CONFLICTING PATHS TO WELLBEING: RARAMURI AND MESTIZO INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS IN NORTHERN MEXICO.

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SUMMARY

Indigenous people in Mexico have historically been subjected to subordinate positions in relation to dominant non-indigenous groups. Indigenous people continue to face political exclusion, social discrimination and economic disadvantages compared to the non-indigenous population. Most studies use a universalising approach to conceptualise wellbeing in order to account for these differences among groups, neglecting to consider local indigenous understandings of wellbeing, and how such understandings may be obscured by inter-ethnic power relations at the local level. This research contributes to the larger debate of how asymmetries among social groups are formed, how they are contested through the articulation of discourses, and the implications of mobilising discourses as a political tool at the local level.

The dissertation focuses on the case of the Raramuri indigenous people of Northern Mexico, and uses detailed ethnographic evidence to explore how discourses of wellbeing are constructed by the Raramuri people in their daily interactions with the non-indigenous population and how power asymmetries between these groups form and persist. It does so by pursuing three main objectives. The first is to document local understandings of wellbeing which emerge for the Raramuri people in contexts of ethno-political oppression. The second is to uncover underlying power relations that hinder wellbeing and reproduce ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities. Examples of this are land conflicts and institutional arrangements behind land management schemes. The third objective is to analyse resulting mechanisms of resistance employed by the Raramuri indigenous people in order to seek control of practices and customs that promotes ethnic distinction. These three pillars provide a novel framework to explore the formation and perpetuation of asymmetrical social, economic and political relations at the local level.

The study finds that the Raramuri people, like other minority groups living in the margins of nation

states and global markets, are constrained to act strategically to face political, economic and social exclusion, while at the same time, taking the opportunity of this position to articulate culturally embedded discourses and mechanisms to reinforce their identity and self-definition. It is in the marginal context that the Raramuri discourse of living well develops and makes sense; fluctuating between the tension of having the right to live differently and the need to be part of the larger society. As a result, this discourse, by stressing ethnic membership and differentiation from other groups, appeals to culturally deep-seated homogenising and idealised elements of ethnicity. Consequently, Raramuri people articulate a recurrent strategy of resistance that allows them to consolidate their cultural identity and the internal cohesion of the group. However, this strategy limits political influence and their capacity to challenge the asymmetric power relations they face from dominant, non-indigenous spheres.

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I freshly remember the warmth and hospitality of the Raramuri and mestizo people in Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi in the Tarahumara region in Mexico. To them, I dedicate this research, for allowing me to live and to learn from them and to share their dreams, knowledge and challenges in the pathways of life.

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What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions. Life is plurality, death is uniformity. By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favours death. The idea of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears diminishes a possibility of life.

Octavio Paz (1987)

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The power relations faced by marginalized and excluded ethnic minorities in Mexico remain a challenge, as they do for minorities elsewhere. The correlation between poor living conditions and indigenous ascription is clear in developing countries in which ethnic minorities have a strong presence.[1] Even in highly developed countries, urban migrants of indigenous origins tend to live in poorer conditions than the general population (Hall and Patrinos 2006; Stavenhagen 2008); Latin American countries are no exception. With an approximate population of 48 million indigenous people, this category represents the largest disadvantaged group in Latin America (Hall and Patrinos 2006, 2010). At the same time, Latin America is considered to be the most unequal region in the world, a fact that presents additional challenges in efforts to introduce effective pro-poor policies (Hoffman and Centeno 2003; Justino and Acharya 2003; Lopez and Perry 2008). The incidence of poverty is especially severe among the indigenous population in Latin America, where

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[1] An understanding of the concept of "indigenous and tribal peoples" is contained in Article 1 of the 1989 Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, No. 169, adopted by the International Labour Organization.

socioeconomic inequalities are at least in part the result of unequal opportunities and subsequent forms of discrimination (Justino 2003).

There is an increasing body of literature that has explored the durability and persistence of inequality in Latin America.[2] Studies that have followed this path seek to postulate a research paradigm focused on the understanding of structural relations and their links with cultural, historical and global dimensions of inequality. This body of literature holds in common the presenting of evidence of a paradigm shift that is able to explain and interpret the sharp levels of socioeconomic inequality that characterise Latin America. Common explanations for the stark inequality in the region focus on inefficient social policies, the low impact of distributive assets such as education (Lopez and Perry 2008), the pervasive effects of late industrialisation and failed market integration (De Ferranti 2003). The economic growth and global market integration experienced by countries such as Brazil and Mexico, however, far from acting to diminish local inequality, instead have contributed to its increase (Hoffman and Centeno 2003). In this sense, although Mexico is a middle-income country whose wellbeing indicators have risen in the recent past, regional pockets of poverty have remained unchanged, or have worsened. This holds true as well if indigenous populations are considered (Hall and Patrinos 2006; UNDP 2010; UNDP CDI 2006).

The indigenous population in Mexico represented approximately 11% of the nation's total population as of 2010, with a total of 52 indigenous groups (INEGI 2005). Mexico's indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented among the country's poor, as in 2008 a quarter of the people below the national poverty line belonged to indigenous groups (González de Alba 2010, p.457). Despite the recent shift in the pattern of settlement due to migration to urban areas, a large proportion of the indigenous population stills lives in rural areas (60%); only 22% of the non-indigenous population live in an urban setting. Those living below the poverty level are concentrated in the rural and

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[2] See Gootenberg (2005) and and Lusting, Lopez-Calva, and Ortiz-Juarez (2012) for relevant literature review and a discussion on diverse approaches.

marginalised areas where indigenous people tend to live (UNDP 2010); as a result, the incidence of extreme poverty in 2002 was 4.5 times higher among indigenous peoples than among their non-indigenous counterparts in predominantly rural municipalities. This figure was an increase from the ratio of 3.7 times reported one decade earlier (Hall and Patrinos 2006). This fact highlights the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous in terms of the intensity of poverty and levels of marginalisation that persist over time (CONEVAL, 2011; Garcia-Moreno and Patrinos 2011; UNDP 2010).

These data provide a general picture of how indigenous people in Mexico have historically been subjected to subordinate positions vis-à-vis the dominant non-indigenous population (Bonfil 2006; Cimadamore, Eversole and McNeish 2005; Esteva 2001; Hall and Patrinos 2006; UN 2009; Villoro 1998; Warman 2003). Despite the recognition of historical and political exclusion, however, most studies have neglected the role power relations play in shaping the livelihoods and ways of living that are available in predominantly indigenous-occupied areas. There are a few studies that represent exceptions to this tendency, which emphasise power inequality and its effects on indigenous peoples' and peasants' livelihoods via the adoption of neoliberal policies (Arteaga and Brachet-Marquez 2011; Hewitt 1984; Lund and Peluso 2011). These issues have not yet been critically addressed, however, with questions remaining as to how the inter-ethnic power relations contribute at the micro level to the creation and perseverance of the power asymmetries that disproportionally affect indigenous groups in particular having gone unaddressed.

Most studies that have adopted a universalising approach in conceptualising development and wellbeing, in order to account for differences among groups, have also neglected to consider local indigenous understandings of wellbeing and how such understandings may be obscured by inter-ethnic power relations at the local level (Matthews and Izquierdo 2011; PUMC-UNAM 2008). Understandings of wellbeing are determined by historic, cultural and collective experiences on the part of social groups, especially considering the fact that indigenous groups articulate particular systems of cultural values and socio-

political organisation in their interactions with the wider society. As Matthews and Izquierdo (2011) have noted, "[...] the American or Western conceptions of wellbeing are insufficient to understand wellbeing in a range of societies across the globe, and are thus insufficient as a basis for cross-cultural comparison of well-being". Although this may hold true to an extent, most indigenous groups are not isolated units nor should they be understood as such, but instead should be seen as part of a complex and intricate web of inter-ethnic interactions, within which power relations become crucial to understanding their disadvantaged positions and how their *emic* understanding of wellbeing is combined with other, more mainstream understandings.

This research will therefore argue in favour of a different approach to exploring power asymmetries, understood as the unequal social, economic and political relations that exist between culturally defined groups at the local level. This research will explore the relationship between ethnicity and the construction of power asymmetries. It will discuss how the Tarahumara people—or the Raramuri, as they refer to themselves—in the Tarahumara Mountain range in Northern Mexico, seek to preserve their sense of wellbeing despite being subject to increasing inter-ethnic power asymmetries as a result of their political and economic environment. Raramuri understandings of wellbeing give us insight into indigenous people's livelihoods, which are heavily reliant on small-scale, subsistence agriculture and social networks of cooperation and solidarity that constitute traditional welfare systems. These forms of livelihoods, complemented by participation in labour markets through seasonal, low-wage jobs promoted by labour markets and government-led social protection programmes, are currently being threatened by the increasing impact of global neoliberal policies and the continued commoditisation of everyday life.

