face of oppositions.<sup>27</sup> In its political project, the PRI managed to reconcile the interests of the 'development' agenda with people's traditional values of community, honor, and loyalty to the nation.

Second, I believe that the recurring themes of the *Solidaridad* project highlight the importance of examining people's consumptive practices and their ideas about 'modernity' and 'progress' in order to understand how consent is constructed in the wider arena of social thought. If the Mexican state ruled only by imposing its dominant ideology on the entire population through manipulation and/or force, then this imposition would be easier to expose and thus, to oust than in practice it is. The internal structures that form a social order are more complex. Meanings, values and practices that come to be dominant and effective are in a continual process of renewal, recreation and modification (Williams 1991).<sup>28</sup>

Most Putlecans now believe that commerce is the only viable economic option if you want to live in Putla. They want to sell more goods in order to increase their own consumption of national and international goods and to construct homes with more amenities. Continually exposed to higher living standards via migration processes, mass

media sources, and public education, Putlecans believe that to have more material goods is to 'progress' and to live a more 'civilized' or 'modern' life. These institutions coupled with migration processes have created, reinforced and elaborated ideas about 'modernity' and 'progress' that concur with the interests of the dominant social order.

Television programmers' main purpose is to convince viewers to buy consumer goods that are produced in national and international markets. Public education emphasizes individualism and competition rather than communalism and cooperation. Migration processes not only expose Putlecans to different living standards, but allow them to experience first hand homes with kitchen appliances, indoor plumbing, and "comfortable" furniture,<sup>29</sup> highways without potholes, and stores with endless variety. Advanced technologies, such as computers, FAX machines and satellite dishes, further integrate the local community with the nation-state and the international community.

By putting into practice the theory of consumerism, (i.e. increasing consumption of goods is economically and socially desirable), Putlecans support the state's agenda of opening market doors to transnational capital interests and, at the same time, enhance their dependence on outside economic inputs. These processes bind Putlecans irrevocably to the national economy, itself bound to the international economy and to the state.

Increasing consumption is not simply a material process. It is intricately tied to processes of identity constructions as highlighted by Mexican television advertisers who associate material goods with racial characteristics (e.g. the 'whitening' power of consumption). Consumption is a critical factor in social differentiation and in definitions of

the self.

The construction by Putlecans of a 'white identity' and a 'brown/black identity' dichotomy in which white is linked to positive qualities (wealthy, civilized, educated, clean) and brown/black, to negative ones (poor, uneducated, dangerous, dirty), parallels the constructed dichotomy between the white 'first' world countries and the darker 'third' world countries in neoliberal economic theories. Hence, the "logical" conclusion reached by many Putlecans that white *norteamericanos* are wealthier and own more material goods because they are more 'civilized' (more advanced on the evolutionary scale) than darker skinned peoples. These racist dichotomies which underlie the 'development' discourses, justify the world hierarchy by naturalizing arguments about evolutionary selection and competitive fitness. Thus, Mexicans must endure their current living situation until the nation "matures" from its childlike or uncivilized state into a "civilized adult." Differences between 'first' and 'third' world countries are reduced to the simplicity of essences upon which dualist oppositions are built.<sup>30</sup> The 'development' discourses reflect and obscure forms of domination.

### **Migration Processes and the State**

Migration processes have played an important role in the legitimation of the dominant social order. Migration helps alleviate Mexico's labor absorption problem. It provides people the opportunity to accomplish their goals of consumerism and to re-create their social identities. People can migrate seasonally and continue to live in their

hometowns, rather than being forced by economic necessity to leave permanently and join the urban sprawl of the Federal District.