1.2 Questions and Objectives

This research focuses on the everyday inter-ethnic interactions that occur between the Raramuri and the non-indigenous population living in the Tarahumara region, the *mestizo*.

It proposes to undertake a deep examination of the links between ethnicity, understandings of wellbeing and power structures in the Tarahumara mountain range in Northern Mexico in order to contribute to a fuller understanding of how the power asymmetries that disproportionately affect the Raramuri are perpetuated. In examining the interface of these broad topics, this research will have as its main research question: How do inter-ethnic power relations shape the persistence of asymmetries between the Raramuri and the mestizo population living in the Tarahumara region of Northern Mexico?

In order to answer this question, this research will pursue three main discussions, which I will describe here briefly and which will be explored in greater depth in section 1.5, specially the fact that there are tensions and overlaps between these discussions as they draw on different value systems and different political aspirations. The first topic concerns the objective of documenting the local understandings of wellbeing that emerge among the Raramuri people where most commonly agreed indicators show they live in contexts of ethno-political oppression. In identifying those dimensions that are crucial for the wellbeing of the Raramuri, this research will present evidence of a culturally embedded discourse that this indigenous group expresses by way of aspired livelihoods and ways of living. Based on empirical evidence, the research will indicate a clash between local understandings of wellbeing and a mainstream development discourse based on Western values conveyed by local governments and global economic forces (PUMC-UNAM 2008; Sariego 2008).

The second discussion will seek to uncover underlying power relations that hinder wellbeing—as understood by the Raramuri—and to identify structures and institutional arrangements that help reproduce ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities. Examples of this include land conflicts and the perpetuation of the *ejido* system as a means of land management. In this way, this research will be able to explore the impact that the inter-ethnic interactions between the Raramuri and the mestizo have on the creation of factors that hinder the Raramuri's collective sense of wellbeing, which is in turn linked to factors

that produce and perpetuate asymmetrical power relations between the indigenous and non-indigenous populations.

The third discussion will analyse the resultant mechanisms of resistance the Raramuri employ in seeking control of practices and customs that promote ethnic distinction. The research will show how the Raramuri articulate a recurrent strategy of resistance that allows them to consolidate their cultural identity and how the internal cohesion of the group aligns with the discourse on wellbeing mentioned earlier. This strategy, however, limits their political influence and their capacity to challenge the asymmetric power relations they face from dominant, non-indigenous spheres. In this way, this strategy of resistance makes the Raramuri people complicit in their own ethno-political oppression, as they legitimise the terms that prevail within wider society by lack of effective policital lebarage.

These three pillars provide a novel framework within which I will answer the primary research question by exploring how diverse inter-ethnic power relations shape the persistence of asymmetries that exist between the Raramuri people and the mestizo population living in the Tarahumara region of Northern Mexico. These three discussions evidence tensions and overlaps between them suggesting a need to understand power relations and open up politics around development's broader agenda a inequality and wellbeing.

The remaining sections of this introduction are as follows: first, section 3 provides an overview of the Tarahumara region in Northern Mexico, where fieldwork was performed. Section 4 presents the main argument of this research. Section 5 presents the general structure of this thesis. Lastly, section 6 presents the methodology applied in pursuing this research.

1.3 Research site

The Tarahumara region is located in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua and in parts of the states of Sonora, Durango and Sinaloa. The approximately 60,000 square kilometre region is home to four indigenous groups: the *Raramuri*, or 'Tarahumara', with an estimated population of 80,897 according to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadistica y Geografia* [National Institute of Geograpgy and Stadistics] (INEGI 2010); the *Odame*, or 'tepehuanos', with an approximate population of 7,903; the *Warijo*, or 'warijios', with an approximate population of 1,900; and, the *O'oba*, or 'pimas', with an approximate population of 435. Approximately 104,014 indigenous people coexist with the non-indigenous or mestizo population, which is twice as numerous.[3]

This region has been a contested landscape throughout history, as groups have fought over control of natural resources and over different ways of living and different understandings of wellbeing. This contestation is most evident through the increasing effect that national and global neoliberal economic policies have had and are having. Such policies have led to the exploitation of natural resources through, for instance, forestry, commercial land use, tourism development, the cultivation of narcotics and the growth of the mining industry, which benefits few local people and only tangentially benefits the Raramuri (COSYDDHAC/Texas Centre for Policy Studies 2000; Hard and Merril 1992; Perez-Cirera and Lovett 2006; Quiroz 2008; Rivero, 1987; Sariego 2008; Wyndham 2010).

The biology and topography consist of a system of deep subtropical canyons dominated by tropical dry forest (Bye 1994), with at least five such canyons being deeper than the Grand Canyon in the Southwestern U.S., alternating with high mountains that rise up to 3,300 meters above sea level and host approximately 15% of Mexico's national forests (Perez-Cirera and Lovett 2006). Conifer-oak forests are abundant in the highlands. This natural diversity has attracted national and global investment in an effort to develop the

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[3] Mestizos are considered an ethnic group within this research, as they possess cultural practices and identities that differentiate them from both the local indigenous populations and wider Mexican society.

Tarahumara region as a tourist destination. Since the 1980s, construction of a network of roads, hotels, airports and other infrastructure, as well as the promotion of protected national parks, has been undertaken by the government at all levels; the Copper Canyon Tourist Project, which includes international resorts, cable cars crossing the canyons, and golf courses, is a large scale example of this, as is the rush for land acquisition on the part of the local elites and national and global private entrepreneurs (Mancera et al 1998). The abundant conifer-oak forests have also led to the region having become economically attractive to national and global economic actors due to its biological diversity and rich natural resources.

The promotion of the land reforms that permitted the collective extraction of timber resources through the *ejidos* is one example of the investments that have shaped the recent history of the Tarahumara region.[4] Indigenous and non-indigenous people participate in ejidos as members, although the institutional arrangements within the ejido structure itself can lead to the concentration of power in the hands of a few; more often than not such processes benefit the mestizo at the expense of the indigenous people. Moreover, the Tarahumara region has been known for its mining activity since the nineteenth century, now being one of the most productive states in Mexico. This globalized industry now produces new paterns or investment, driven by new technologies that have discovered crucial reserves that are listed on the world's most influential stock exchanges (Sariego 2008a).

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[4] Ejidos, a form of collective land management created after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the subsequent Agrarian Reform process, were meant to facilitate land redistribution. Ejidos became the dominant form of organizational division of rural land during in the last century. Most indigenous populations in Chihuahua, Mexico live in ejidos (COSYDDHAC/Texas Center for Policy Studies 2000). In the Tarahumara region, as in other indigenous-dominated regions in Mexico, ejido areas and demarcations were imposed that overlapped pre-existing divisions of Raramuri towns or ranches. As ejidos function as cooperatives for the management of land resources, collective decisions are made through a general assembly composed of a president, a secretary and a treasurer, elected by its members, or *ejidatarios*. Individuals can become members after living a specified amount of time within the ejido, thereby acquiring rights such as the right to participate in the making of collective decisions concerning the management of natural resources and the right to receive their share of the profits from the sale of natural resources, especially timber.

These economic policies align with mainstream Western development discourses, which have created contested scenarios that clash with traditional livelihoods and ways of living that are based on different ways of understanding wellbeing, such as those that look to adopt a form of subsistence agriculture and those which argue in favour of solidarity and practices of cooperation within the indigenous group. As this research will examine, the intensification of neoliberal policies since the late 1980s has produced unintended consequences for these indigenous peoples. As a result of the economic development models imposed on the region, power asymmetries between social groups have developed that disproportionally affect the Raramuri as compared to the non-indigenous population living in the same area, as has been shown by a number of studies (e.g., CDI/UNDP 2006; De la Torre and Rodolfo 2010).

The Human Development Report for Indigenous Population (CDI/UNDP 2006), for instance, has shown the Tarahumara region to have the greatest disparity on the Human Development Index in terms of the difference between its indigenous (0.5461) and non-indigenous population (0.7831) of any region in Mexico. The most recent Human Development Report for Indigenous Population published in Mexico shows that the municipality with the lowest score on the Human Development Index for Indigenous People (HDIIP) in Mexico is Batopilas (0.3010), also located in the Tarahumara region. This index is lower than that reported for Niger (0.3300), the nation with the lowest scores on the HDI (UNDP 2010). Data from the Social Marginality Index created by the *Consejo Nacional de Población* (National Council of Demographics) and from the new multidimensional poverty measure created by the *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de Política Pública* (National Council of Public Policy Evaluation) also have shown discrepancies in the socioeconomic variables that affect the indigenous peoples in the region.[5] Moreover, research conducted in the area has shown how indigenous populations are systematically marginalised, kept from being eligible for health coverage and exempted from qualifying for a range of public services (Monarrez and Martinez

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[5] See www.coneval.gob.mx for further comparisons of indigenous and non-indigenous populations on a range of social indicators.

2000), denied land management benefits (Perez-Cirera and Lovett 2005); and, having differentiated access to income when compared with the non-indigenous population. Monarrez-Espino, Greiner and Martinez (2004) established the fact that the infant mortality rate among the Tarahumara, at 95 per 1000 live births, is nearly double the infant mortality rate reported nationally among indigenous groups, and triple that of the overall national rate. These indicators were helpful in uncovering the power asymmetries that lay beneath inter-ethnic relations.

The ethno-political tension therefore has been increasing in the region, for instance in the form of land conflicts—which are evidence of how the Tarahumara region can be conceived of as a contested region not only in terms of who controls and benefits from the region's natural resources and how that control is exercised, but also as a space suffused with power that challenges core assumptions of mainstream development and wellbeing (Sariego 2008). Although the non-indigenous population is also impacted by these investments and contested scenarios, the Raramuri historically have suffered greater disadvantages in terms of the levels of their participation in formulating economic and political policies that promote their aspirations and collective aims, their ability as a group or as individuals to engage with the State and its institutions on equal terms, and their capacity to put forth their ethnic and political demands in the national arena.

The livelihoods and ways of life pursued among the mestizo are associated to a greater extent with the commoditisation of everyday life, due to the group's close ties to the dominant society and the fact that their engagement with the market economy gives them a greater capacity to cope with and respond to the economic and environmental shocks and benefit from the available resources and opportunities in more effective ways than the Raramuri. Instead the Raramuri pursue a way of life that focuses on maintaining a form of subsistence agriculture and that values solidarity and practices of cooperation.

Ethnicity in the region

The Raramuri as a group have a distinctive form of socio-political organization, distinctive cultural patterns and a unique history when compared to the mestizo population. The livelihoods of the Raramuri are largely based on diverse subsistence and economic activities that have been shaped through a history of inter-ethnic relations and a jealously guarded sense of self-determination. There is a distinctive settlement pattern that marks Raramuri localities, with the majority—52%—living in scattered settlements such as hamlets or *rancherias* of less than 100 people (Pintado 2004). The majority of the Raramuri population are engaged in subsistence agriculture, with each family working small plots of land and the resultant crops being collectively shared under the principle of the ejido, or *comunidades agrarias*. The primary crops are maize, beans, squash and potatoes, although other vegetables are also grown. Livestock animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep and goats are also important assets for these households, although they are kept only on a small scale. These livelihoods are complemented by occasional participation in a variety of low-paid seasonal jobs—e.g., as builders, producing and selling hand-crafts for tourists, as labourers in privately owned fields—and in the illicit cultivation of amapola and marijuana. This participation in the market economy, largely locally dominated by mestizos, accounts for the largest share of "off-farm" income activities among the Raramuri. When available, the Raramuri, the mestizo and other non-indigenous groups will seek to benefit from a combination of social protection programmes which are mainly government-led income transfers, such as *Oportunidades* and *Procampo.*[6]

The mestizo population tend to participate in a broader array of market-based activities, such as commerce, services, tourism, forestry and mining, in the larger urban and semi-urban localities. Households also tend to benefit from economic diversification within market activities as a means of broadening their sources of income, which also provides

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[6] *Oportunidades* is the primary social protection programme in Mexico aimed at breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty by focusing on making interventions in children's nutrition, health and education. *Procampo* is a federal programme that promotes agricultural production by providing commercial and market advice, agricultural materials and technology, along with other subsidised services.

some protection of their basic livelihoods (Hard and Merril 1992). The larger towns within the Tarahumara region have a clear and distinct economic orientation toward services and commerce administered by mestizo families. The economic stratification evident within the mestizo population is quite evident, in general, as some families have greater ties with certain economic or political activities than do other families. The political spheres at the local level—the municipal government—are dominated by patronage relations, as most if not all of the 17 municipalities that compose the Tarahumara region are controlled by mestizos. In some cases, apparent political and economic groups—some formed by kinship—operate as powerful local elites that control the municipal governments and local-national political relations within the region (Ortega 2010). These elites also have command over—and extract greater benefit from—the tourism and forestry projects introduced by international corporations and foreign investors. These sectors of political and economic power exclude the Raramuri population of the region.[7] This research focuses, in particular, on two localities: one, Aboreachi, inhabited by a population of 120 Raramuri, and the other, Laguna de Aboreachi, with a predominantly mestizo population of 315. These two localities are taken to be representative examples within the Tarahumara region in terms of the size of the population, its demographic composition, the infrastructure, and the prevailing cultural features in terms of land management, administrative configuration and social organization within the same geographical space.

1.4 Argument

Three main points of discussion frame and structure this research focused on understanding how power asymmetries are constructed between groups. The first focuses on what the Raramuri consider to be "living well". The second explores how these notions of living well are hindered by interethnic power relations. The third analyses how the Raramuri engage in culturally embedded forms of resistance to those power relations.

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[7] This concrete example is consistent with the literature concerning patron-client and regressive political institutions (Gacitua and Sojo 2000). Other studies have emphasised the historic legacy patronage relations have had on official institutions in inhibiting opportunities for indigenous peoples to achieve effective involvement in and control over their own livelihoods (Engerman and Sokoloff 2006).

These three topics of discussion constitute the thread that connects the major themes of this research.

These three discussions provide a novel framework within which we can explore the formation and perpetuation of asymmetrical social, economic and political relations at the local level in the Tarahumara region. I engage with this discussion in several ways. First by making a case that there are differences in how the respective groups understand wellbeing, which are often overlooked in development studies and which are crucial to efforts to consider the cultural differences of the involved groups. Second, even if we were to consider the emic and culturally differentiated understandings of wellbeing that exist between the Raramuri and the values that dominate Western societies, we would still encounter differences in how those understandings of wellbeing are attained that are influenced by institutional arrangements and structural factors. Third, in the face of these institutional arrangements and structural factors, the Raramuri employ resistance strategies that complement their notions of wellbeing and their need to fortify their ethnic identity through cultural practices that differentiate them from wider society, although they have little potential to influence the wider political, economic and social environment that oppresses them.

This study therefore will argue that, in order to understand the formation of the asymmetries that exist between the Raramuri and the mestizo, power relations must be taken into account from the moment understandings and notions of wellbeing are defined. I will ask who defines the crucial concepts that are used to measure and compare a society's success and standards of living. By providing ethnographic evidence, this thesis argues that understandings of wellbeing are not universal, but instead are subject to and influenced by socio-cultural and political contexts (Diener and Suh 2000; Baumeister 1991; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009; Calestani 2011; Kavedžija 2012).

To make such an argument, however, we first need a cultural lens through which to analyse understandings of wellbeing; that in turn will allow us to look at a stakeholder's

point of view and consider the differences in perception that have emerged based on ethnicity (Rao and Walton 2004). At the same time the historic, social and political contexts must also be understood, so that we may capture perceptions and understandings of wellbeing that do not necessarily match mainstream or Western values concerning development (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009). These latter aspects do not undermine the usefulness of other types of indicators, such as those that measure poverty or inequality, but instead offer a needed complement by helping us to understand the unequal interactions that occur between ethnic groups (Renshaw and Wray 2004; PUMC-UNAM 2008).

The narratives collected in the course of conducting fieldwork are not limited to a single concept or a small number of dimensions, but instead present comprehensive discourses that tell a story about realising contentment through cultural perseverance, in relation to the Raramuri expression of 'living your life through the correct path' or, in the Raramuri language, '*Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich*'. This notion is linked to ideas of happiness, being productive and maintaining harmony with the social, physical and spiritual world. This relates to what Sahlins (1972) identified in affluent societies as having limited wants or needs that are easily satisfied, rather than unlimited wants that are difficult to meet.

While conducting interviews of the Raramuri people, a common response to the question of what made them happy and content concerned the apparent ability to endure and make do with what one has, with a strong community component. Jackson (2011) explored the notions of wellbeing among the *Kuranko* people in Sierra Leone and also described this aspect. Specifically, in my research I explore two dimensions that became evident during interviews, informal conversations and participant observation, in addition to arising as topics of conversation when discussing what makes the Raramuri happy and leads them to say they are living well: (a) the need to have a productive means of subsistence agriculture; and, (b) the need or desire to enjoy a strong sense of community through solidarity and networks of cooperation. This research argues that these emic

understandings of wellbeing as expressed by the Raramuri are differentiated from and clash with mainstream or Western understandings of how wellbeing is or should be attained. This clash highlights a key difference between mestizos and the Raramuri, in the sense that for the latter, the search for a means to live well implies the maintenance of living conditions that allow one to live *well*, and not necessarily that allow one to improve their condition through material accumulation in order to live *better*, or in a manner similar to the non-indigenous population. This research also explores parallels between discourses on wellbeing and the Raramuri idea of 'living your life through the correct path', in terms of maintaining a balance that places the individual in harmony with the social, physical and spiritual worlds. The path that the Raramuri follow implies that moving forward is not necessarily to be equated with moving upward, a notion that is more firmly rooted in Western values of progress.