Migration to the United States is also used as a scapegoat for problems in the family and in the nation that have been created or exacerbated by the 'development' agenda. In Putla, parents and teachers blame migration to the U.S. as the reason their children and students do not finish school.<sup>31</sup> Husbands and fathers complain of their wives' and daughters' increased mobility and participation in the urban workforce where patriarchal ideals are challenged. Rather than seeing migration as a response to structural adjustment policies which have intensified the un/underemployment problem in Mexico, people blame migrants for abandoning their families and for failing to help their country develop. As Goulet points out,

Television commercials sponsored by the government urge rural Mexicans to return to their native villages and not to seek work over the U.S. border because "your country needs you." The implied message is that the country can provide a decent livelihood for all its citizens (1983:63).

While Putlecans believe that migration is beneficial to individuals but detrimental to the community, their opinions can change from one day to the next. For example, one young man who declared migrants to be "traitors" and thus, was adamantly opposed to "abandoning" Putla, left after receiving a phone call from his older brother asking him to join him in Long Branch, New Jersey. Less dramatic changes in people's opinions and actions occur frequently as daily life presents new experiences, meanings, and opportunities. Putlecans' mixed feelings towards migration are just one example of how

Putlecans live with contradictory ideas and practices. They want the town and its people to 'progress,' yet they want things to be as they were in the past. They strive to increase prestige by buying more material goods, yet disapprove of conspicuous consumption. They are critical of NAFTA, the formal treaty, but support more nebulous ideas about free markets and development. They build larger houses and pave roads, yet worry about the rivers' falling water levels which in part is a result of the uncontrolled extraction of sand and gravel from riverbeds for construction. They compete with neighbors in their local businesses but share resources in community *fiestas*. They blast music by national groups on their radios, yet are disappointed at dances if *chilenas* are not played. They use birth control and identify themselves as devoted Catholics. Their full range of beliefs and practices at any one time includes what Williams (1977) calls "oppositional" or "alternative" forms as well as the dominant and effectual.

Putlecans negotiate ideas about 'progress' and 'modernity' with 'traditional' ideas. At times, they do see through ideological manipulations of the state.<sup>32</sup> But, for the most part, they consciously support the interests of the dominant order. Putlecans are neither passive pawns nor revolutionaries. They think and act within the field of constructed possibilities, accommodating, modifying or rejecting meanings and practices as their needs and perceptions change.

## **Conclusion**

The search for identity through consumerism is part of the larger processes of the

globalization of consumption and the internationalization of advanced capitalism which have strengthened the importance of transnational money markets and the global division of labor. If, as Salinas states, "we live in a world economy," then Putlecans' decisions to move to places with better job opportunities, without attention to national borders, is a logical response. They are not "criminals" as U.S. anti-immigration groups depict them; they are following the new "rules" of the global economy. When many Putlecans first heard the news about NAFTA, they were excited. They assumed that "open borders" meant the free flow of both goods and people. Not that more Putlecans would have rushed to the United States. It just "would have made the trip easier" as a young Putlecan man told me. For them, it does not seem just that capital can move freely across borders, yet the laborers who produce and consume the goods are forced to sneak across the border in their arduous journeys to *el norte*.

Following World War II, the Mexican government moved sharply to the right, marking the end of the agrarian revolution and the start of the industrial one. Advanced capitalism has penetrated regions unevenly but the constructed ideologies of 'development' and 'modernization' have permeated most of Mexican society, forging a social consensus. These ideologies which praise the 'modern' industrial sector and portray the 'traditional' agricultural sector as holding back the nation, are part of a larger historical consciousness, extending back to nation-building processes in the nineteenth century.

The export-oriented economy is the material manifestation of the development construct which serves state's interests. As an ideological representation of a specific mode

of accumulation, the development agenda re-presents international financial institutions as Mexico's "indispensable partner" in the global economy. It is a social process in which the concepts, progress, modernity, and growth, become internalized and "commonsensical." Constructions of social relations by Putlecans, in turn, affirm the development discourse to be "true" - a feedback process. Their everyday consumptive practices and beliefs support the political project of the dominant social order.