Analysis of the two dimensions also suggests that, for the Raramuri, living well is accomplished by pursuing the right strategies with which to maintain their livelihood, such as subsistence agriculture; communal rather than individual ownership of the means of production; social systems that are heavily reliant on kin relations; and, culturally-embedded forms of sharing and reciprocal exchange—such as gatherings at which a drink of fermented maize called *teswuino* is shared—which entail collective returns rather than focusing on individual accumulation (Kennedy 1963, 1978; Urteaga 1998; Saucedo 2003). In doing so, social and cultural mechanisms maintain a discourse on living well by articulating the social practices that create the practices of ethnic differentiation (Gluckman 1958; Grinker 1994). Living well for the Raramuri also implies a cosmological understanding that adds to the subjective and complex implications of living well among indigenous people.

Raramuri-mestizo relations are not based only on cultural differentiation, however, as they form part of the same economic, political and social system despite occupying different social positions with different relative advantages and disadvantages. This

research will therefore argue that wellbeing for the Raramuri can be understood as a result of two forces: a right and a need. First, as described earlier, there is the right to maintain a livelihood that is based on subsistence agriculture, a set of cultural and religious beliefs, their own social and political structures, and practices of solidarity and cooperation that help to build a strong sense of community. The second force is the need to engage with the dominant society through the labour market, land management schemes such as the ejido system, and the official government. This study found that is through the expression of this need to engage with the State and the wider society that power relations become evident, as these relationships are held in the conditions of exclusion and domination, characterised by asymmetric power relations.

The Raramuri, in their economic, social and political relationships with State institutions and with the mestizos living in the Tarahumara region, interact on uneven terms, thereby perpetuating the already-existing power asymmetries. An additional major argument of this research therefore is to consider how the wellbeing of the Raramuri is constrained by a series of structural factors, as conveyed by economic models and possible livelihoods promoted by the State at the national level and by the global markets.

This research will show that the Raramuri identify factors that hinder their wellbeing. Three main factors are identified by the Raramuri informants through analysis of interviews, ethnography, surveys and archive research: First, land conflicts are analysed, with empirical and historical accounts collected during fieldwork in the Tarahumara region showing that invasions by the mestizo place pressure on the availability of land suitable for subsistence agriculture.

Second, the institutional arrangements of the ejido system are a further hindrance.These institutional arrangements permit elites to consolidate their privileged social and economic positions by hoarding local opportunities. Municipalities and *ejidos* are spaces in which economic, social and political resources can be easily hoarded and manipulated by

small, privileged groups (Nuijten 1998; Lopez Bacernas 2006; Ortega 2010). Community projects in the Raramuri localities included in this research show how these groups of *elites*—commonly comprised of mestizos—operate and are maintained through networks of local economic investors, middle-men traders, local cattle dealers and leaders that negotiate with the local government for favourable business arrangements and who treat collective public goods as private ones. The *ejido* as an imposed land management scheme is another example of a political space in which small groups of mestizo are able to hoard opportunities that allow them to maintain their privileged positions, creates concentrations of power and imposes new authorities and structures of power in the region. (Nuijten, 1998). Third, ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities in the localities were documented. Raramuri people also face vulnerabilities such as discrimination, which help shape a distinctively unequal pattern of opportunities and access to resources between groups. Differentiated sets of vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect the Raramuri in contrast to the non-indigenous population therefore are evident when the Raramuri engage in economic activities that strengthen predominantly mestizo livelihoods. This will be presented through empirical cases identified in the course of fieldwork. The factors that hinder Raramuri wellbeing contribute to the promotion of unequal social interactions among the Raramuri and the mestizo, and limit the ability of the Raramuri and other indigenous peoples to secure the means of earning a livelihood.

The manners in which the Raramuri address land conflicts, institutional arrangements and ethnically differentiated vulnerability are diverse. The research will provide examples of how the Raramuri people, by stressing ethnic membership and differentiation from other groups, appeal to deep-seated cultural homogeneity and idealised elements of ethnicity. This is evident in the collective importance placed on perpetuating ceremonies and gatherings that are organised and performed solely by the Raramuri. I will argue that organising and participating in such cultural festivals and gatherings is a form of hidden resistance to ethno-political oppression resulting from inter-ethnic interactions (e.g., Scott 1985; 1990).

This mechanism of resistance implies that the Raramuri seek to enhance and draw attention to practices and livelihoods that allow them to differentiate their ethnic identity from that of mestizo, and that the homogeneous cultural practices of the livelihoods pursued by the Raramuri are meant as a means of securing their ethnic identity. This resistance strategy can represent a double-edged sword for the Raramuri, however, as by limiting their actions to efforts to fortify their ethnic identity they are left with little or no means with which to influence and motivate radical economic, political and social change. By preferring to consolidate their cultural identity and to fortify the internal cohesion of the group, instead of seeking to influence the oppressive environment in which they find themselves, I will make the case that the Raramuri are in effect complicit in their own ethno-political oppression by continuing to live under the terms imposed by the wider society.

The Raramuri people have found themselves in a scenario in which they are at the margins of the State, with little ability to influence global markets. They see themselves as being part of an intricate socio-political environment. On the one hand, they are on the margins of a web of political relations that is dominated by the power of political elites and economic policies that orient themselves toward a free market and the commoditisation of everyday life. On the other hand, they have certain self-defined spaces within which the unique cultural practices that fortify their ethnic identify are produced. Although they have a foot in both camps, they do not completely occupy one or the other. This condition of being on the margins represents a state of economic and social vulnerability, a result of a lack of recognition of their socio-cultural and economic rights on the part of the national government. It also enables them to make strategic decisions in order to, if not negotiate the overall terms of their relations with the mestizo who are dominant within their region and the State, to at least manage their role as an ethnically differentiated group within the State, in order to secure the survival of their culture. The empirical evidence described here therefore suggests that the Raramuri must adopt a strategic pose that will allow

them to cope with economic vulnerabilities through processes of self exclusion, but also to benefit from the opportunities their position on the margins grants them, so as to reinforce their identity and self-definition.

To summarise, in order to answer the main research question concerning how inter-ethnic power relations shape persistent power asymmetries between the Raramuri and the mestizo populations living in the Tarahumara region of Northern Mexico, this research will engage with the following three points of discussion: First, this thesis will consider local understandings of wellbeing that document and frame the Raramuri's shared and culturally embedded ideas of affluence as different from those held by the mestizo population, which are more in tune with mainstream discourses on development. Second, this thesis will discuss how emic understandings of wellbeing on the part of the Raramuri are constrained by structural factors introduced by their environment, such as those that contribute to the institutional arrangements and land conflicts that ultimately create ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities and perpetuate power asymmetries. Third, this thesis will consider the Raramuri's approaches to resistance and what these tell us about how they react in symbolic terms or, as Scott (1985; 1990) has suggested, in hidden ways, through for instance the performance of rituals and festivals that express their ethnic position relative to the oppressive inter-ethnic relations. The mechanisms of resistance explored in this research will provide evidence for the clashing and contestation of understandings of wellbeing held by two discourses: one discourse based on the idea that people should have a livelihood that is oriented toward the maximisation of resources, having secure sources of income and a tendency toward the accumulation of material wealth in order to live better; and the other discourse based on the idea that people, by securing their traditional livelihoods and ways of living, will promote cultural institutions and practices that, among other things, endorse community-based cooperation over individual accumulation of material wealth as a means of living well.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter II outlines the conceptual and theoretical approach pursued in answering the research questions. In doing so, several theoretical themes—such as constructions of living well, power, ethnicity and resistance—are explored.

First, I will analyse the *Buen vivir* approach, and how it is useful in identifying and understanding what is considered to be living well among the Raramuri. Next, the chapter will analyse the research paradigms that are focused on the understanding of structural relations and their links with cultural, historical and global dimensions of asymmetries and inequalities that affect indigenous peoples, with a special focus on Latin America. Finally, resistance strategies and theories about power will be explored, so that we might understand what forms of contestation are articulated by disadvantaged groups. This section will also consider the role ethnicity plays as an underlying factor in asymmetric power relations.