As Mohanty has shown, "white capitalist patriarchies institute relations of rule based on a liberal citizenship model with its own forms of knowledge and impersonal bureaucracies" (1991:21). Impersonal bureaucracies, such as international finance institutions, transnational capital and state agencies, present their economic models as objective, neutral, and based on scientific facts. But as Pantojas-García points out,

to confuse a model with reality is to leave-out the social or real-world basis of development options and to underestimate the role of political conflict in the adoption of particular policies to the detriment of others (1990:1).

The Putlecan agronomist's comment about Putla not being productive, thus poor, illustrates how Putlecans assume personal responsibility for economic problems in the region. Like the government, they sometimes blame environmental factors but more often they blame their own "lack" of modernity and progressiveness. But through migration and education (in the broadest sense), they work to re-create their identities in accordance with the development agenda.

## Endnotes:

1. *La Loma* is a hill to the north of Putla.
2. The World Health Organization reported that the country's nutritional levels were severely repressed between 1983 and 1986, dropping dramatically from what they were the decade before (*Excelsior*, Mexico City, May 11, 1987, cited in Calva 1991:113).
3. The 'economic ladder' refers to Rostow's famous book (1960) which outlines the "stages of economic growth" through which countries must 'progress' if they wish to join the ranks of 'first' world countries.
4. The exception, of course, is the *Zapatistas* of Chiapas who on the first of January 1994 began their revolution against the government in protest to their political-economic position in Mexican society and to their government's signing of NAFTA.
5. See Benería (1992) for an overview of the Mexican debt crisis and the social costs of structural adjustment policies.
6. The bold move by the Chiapans made Putlecans hopeful and excited, yet at the same time, apprehensive and worried. Most people agreed with the *Zapatistas* and waited anxiously to see how the government was going to react. The local priest and community members organized a collection of clothes and medicine to send to Chiapas. The town's president reacted by having a metal gate built across the entrance to his office. Identifying with the *Zapatistas*, people started feeling more empowered and talk of change spilled through the air. Then in March 1994, a teacher was killed. When the authorities failed to do anything about it, a mass demonstration was organized against the authorities' ineffectiveness and their corruptive practices. People of all ages, sexes, classes, and ethnicities marched to the town's plaza and demanded social justice. Banners proclaimed the people's support for the *Zapatistas*. Organizers remarked on how the response was numerically and emotionally stronger than at any previous demonstration. The town's president must have felt the same since he left town as quickly as possible. But with time, emotions began fading. People lost faith in the *Zapatista* movement, commenting that nothing will ever change in Mexico. People returned to gossiping about local events. While many still wondered "what could have been", most resigned themselves to the immediate tasks of daily survival.
7. The state as a cultural form, not a thing (see Joseph and Nugent 1994:18-20).
8. I am following Corrigan and Sayer (1985) argument on state formation in which the "individualizing" dimension of state formation is emphasized. This dimension "is organized through impositional claims embodied in distinctive categories (e.g. citizen, taxpayer, head

of household, *ejidatario*, and so on) that are structured along the axes of class, occupation, gender, age, ethnicity, and locality" (Joseph and Nugent 1994:20).

9. The party's original name was the *Partido Revolucionario Mexicano* (PRM). In 1946, the name was changed to the PRI.

10. For example, see Vélez-Ibañez (1983).

11. For example, U.S. transnational corporations now play a major role in Mexican trade, accounting for more than 40 percent of manufactured exports (Unger 1991).

12. See Bello et al. (1994), Danaher (1994), Due and Gladwin (1991), Kidane Mengisteab and Logan (1995) and Ramsaran (1992) for critiques of structural adjustment policies that have been implemented in 'third' world countries across the globe. See also Stein (1995:22, endnote #2) for a partial list by topic (debt, agriculture, industry, basic needs, trade and investment levels) of the extensive literature criticizing structural adjustment in Africa.

13. From the late 1930s to the early 1970s, the PRI defined and created much of its legitimation through a combination revolutionary rhetoric, paternalism, corporatism, co-optation, some redistributive policies, and when needed, repression (McCaughan 1993:24). See section VI for a discussion of the creation and defense of the "revolutionary nationalism" in Mexico during this century.

14. Gramsci (1971) argued that effective and extensive forms of hegemony can emerge as the state arbitrates diverse interests but these forms are transitory. Periods arise when the masses "become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously," resulting in a "crisis of authority" (1971:275,276).

15. As Reding and Whalen point out, in order to ensure their position of power after the initiation of the 'crisis,' the PRI has had to resort to a pattern of human rights abuses and state-sponsored violence. "Torture is universal, and dozens of journalists, more than one hundred members of political opposition parties, and a prominent human rights advocate have been murdered since Salinas took office" (Reding and Whalen 1991:i).

16. Corrigan and Sayer define moral regulation as "a project of normalizing, rendering natural, taken for granted, in a word 'obvious,' what are in fact ontological and epistemological premises" (1985:4). A prime example of moral regulation is in their discussion of the "pervasive masculinity of the State" (1985:12). By regulating social identities of gender to clearly demarcate a new gender division in which women are relegated to a subordinate position throughout the capitalist world, the state parallels the patriarchal order of the family, rendering the domination as part of the "natural" and

"normal" processes of life. See also Vélez-Ibañez (1983:194-196) who examines how the Mexican state creates and defends the "myth of national integration" - the belief that everyone has equal access to economic and political resources, regardless of class status and ethnicity - in order to ensure the political and economic ascendancy of the state's interests at the expense of Mexico's marginalized populations.

17. For example, Goulet (1983) argues that Mexico needs a pluralistic development paradigm in which each policy is catered to a particular sector or a particular region to meet the needs of the strikingly different regions that comprise Mexico. Not only the strategies should be pluralistic, but the planning and distribution of public resources must be decentralized in order to gain widespread popular participation. Both of his points are contrary to the neoliberal economic development paradigm pushed by the Bretton Woods institutions and enforced by the government. See Martínez (1990) for a discussion of the PRD's alternative economic program which advocates the suspension of debt payments and the expansion of the domestic market and government spending.

18. As Williams demonstrates in her discussion of nationalism, "all bloods are not equal, but the precepts of nationalist ideologies demand that all subordinated groups bleed equally for the nation" (1989:436).

19. Salinas had been concerned about the connection between public investment and how to use it to increase public support long before his presidency. In 1982, while Director of the *Instituto de Estudios, Políticos, Económicos, y Sociales, Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institute of Political, Economic and Social Studies, PRI), Salinas published a study comparing "the relationship between citizens' participation and the stability and survival of the political system" (the PRI) in Mexico (1982:30). He states that his study arose due to the need to change the ineffectualness of past PRI policy which used public spending to "buy the political support of groups which benefit from these projects" (1982:3). He concluded from the study that a better way to increase public support was to increase participation of the beneficiaries in the implementation and administration of public projects. The *Solidaridad* program not only realizes this line of thought, but takes it to its logical extreme - where 'participation' means doing it yourself.

20. The systematic use of the media to support national development programs is not new in Mexico, nor in other 'third' world countries (see section VIII; see also Lent 1979).

21. One man objected to the high costs so he did not pay his share. When the street was paved, workers left the section in front of his house unpaved. Community members criticized him for being "cheap" and for failing to do what "is best for the town." The street project was also denounced by some of the ecology group members who stated that paved streets are causing the daily temperature in the town to increase and that the concrete prevents the ground from soaking up needed rainwater.