Chapter III will provide context on the Tarahumara region. It will start by giving an ethnographic overview of the Raramuri and the mestizo people and their economic, social and political relations, the main point being to stress the need to understand the region as a contested space in terms of the two groups' conflicting livelihoods and ways of living. In order to make this case I will present a brief historical overview of the economic and development approaches the Mexican State has implemented in the Tarahumara region and how these have shaped the correlation of political forces in a manner that has unequally benefited particular livelihoods such as those associated with the commoditisation of services, extractive industries and commerce, all of which mainly benefit the mestizo. I will then introduce the two localities in which I conducted fieldwork: Aboreachi, the Raramuri locality, and Laguna de Aboreachi, the mestizo, non-indigenous locality. Both localities are occupied by culturally differentiated groups, albeit with strong economic, political and ethnic links between them that argue in favour of them

constituting a single structure of social relations and a single economic system, rather than differentiated structures. The next three sections provide empirical support for the arguments according to the information obtained through interviews, participant observation, and ethnographic research conducted in Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi over a period of 12 months.

Chapter IV is dedicated to an exploration of the ethnic discourses associated with the path of living well for the Raramuri people. Among the diverse, culturally embedded discourses, a particular discourse stands out concerning how the Raramuri *should* live and *walk* the correct path of living. Although a wide range of elements and dimensions are identified as being related to living well, the discourse relates to two main dimensions: the significance of effective farming and land management; and a strong sense of community as built through solidarity and networks and practices of cooperation. I will argue that these two dimensions reflect a form of livelihood and a way of living for the Raramuri that differs and departs from the mestizo understanding of same in many aspects—that the same discourse on living well, in and of itself, promotes ethnic differentiation between the groups. The final section of this chapter concerns the social reproduction of the dominant discourse through myths, cosmological beliefs and cultural drivers. In this context I will argue that certain social interpretations of natural phenomena express the relationship of wellbeing and asymmetrical interethnic relations.

Chapter V is dedicated to exploring how these dimensions of wellbeing—embedded in the Raramuri's dominant discourse as discussed previously—clash with a series of social, economic and political practices that prevail in the mestizo world that hinder Raramuri wellbeing in several ways. Three economic, political and social factors that operate at the micro level will be explored, with a focus on their potential influence on the Raramuri's path to living well: land conflicts; the institutional arrangement of the ejido as a form of land management; and, the broader processes of differentiated vulnerability that exist between the mestizo and the Raramuri. These three factors were identified by the

Raramuri as the important factors that hinder them from pursuing their path of living well. The second section of this chapter is dedicated to a further exploration of the macro factors, such as embedded inter-ethnic economic transactions and institutional arrangements, which can lead to increased hoarding of opportunity and the strengthening of client networks, thereby increasing the vulnerability and extent of political exclusion of indigenous peoples in the region.

The final chapter will be dedicated to an exploration of how the Raramuri react to and challenge the hindering factors discussed previously. The central argument of chapter VI will be an attempt to show how Raramuri engage in a variety of resistance techniques and strategies articulated and performed as a reaction to and contestation of the hindering factors understood as power asymmetries that benefit the mestizo and the dominant national society. These diverse mechanisms of resistance imply enhancing and making visible ethnic practices and livelihoods that differ between mestizo and Raramuri, and at the same time homogenizing the cultural practices of the Raramuri in order to defend them. These two processes deal with ethnicity and with links to the discourses on living well discussed earlier. I will argue, in particular, that ethnicity plays a key role in shaping resistance by producing strategic mechanisms by which the Raramuri are able to create opportunities to exercise agency in appropriating and adapting processes at the micro level, while at the same time undermining their capacity to articulate demands to the State, thereby having the inadvertent effect of perpetuating the status quo that surrounds ethnic relations in the Tarahumara region.

1.6 Methodology

Selection of localities

The two localities included in this analysis were selected on the basis of several factors. First, as the research is concerned with the link between power asymmetries and inter-ethnic relations, the localities selected had to be the site of intense inter-ethnic

interactions on a daily basis. Second, both localities had to have the potential to provide examples representative of the Tarahumara region in terms of the relative size of the population and its demographic composition. Laguna de Aboreachi and its 138 households is a predominantly mestizo town, which has the infrastructure and economic features typical of other mestizo towns of the region; the settlement is well connected to other, larger mestizo towns by roads, with intense contact among these localities, as the mestizo people often engage in market economic activity.

Aboreachi, on the other hand, is a characteristic indigenous town, like many others dispersed throughout the region. Its entire population consists of 30 households, which engage in a form of subsistence agriculture and, to a lesser degree, in small-scale rearing of livestock and seasonal paid jobs with the mestizo. As described above, 52% of the total Raramuri population of the Tarahumara region live in dispersed hamlets or *rancherias* of less than 100 people (Pintado 2004), meaning that Aboreachi, as well as Laguna de Aboreachi, share certain characteristics in terms of demography when compared to the broader Tarahumara region. Both localities constitute areas where historical mestizo and Raramuri settlements can be traced back over several generations. At the same time, both localities present clear cultural differences expressed in terms of land management, administrative configurations and social organisation despite occupying the same geographical space.

In addition, both localities form part of the *ejido* of the same name, Aboreachi. The location of the *ejido* in which both Laguna de Aboreachi and Aboreachi are located matches almost exactly the Raramuri's traditional territorial organization known as the *Pobora,* a set of hamlets that forms a community under one set of traditional political authorities. As explained further in this thesis, these two conceptions of territory and social organisation reveal the cultural differences that exist in the relationship between society and territory. Consequently, the Laguna de Aboreachi area presents the social and political configuration of a mestizo town, with its links to larger cities in the region and the

economic activities and extraction of resources, while the Raramuri locality is recognisable based on the hamlets that surround it while it itself is a centre for traditional and religious activities.

Moreover, both localities are in contact with *gentiles*, or non-baptized Raramuri people, the Raramuri subgroup that continues to forsake much of the social and economic interaction with the mestizo, the baptized *Raramuri* of Aboreachi, and the wider society by living in a self-excluded manner in even more remote hamlets. Having both subgroups of the Raramuri, as well as the mestizo, present within an ejido—and within a Pobora— adds to the importance of considering the inter-ethnic and social relations that occur between groups. Finally, these localities are located in the Guachochi municipality in the Tarahumara region, which is the municipality that represents the largest disparity on the HDIIP when comparing indigenous (0.5832) and non-indigenous (0.8470) groups (UNDP-CDI 2006). These socioeconomic indicators illustrate the deprived and unequal situation the population living in the region faces. The Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi localities therefore combine appealing research conditions to further explore the economic, social and political impacts of inter-ethnic interactions among the Raramuri and the mestizo. With this context, the thesis presents an argument about how inter-ethnic power relations shape the persistence of power asymmetries between the Raramuri people and the mestizo.

Fieldwork

In conceiving of and developing this study, I adopted a subject-oriented approach in order to conceive of the people living in the research area as more than interviewees or mere informants. This was done to prevent the usual asymmetries that occur in the subject/object relationships that prevail in fieldwork-based research (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991). In selecting the research methods to be applied in conducting fieldwork I was largely inspired by Stephan Gudeman and Alberto Rivera's work, *Conversations in Colombia: The domestic economy in life and text* (1990), in which the authors proposed looking at the domestic economy in daily life in order to understand the social processes

and dynamics from a local perspective. Inspired by these authors, I aimed to build up a conversational community with informants not only to obtain information from them, but also as a way to verify and validate sources and information.

This approach was used because, in order to obtain quality information, I needed to live among the people, so as not to limit my relationship solely to the applying of well-designed questionnaires and surveys, which would limit my relationship with the people to that of informants. I instead sought to engage with them in their everyday activities wherever possible. Other cultural factors were taken into consideration, as well, in an effort to obtain information through a variety of techniques; for instance, I learned that asking several questions consecutively, in a direct and persistent manner, is considered impolite among the Raramuri people.[8] So, interviews were conducted mostly in informal conversations while undertaking everyday activities with the informants, this could be in their fields doing farming work, walking between hamlets, doing domestic work, attending to animals, etc.

The data presented here is comprised of both primary and secondary sources. The main source of primary information is the fieldwork conducted at the two sites noted above in the Tarahumara region from January to December, 2010. The methods used to obtain information during fieldwork included ethnographic research, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and surveys. The interviews and surveys were applied to 30 self-identified Raramuri and 30 mestizo inhabitants of the Guachochi municipality, Chihuahua, Mexico. Ethnographic research and participant observation was conducted in the area known as Aboreachi (a Raramuri locality with a population of approximately 120 people) and Laguna de Aboreachi (a predominantly *mestizo* locality with a population of 315 people), each in the municipality of Guachochi. The interviews took place inside or in the proximity of the informants' houses. Special care was taken to interview male and female, young and old. The entire locality of Aboreachi was covered in the survey process and a

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[8] This fact was also was noted by Wyndham (2010).

total of 60 surveys were conducted, including the *mestizo* population in Laguna de Aboreachi.