22. If the funds were distributed evenly, each community would receive a little more than the equivalent of one thousand U.S. dollars for all these projects - a sum which is probably less than what the government spent for the governor's visit that day to the town. For a summary of his visit, see *El Imparcial*, Oaxaca City, 8/17/93.
23. The sports park is to have soccer fields, basketball courts, a track, and a restroom building. The project was initiated in the early 1990s but funds ran out before it could be completed. What was constructed is now overgrown with weeds.
24. The current governor is a "Jack Kennedy" type - son of a millionaire, young, good-looking, energetic and very charismatic.
25. See section IX, Endnote #3.
26. What Gramsci (1971) calls an "organic ideology." It "intervenes in the terrain of ordinary, contradictory, episodic common sense - to interrupt, renovate, and transform in a more systematic direction the practical consciousness of the masses" (Hall 1988:55).
27. The PRI suffered a decisive defeat in the 1988 national presidential election; numbers were changed, however, and the winning candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, was not permitted to take his seat.
28. As Williams notes, the construction of hegemony "is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understandings of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming" (Williams 1991:413).
29. While depicting what their life was like in the U.S., Putlecans often described how "comfortable" furniture is in the U.S. since most Putlecans only have furniture made out of wood without cushions, pillows, etc. and some still sleep on *petates*. As noted in section VIII, some Putlecans are now buying sofa sets but for most families, hammocks are still the only comfortable seat in the house.
30. As Minh-ha points out, dichotomies are used "as a tool of segregation, to exert power on the basis of racial and sexual essences. The apartheid type of difference" (1990:372).
31. Young migrants who left school to go to the U.S. told me that they see no future in studying for a career in a country that lacks job opportunities.
32. For example, no one believed the "official" version of the Chiapas revolution proclaimed by the government via *Televisa*.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most we can do is remain skeptical of available representations, while continuing to ask questions about what, and who, is not being represented (Bottomley 1992:167).

In this study, I have examined the relationships between migration processes and the constructions of social identities and of social relations within local, national and international contexts in order to illustrate how social change in a small western Oaxacan community is a complex, multi-faceted process. By paying closer attention to everyday activities, the heterogeneity and multiplicity of Putlecan subjectivities and experiences have been highlighted. New experiences and information technologies have led to a redefining and re-presenting of meanings and practices which have had both negative and positive impacts on individuals, on families and on the community.

Putlecans have internalized their own subordination through hegemonic processes, reproducing the dominant social order, yet they frequently challenge their own particular social locations within this social order. Migration processes and the globalization of communication and consumption in advanced capitalism have played key roles in these processes. The multiplicity of defining elements in the construction of a person's identity allows her or him to maintain contradictory notions of 'self.' Putlecans may emphasize one or more aspects of their identity (e.g. their class position, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or sexuality) and downplay others in response to the particular circumstances in which they are situated.

## **Migration Processes**

Studies on migration have tended to prioritize the role of economic factors in these processes, often to the neglect of other aspects which constitute and shape peoples' practices and decisions. Economics certainly do play a prominent role in migration processes, but we need to broaden our perceptions and our investigations to include other social variables, such as gender, race, age, family, sexuality, and religion, which also directly and indirectly affect migration processes. People's decisions about whether they should leave their community or remain at home are influenced by a multitude of economic, political, and social factors. In the case of Putlecans, changing gender relations, media constructions, racial ideologies, family networks, educational differences among and between generations, and economic needs all play important roles in shaping migration processes.

In my study, I have underscored the economic and social changes in Putlecan consumptive practices because consumption is a central component in migration processes. What I have emphasized, however, is looking at consumption as a social process, one which channels resources and draws lines of social relationships. When migrants send remittances to their families, they are helping them economically but they are also maintaining and renewing their social relationships and their connections with their home communities.

After the completion of the road which connects Putla to the national road system,

the consumption of urban-Western goods increased in most Putlecan homes. Fostered by the "modernizing" attitude spread by migrants, by public education, and by mass media and other new technologies, new ideas and assumptions have emerged in the defining of what a person or a family must have in order to reach or to maintain a particular living standard. Putlecans have internalized these ideas and images. Race intersects with class to reinforce the messages. Putlecans mark white skin color as progressive, modern and civilized, and black or brown as backwards and inferior. Migration to the United States has strengthened racial and class ideologies constructed in the home community. Putlecans use material goods, such as clothing, cars, *lociones* and so forth, to imitate white, middle-class *norteamericanos* in the United States and to make statements about their success in the U.S. landscape at home - to construe themselves as people who are more "modern" due to their migration experience in order to increase their social prestige in the home community. Consumption is a critical factor in the construction of identities and in the processes of social differentiation.

While Putlecans use migration as a way to challenge their own particular social location within the social order, their everyday activities and beliefs, in turn, support and reproduce the dominant social order. Putla is, and has been, an important regional commercial center since pre-Hispanic times, only today commerce is assuming a greater role in the community's economic livelihood as agricultural production continues to wane. Continually exposed to higher living standards, Putlecans believe that to have more material goods is to "progress" and to live a more "civilized" or "modern" life like 'first'

world peoples have: the "whitening" power of consumption. These beliefs concur with the interests of the dominant social order. Putlecan consumptive practices support the state's agenda of opening market doors to transnational capital interests, and at the same time, enhance their dependence on outside economic inputs. These processes bind Putlecans irrevocably to the national economy and to the Mexican state which are bound to the international economy.

While supporting the social order through their practices and beliefs, Putlecans do at times resist hegemonic ideologies. The ideology of individualism has not completely destroyed the spirit of communalism. Putlecans criticize community members who boast about money, who refuse to support community *fiestas*, or who fail to help out other community members in time of need. Migrants send money for community projects, such as the restoration of the church. They serve as *mayordomos*. Putlecans negotiate ideas about progress and modernity with traditional ideas. Their range of beliefs and practices at one time includes oppositional, alternative, and dominant forms. Putlecans think and act within the field of constructed possibilities - accommodating, modifying or rejecting meanings and practices as their needs and perceptions change.

The changes in gender relations in the community highlight this point. Putlecan women do not form a homogeneous group. Their differing social positions and diversity of experiences produces a range of responses to the current challenges to patriarchal authority in the family. The same is true for Putlecan men. While the trend towards more egalitarian relations between men and women is growing in the community, many Putlecan

men and women still adhere to traditional norms and find the challenges threatening to themselves and their families. Some Putlecans agree with certain changes in attitudes and behaviors, and reject others. The remarks of Putlecan women demonstrate how people define equality and their own subordination differently. The constructed meanings are continually renegotiated in response to migration processes, daily struggles, religious beliefs, and other social relations.

Putla is a large, *mestizo* community whose population is continuing to increase despite its high out-migration rate. When I came to work in Putla, I knew that many people migrate out of the community but only after I finished my survey did I realize how many people were recent immigrants who see Putla as a place of opportunities. We are beginning to witness some major changes in migration patterns as the result of transformations in regional, national and international economies. The past trend of migration from rural communities to primate centers, such as to the Federal District in Mexico, is changing in Latin American countries (Portes 1989:16). People throughout Latin America now realizing that opportunities are limited in primate centers, are migrating to smaller cities and regional towns. As the turn of the century approaches, we will find that many of the migration patterns that have extended from mid-century to the 1990s will no longer continue as people devise new strategies to accomplish their goals. Putla provides a glimpse of some of these changes to come.

## **Migration and Borders**

Migration is an age-old phenomenon, yet in the late twentieth century, it has emerged into the forefront of political debates worldwide. People's fears and ideological stands underlie most of these debates which have resulted in the proliferation of racist attitudes towards migrants and immigrant populations, especially in 'first' world countries. People worry that our nations are being "invaded" and overrun by poor, uneducated 'third' world peoples to the point of mayhem and loss of control over our societies. The situation is constructed as a one-way street. We tend to forget that many of our citizens (businesspeople, retirees, foreign diplomats, military servicemen and women, researchers, expatriates) also migrate to, remain in, and exert considerable influence in 'third' world countries. For those of us with European ancestry, our forbearers migrated to 'third' world lands centuries ago and stayed whether they were welcomed or not. Their migrations dramatically changed the lifeways of peoples around the globe. Yet today our reactions to migrants who enter our borders range from genuine concern of "cultural separatism" to malice and hostility towards the newcomers.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, the backlash against immigrants crosses political lines with both liberals and conservatives participating in the public outcry (Mills 1994). Undocumented migrants are blamed for lowering wages, increasing unemployment, draining public resources, causing divisions among minorities, threatening U.S. security and escalating criminal activities, especially drug smuggling.<sup>2</sup> "Illegal aliens could, then, eventually become a hotbed of agitation and disaffection which might at some point