A few informants lived in neighbouring localities within the Aboreachi *Pobora*. Mestizos were interviewed in the locality of Aboreachi. However, information obtain in this research was gathered in different social spaces, so participant observation was conducted in order to capture relevant information in ceremonies, festivities, collective farming activities, journeys on foot to other towns, and everyday activities. During the journeys and everyday activities I participated in, I made a special point of capturing opinions, statements and expressions related to what makes people happy, what their ideas are of how life should be, what makes someone feel good, and their future aspirations, both as individuals and as part of a group. Additionally, information about interethnic relations and ways of resistance was captured in the same way in these social spaces. I was careful to listen to their problems, their fears and the obstacles that people mentioned as hindering factors. As I have used information that might be sensitive, I have chosen to use pseudonyms in interviews and have anonymized where necessary.

Secondary sources of information included a variety of government documents, previous research projects, organizational reports, publicly available statistics, academic studies, dissertations, journal articles, books, etc. Linkages with existing ethnographic work based on the Tarahumara region will be used as references to support concrete own findings and also as opportunities to review changes over time. Archival research conducted at two historic collections complemented the research methods and allowed the researcher to incorporate a synchronic perspective wherever possible. The archives consulted include the Archive from the Coordination Centre of Guachochi for Indigenous Action of the National Institution of Indigenous Affairs (INI) and the Smithsonian Institution Archive Section of the Tarahumara Region. Both archives are held by the National School of Anthropology and History in Chihuahua City, Mexico. The archives were consulted from September to November, 2010.

A qualitative approach was therefore adopted, and the subsequent analysis was developed in such a way that it would allow me to engage more deeply with the topics that comprise this thesis. The process of analysis used was mainly based on the empirical data gathered in the fieldwork, along with an analysis of secondary sources whenever possible. Specifically, I used grounded theory[9] as an analysis technique as this allowed me to identify those events, narratives and facts that relate to the thesis' different topics; different ideas of wellbeing, happiness, aspirations; factors informants identified as constrains to those ideas of affluence; and the different mechanisms of collective actions and resistance to those constraints which were identified.

 I used an ethnographical notebook to record and document such field events. Interviews and surveys applied to informants were arranged and coded. These were later merged with the field notes in a further iteration of the coding process that allowed me to systematise the empirical evidence and refine the concepts I was using to build my theoretical framework. Therefore, by using this approach to data analysis influenced by constructivist grounded theory, I was able to build up concepts and arguments I used from the elements and emic categories that the people in the Sierra Tarahumara themselves considered to be important, at the same time as relating them to key concepts identified from the literature, while trying to practice reflexivity and pay attention to my own positionality (see next section). The combination of empirical and grounded facts with bibliographical accounts provides robustness to the claims presented.

I identified and selected for analysis those events and characters presented in this thesis following a twofold criteria: a) representativeness among the universe of events identified and gathered; and b) robustness which allowed me to illustrate the complexity and richness of the factors at play. This process of identification was done every day during fieldwork when performing interviews, surveys, informal talk and day-to day activities with the people in the localities studied. Therefore, information, narratives, events and cases presented emerged largely from fieldwork, and were the result of a reflective and,

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[9] See Thornberg (2012)

whenever possible, collective process with informants to capture different points of view and possible interpretations.

Positionality and reflections on information gathering

I am a Mexican anthropologist who has worked in the Tarahumara region in diverse applied and academic activities over the last decade. I have conducted fieldwork research in several localities prior to starting my PhD at the Institute of Development Studies. I sought to learn from my past research experiences, and for this reason drew upon my knowledge of the importance of an approach that incorporated extensive field research, best conducted by living within the studied communities. One of the main reflections I drew from my field experience was the need to build a relationship of trust between the informants and myself. This implies the use of time and the need to be aware of my role as a "foreign element" in the social scene of these localities. I believe, for instance, that a researcher doing fieldwork—especially when entering a social setting—must first be prepared to answer questions from the people encountered concerning their role and purpose as a researcher. This might entail providing our name, our profession, what has motivated our visit, what our family does for a living, etc., before expecting to obtain answers pertaining to our research interest. Important facts about ourselves—potentially including personal information such as marital status or food preferences—helps build the confidence and trust relationships needed to bond and make clear our intentions, our expectations, and our position not only as researchers but as human beings entering a pre-existing social setting.

During my stay at the Raramuri locality of Aboreachi, the *Seriame*, or leader of the locality, invited me to live in the community, in a small room at the boarding school. This allowed me to get a sense of the day-to-day life of the locality. During my stay in Laguna de Aboreachi, I stayed in a small room that a *mestizo* family offered to rent to me. As I stayed with them, we shared meals and spent much time together, and so they become important informants.

For me, fieldwork implied being aware of my presence as an outsider, and also being attentive to the mind-set I had as an individual toward the mood of the social setting. For example, the Raramuri people are known to celebrate frequent gatherings at which collective help is called upon from a household to perform a physically demanding job, such as the erection of a fence or the ploughing or planting of a field. The host then recompenses those who have helped with *teswuino*, a highly sought after drink made of fermented maize. These gatherings are deeply embedded in the group's culture and form an important part of the social networks of cooperation that consist of family members, neighbours and close friends, all carefully invited by the host household and forming part of the traditional welfare system (Kennedy 1963, 1978; Saucedo 2003).[10] The beverage is therefore also intrinsically related to labour and the sense of having earned the right to drink it by working in farming and by helping others (Urteaga 1998). *Teswuino*, through the associated ceremonial practices, is eventually used to perpetuate the farming cycle.

These occasions are special moments in the community and have an implicit joyful atmosphere due to the fact that they are considered celebrations and collective expressions of community, where a host household invites close friends and family to help with a laborious task. To participate in these gatherings is important, as it is considered an honour to be invited; reciprocity is important in the marginal and vulnerable environment of the Tarahumara region. Such gatherings also constitute socialising spaces where crucial information is shared, such as weather forecasts, when the monthly visits by the health services will take place, or which candidates are the most likely to run for the leadership of the traditional government. This is also the space in which gossip is spread and personal disputes are settled.

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[10] As is the case among other ethnic groups, the Raramuri have traditions and practices that promote social cohesion and produce and fortify their identity. Among these traditions are *rohonama*, a term meaning that one should share, divide and distribute things among family and friends. Levi (1992), studying trade mechanisms and the exchange of commodities within and between the Tarahumara and mestizos, has also suggested that, among the Raramuri, there is an implicit sense of reciprocity, of giving and receiving that extends to wider social forms of exchange such as gifting, bartering and sharing. In this sense, trade is basically done at an individual level. This is therefore conceived of as a personal relationship among known individuals that involves friendship and trust, rather than as an economic transaction.

As my research interests were primarily concerned with issues of how a sense of communal solidarity and co-operation is built and performed—as these comprise important components of indigenous notions of wellbeing—participating in as many of these gatherings as was possible became a vital pursuit. As a result, participation in a joyful manner, and having the ability and willingness to contribute with physical labour in the collective task in order to obtain the *teswuino* was necessary in order to gather valuable information and detailed descriptions of the ritual. The importance of being happy, active, and participating with a good attitude toward the collective expectations of the community came to be demanded as part of the process of gathering information. Once people began to invite me to *teswuino* gatherings, or to assist at collective gatherings, I was able to spend time mingling in conversations, hearing and participating in dialogues, exposing myself to new facts, corroborating information, identifying conflicting understandings, or having the chance to meet potential informants. Accessing these important practices with a socially appropriate attitude and active participation opened up further spaces of social interaction within the community, where being able to convey a sense of trustworthiness is a prerequisite.

Feeling integrated and able to build relations of trust among the Raramuri came slowly, in small but crucial moments when I was aware that I had entered, at least to some degree, a space of communicative confidence. During the course of my fieldwork, one such moment came while I was sitting around a bonfire during a *teswuino* gathering among several Raramuri men and women one cold night in February, 2010, after working to erect a wooden fence for cattle. We were talking about how the Raramuri people differentiated themselves from non-Raramuri, from the mestizo population. They were especially surprised that I liked *teswuino* and knew how to gain access to it, by collaborating in physical labour. I told them with a smile that I had learned about *teswuino* during past visits to other Raramuri localities and, even if I was a *chabochi* (the term the Raramuri use to refer to the mestizo), I truly enjoyed drinking *teswuino* and living in the community with

them. After a moment of silence, some of them told me that I am not a chabochi, but a Raramuri. After a moment of confusion this time on my behalf, an elderly person explained to me that non-indigenous people often treated them badly, in an abusive manner, and took advantage of them. Others went on to explain how some mestizos from Laguna de Aboreachi came with their trucks to their houses to trick them into buying sick horses, mules or cows.[11] That kind of person was referred to by the term chabochi, meaning "whiskered ones" in Raramuri language. I told them that I did not understand, I did not identify with those merchants from the Laguna de Aboreachi but I also did not feel as though I was considered by them to be Raramuri. The elder told me that it does not matter, if you respect our ways, live like us and do not try to take advantage of us, then you are not a chabochi but a Raramuri. That night I felt that a bridge of communication had been built.