challenge the harmony and unity of American society" (James 1991:104). Except for Native Americans, U.S. society is a nation of immigrants, yet this fear of our society fragmenting beyond repair weighs heavily in debates about immigration. Blaming the 'other' for our domestic problems is the easy way out. After the tragedy of the Oklahoma bombing, we should realize that what threatens the peace and stability of any country, region or town are the re-production of stereotypes and the creation of new hatreds.

If we want to reduce the number of people crossing our borders, then we need to go beyond setting up "close door" immigration policies which are, and will continue to be, futile. We need to recognize our role in migration processes - how our ideologies, consumptive practices, and immigration policies stimulate migration. For example, certain U.S. immigration policies encourage the "brain drain" and "capital drain" of 'third' world nations by offering residency/citizenship to those who can invest a million dollars in the U.S. economy and to those who can improve the country's business or scientific capabilities.<sup>3</sup> The departure of people with capital or with higher education from 'third' world nations hinders the development of these countries and further marginalizes their people in the global economy. In the case of Mexico, development ideologies and NAFTA will continue to uproot millions of people, sending them in search of work and security in places within and outside their national borders. As Rothstein notes,

If we truly want less Mexican immigration, persuading the Mexican government to slow its agricultural liberalization would be one approach. Failing that, we could underwrite targeted industrial policy in Mexico, which, in violation of free trade rules, would subsidize the development of small industries in rural areas where peasants are being displaced (1994:62).

### **Borders and Boundaries**

The destructiveness of racist ideologies and of fear of the 'other,' is in no way unique to the United States and other 'first' world nations. As seen in this study, Putlecans also blame "outsiders" for conflict and problems in their town. They too draw boundaries to distinguish "authentic" Putlecans from newcomers, and fail to recognize that their parents or grandparents migrated to and settled in Putla years ago. As the local economy worsens, resentments and frustrations are directed towards newcomers rather than towards the more distant national and international policy makers whose actions continue to marginalize their town, region, and state.

People negotiate constructed political, economic and social borders and boundaries of self identification throughout their life cycle. I titled this study as "negotiating" borders in order to underscore how the boundaries we create are not fixed and closed but rather flexible and fluid. Putlecans develop and sustain multiple social relations as they cross political borders. They negotiate new forms of self-identification as well as the identification of others within a multinational context. Unfortunately, often the boundaries people draw to distinguish "us" from "them" are based on racial stereotypes, ignorance (especially of history) and fear of the other. Identities are grounded in space and in time, and transform as time passes, as people move across spaces, and as local lifeways, national policies and global conditions transform. People react by accommodating, challenging, and/or resisting these changes and constructions, and produce new cultural forms which

incorporate individual practices and wider relations of social experience within particular historical junctures. Further reflection is needed to understand how these new cultural forms continue to reproduce class, racial and gender hierarchies in differing contexts, and how with our studies we can work to dismantle them.

**Endnotes:**

1. Some people fear that the U.S. is losing its unity due to the entrance of foreigners, especially Spanish speakers, creating a country divided by linguistic and “cultural” barriers. English-only propositions, in part, stem from this disconcert.
2. See James (1991) for the advancement of this position. See Mills (1994) for counter arguments to each of these claims.
3. See testimonies in the Hearings before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, 101st Congress, Second Session, Serial #21, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1990.

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