Another implication during fieldwork concerns the way I, as researcher, introduce myself in the fieldwork site and that might have had an effect on the informants and information I was exposed to. For instance, I obtain permission to perform interviews and undertake fieldwork in both localities studied was granted according with the traditional way most anthropologist and researchers approach the local population. In the *mestizo* community, I talked with the *Ejido Commissioner*, perceived as the local authority. In the Raramuri locality, I was officially introduced during a community meeting where the traditional leader (*Seriame*) allowed me to talk about my research and the intentions of my visit and people were able to ask question about my work. As a result, most of the residents were aware of my intentions as a researcher since the beginning of fieldwork. However, at the same time, I was introduced by the traditional channels of authority on each case and therefore informants might have perceived me as being associated to those figures of power and therefore, perhaps, granting me greater access to those informants in positions of power within the mestizo and the Raramuri. This is particularly important as

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[11] These professional dealers obtained favourable terms of exchange by taking advantage of the possible need and urgency of indigenous sellers in these periods of scarcity. In view of that, some commercial interactions are not celebrated under equal terms of negotiation, as cheap alcohol plays a crucial role—given as a "gift" by mestizos in order to induce their Raramuri counterparts to accept a lower price. Authors such as Levi (2003:265) have also noted this apparently common practice of trickery and deception in commercial transactions between the mestizo and Raramuri.

identifying and documenting narratives and discourses of wellbeing and power among groups is one of the research objectives. I tried to interview and interact with all individuals of the localities, including apparent socially marginalized individuals and households within the localities, as a way to overcome this possible effect. I am also aware that my gender and age might affect data collection and the overall fieldwork experience as it was much easier for me to approach and build trust with males than females.

CHAPTER II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND; DEBATES AND CONCEPTS.

This chapter presents and discusses the theoretical foundations on which this study draws focusing on diverse approaches, concepts and perspectives that serve to answer the research question. Firstly, we shall briefly contextualise how wellbeing has been addressed by development debates, focusing on the anthropological contributions to documenting local ideas of what is considered living well and being happy across ethnic minorities and societies in different contexts. Along this trend of literature, the *Buen vivir* approach will be further explored in its usefulness to analyse the contested nature of mainstream "western" and local understandings of development and wellbeing (Gudynas 2011; Thompson 2011). Following this, the chapter will address relevant debates concerning persistence of inequalities in Latin America, focusing on an ethnic perspective in order to explore crucial constraining factors that can influence local understandings of wellbeing. Finally, resistance strategies and theories about power are explored to understand what forms of contestations are articulated by disadvantaged groups. These three pillars provide a novel framework to explore the formation and perpetuation of asymmetrical social, economic and political relations at the local level by uncovering local wellbeing understandings from the Raramuri; exploring how they are hindered by the interaction of different factors promoted by economic policies and everyday interactions

from the non-indigenous population; and finally analysing through which processes and mechanisms the Raramuri people respond to the ethno-political oppression they face.

2.1 Discussions about wellbeing, culture and development

Wellbeing as an analytical term has emerged recently as a complement to the traditional understandings of poverty and the way to measure it (McGregor 2009). This term stands for a more human-centred approach to pro-poor policies that recognizes resources individuals and communities have, what they can achieve with them, and the meaning people make of those implied social processes.

Although the term wellbeing has been used little by anthropologists, wellbeing-related issues have always been part of the interest of anthropology, for instance on how ethnographies provide detailed accounts of how people live and what they value in specific and localized contexts (Kavedžija 2012). Some ethnographies are concerned with unveiling local understandings of wellbeing among indigenous people and ethnic minorities, for example Jackson (2011) and Izquierdo (2009), Corsin-Jimenez (2007), and Calestani (2011). And yet, not many have directly and solely addressed issues about local conceptions of wellbeing. Thin (2009) argues that there are two possible explanations for why anthropologists usually exclude these matters. Firstly, that wellbeing is usually referred to and used in research as an analytical and not as an ethnographic term. In other words, anthropologists and ethnographers tend to analyse terms that people use in their own life with their own cultural references. And secondly, that anthropologists tend to dismiss any assumptions of universal values and meanings related to wellbeing without careful consideration of the particularities any human society possesses. Therefore by focusing on the normality and coherence of cultural systems, Thin argues that extreme positions of relativism in anthropology and naive romanticism evident in some mainstream research do not help to critically analyse the complex and negative side of any human society.

An interesting example of how wellbeing has been addressed in recent years is the *Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group* at the University of Bath. This group aimed to develop a conceptual and methodological framework for understanding the social and cultural construction of wellbeing in developing countries.[12] This was motivated by the recognition of the importance of understanding local knowledge in terms of poverty processes in diverse contexts. Additionally, the group showed a special interest through their publications in building stronger links between poverty and policy thinking (eg. McGregor and Sumner 2010).

In this sense, the concept of wellbeing the research group proposes combines objective, subjective and relational dimensions, and recognises that the concept itself needs to be flexible enough to be understood as an outcome and as a state of being. With this flexibility the interplay of outcomes and processes should be addressed in terms of social, political and economic forces.[13] Therefore the study of wellbeing requires a framework of analysis that is able to comprehend the cultural construction of meanings in particular contexts (McGregor 2006:12). This relates to the long standing discussion in economic anthropology around the formalist/substantivist debate. A formalist position argues that formal mainstream economic models and rules of neoclassical economic theory can be universalised and generalised to any human society including those based on subsistence agriculture. The substantivist on the other hand, argues that goods and services are produced, distributed and exchanged through established and specific cultural contexts, and therefore are not applicable to generalised analysis. The heart of the debate is whether the economic practice of a society is a human behaviour or is a category of culture (Sahlins 1972). Formalists contend that the rational choice of maximizing social and material resources in a context of scarcity is the same everywhere regardless of cultural boundaries.

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[12] http://www.welldev.org.uk/

[13] The proposed framework of Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) Research Group is detailed in (McGregor 2006) and subsequent publications on the Group website.

Aspects of this debate have made their way into the study of wellbeing manifested in diverse ways, for instance, on whether wellbeing comparisons over diverse societies are plausible or not. In this sense, recently wellbeing has been addressed through cross-society comparisons by a growing group of social scientists that include economists, psychologists, health practitioners, and policy makers (Gough & McGregor 2007; Diener and Tov 2007; Stewart 2002; Stewart and Langer 2007, to name a few diverse examples). These studies for instance make use of a variety of indicators such as per-capita income, consumption, life expectancy, and literacy, in order to capture multi-dimensional dimensions of wellbeing or the lack of it. Through comprehensive statistical analysis these studies provide a neat picture of the wellbeing differentials across different contexts and societies and therefore prove to be useful in terms of policy recommendations. Anthropologists, however, tend to be rather sceptical of the usefulness of such comparisons between different societies by expressing reservations on their deepness (Mathew and Izquierdo 2009). Specifically, as most of these comparisons are based upon data collected through surveys, the reservations focus on how much we really understand about how the respondents live in their societies and how much survey data reflects wellbeing conceptions in their own local terms. On this issue, Mathew and Izquierdo express: "Surveys do not ask respondents to talk about their senses of wellbeing in their own words. Rather, they ask for informants' closed-ended answers to fixed questions, as translated into different languages. This not only ignores how individuals express their own senses of their lives, but also ignores how different languages and culture conceive wellbeing in different ways" (2009; 7).

Even more so, these authors provide an example of how survey responses can be criticised by providing culturally shaped responses. By trying to answer why 'North Americans are happier than East Asians?' and citing the Diener and Suh (2000) edited book *Culture and subjective wellbeing,* Baumeister (1991) and Mathew and Izquierdo (2009) provide a plausible explanation based on the social and cultural differences of both groups and respondents. They consider that the differences between the answers that the

American people provided compared to the Japanese respondents lies perhaps with the fact that most Americans increase their responses as a consequence of social and cultural pressures to be perceived as successful. On the other hand, this contrasts with other societies such as the Japanese, where responses might be influenced by a higher value of individual modesty and where bragging of personal fortune is not considered polite. The fact that some people – as parts of a system of cultural meanings - are more willing to express openly their wellbeing or happiness in a survey links with the cultural differences dealt with in this research. I will argue throughout the thesis (and specially in Chapter IV) that the Raramuri people have internalized a discourse of wellbeing strongly based on having an ideal homogeneous society that discourages material accumulation and bragging about one's possessions and condition of living well. This discouragement is based on the fact that shocking disparities in small communities create envy and can lead, in turn, to grave violations of accepted norms. In the case of the Tarahumara region, this Raramuri trait contrasts sharply with the non-indigenous population who easily engage in individual bragging about material possessions as a way to prove their means to provide wealth and economic security.

With this in mind, in order to have a coherent approach to what wellbeing is for the Raramuri people, it is necessary to gain a view of their system of cultural references, values and understandings through extended fieldwork and a combination of methods. Additionally, there has been empirical evidence that tells a story of how recognition of cultural specificities can lead to positive outcomes. For instance, since the 1990s empirical studies have explored how cultural practices recovered and re-valued in nine Latin-American countries lead to economic and social change by drawing upon and reinforcing cultural traditions of low income groups (Kleymeyer 1994). However, these same cases increasingly show how results vary depending on context-specific determinants, demonstrating the immense complexity of this issue.

Cultural groups should not be considered as fixed in time and space; they interact and respond in differentiated ways. The concept of culture should recognise consequently, not only its dynamic and fluid nature but also the complex political process of contestation over the power to define key concepts, including that of 'culture' itself and of wellbeing (Wright 1998). Hence, by conceptualising cultural systems of meanings and values not as fixed essential repertoires but rather as the fruit of dynamic processes of adaptation, we are allowing for the reconfiguration and often contestation of meanings needed to frame discursive clashes. As suggested by Douglas and Ney (1998), culture can be understood as systems of norms, values and rules that provide the guide as to what is perceived as needed and wanted. This system shapes understandings and aspirations and gives meaning to social everyday life, including inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic interactions, founded in their relationships to particular natural and social environments.

These ideas relate to this thesis by recognizing that the Raramuri have dynamic systems of norms and values from which understandings of how to live well emerge as normative guidelines for everyday social interactions. This will be crucial in the empirical chapters, especially in Chapter IV, when we explore how the local understandings of wellbeing among the Raramuri relate to culturally embedded discourses and mechanisms to reinforce their identity and self-definition. These local understandings of wellbeing are social constructs influenced by contexts of ethno-political oppression by the non-indigenous population. In this sense, Doyal and Gough's (1991) Theory of Human Needs recognises that social relations are important means through which needs are satisfied. These social relations could be within individuals, states, markets or other identities, as they took form in particular spaces of diverse social contexts. This theory of human needs provides us with a common ground where needs can be defined as universal (e.g. health and autonomy) although accounting for local contexts by recognizing that they could be satisfied in diverse ways depending on the environments.

However useful these theories are to expose the tension between the universal and the local perspectives on human need by contextualizing local cultural, historical and political references, they do not exhaustively identify the need satisfiers in each particular context, nor do they help to prioritize competing needs (McGregor 2009). The contradictions between perceived needs and how they are addressed through public policy has been explored in diverse local contexts showing the disparity in perceptions rankings, for instance. In this sense, the capability approach formulated by Amartya Sen (1999) is considered to be a milestone in reframing the needs debate by arguing that the ultimate aim of development is not to meet human needs but rather to ensure that people achieve what people value, or 'doing', in order to translate them into the states of *being* the individual can achieve, or 'beings'. McGregor (2009: 503), acknowledging the contribution of this approach in terms of conceptualizing wellbeing, argues that Sen's approach is too much oriented to the individual in an effort to make evident the often contested perspectives of different individual projects of living well. An inclusion of social structures, institutions and interactions will make the capability approach more appropriate to understand the linkages between social and individual projects of living well.

Therefore, these issues make the point that culture and power is important to take into account, but more important to determine *how* it can play a role in development. For this reason, a move towards a more dynamic and applicable cultural conception is required. For instance, Corsin Jimenez (2007) considers how cultural and contextual accounts of the social construccion of wellbeing are shaped in diferent countires and regions by people's values and experiences. Meaningful contributions on how culture matters in development – especially in reduction of poverty and inequality - have been synthesized in *Culture and Public Action*, edited by Rao and Walton (2004).

Culture and Development

The discussion of the role of culture in development, explored by Rao and Walton, has been pre-figured by two extreme approaches: one, which has as representatives Harrison and Huntington (2000) that sees cultural process as inherently opposite to the idea of

economic growth. In the logic of this perspective, culture is considered as toxic to improving the economic and social conditions of a country or within a given society. Therefore removal or modification of ethnicity linked, for instance, to traditional forms of labour, is necessary in order to achieve development. This idea is shared by much of the official discourse of the government dealing with ethnic groups in Mexico.

The second approach to the relationship between culture and development is based on a critique of development as a cultural system (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1994). Under this logic international development bodies are perpetuators of western economic dominance mechanisms through a discourse that leads to the creation of the division of development and underdevelopment - first and third world. The culture of development then is the motive to impose an economic mainstream agenda at the international level. As both approaches take an extreme position, an alternative middle position is needed in order to constructively enact public policy.[14]

Another perspective considering the linkages between culture and development is to understand culture in its capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004). As the definition of culture is sometimes conceptualized as opposed to development, Appadurai argues that part of this is because culture in the anthropological tradition for instance relates to matters of heritage, social organization, customs, etc. which are dimensions not normally associated with change and dynamism, and development on the other hand is more orientated to the future. So therefore Appadurai seeks to "broaden" culture to a more instrumental notion of capacity to aspire in order to link future dimension of cultures to development.

A few key developments in the anthropological debate over culture are relevant here: a) the notion that cultural items are meaningful only in relation to one another; b) existence of the capacity to dissent within a culture; c) lastly, the recognition of porous cultural boundaries where osmosis-like processes between them is the norm. Hence, the capacity

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[14] See Grillo (1997) for discussion of the limits of development as discourse.

of a group to aspire, according to Appadurai, has many obstacles, for instance if a socially deprived group faces adverse terms of engagement with a better-off group then the aspirations of the first are compromised by an inhospitable environment. Rao and Walton (2004) conclude that in order to coherently address inequality one must have a cultural lens to understand what assets are valued in terms of wellbeing, who does the valuing, and why economic and social factors interact with culture in a certain way in order to unequally allocate goods, assets and opportunities. In this sense, they argue for a shift from equality of opportunity to equality of agency. Equality of agency understood as the capacity of a group to decide their future, to take control and mobilise their natural, human and financial resources and therefore of the type of wellbeing, is conceived as the objective of development. In other words, the capacity of a group to effectively have a voice and engage with meaningful inter-group negotiations in order to change terms of recognition, and enhance the environment for poor people to navigate their own way out of poverty.

Appadurai's concept of capacity to aspire links with an earlier concept developed in the heart of Latin-American anthropological tradition by Guillermo Bonfil: *etno-desarrollo* or ethno-development (Bonfil 1995). This concept, very much linked to the idea of development with identity, is based on the context of the indigenous population in Latin-American and it refers to a cultural group's capacity to determine their future, taking advantage of their historic legacy and exercising control over human, natural and economic resources as a way to bring about development defined in their own cultural terms. It is largely based on the degree of control a group has over their resources, stressing the cultural resources defined as those components able to collectively identify, deal and engage with needs, conflicts and aspirations necessary to strength autonomous decision capacity[15].

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[15] Bonfil (1995) mention four types of resources: a) material resources -referring to material culture; b) of organization –the capacity for effective social participation and adaptability to changes; c) Intellectuals – local knowledge and empirical experience; d) symbolic and emotions –subjective resources.

Incorporating a level of context specific issues into the role of culture debate, this perspective semantically distinguishes between promoting a proposal for indigenous development and promoting an indigenous proposal for development. The background presumption of this perspective is based on the analysis of power relations evident in dominant economic, political and cultural forces. A simple example that may help to illustrate this idea is that localities have greater control over traditional subsistence farming as they use and decide on most of their own resources (i.e. land labour), and sets of rituals, knowledge and practices linked to the activities, but when promotion of intensive commercial farming begins to increase the level of local control decreases in the same proportion. Hence, from a policy intervention perspective there is a need to identify those internal and external factors a group can deploy to gain or regain control over resources and decisions that affect directly their opportunities and agency and aspirations. Internally, a group may reinforce and re-appropriate cultural elements in order to reinforce ethnic identity and/or instrumentalise it. Externally, the national state and civil society organizations are essential in promoting a legal political and economic environment. Bonfil promotes therefore a rights-based approach as a base from which the state must improve the context where groups can engage in equal terms with the state in terms of rights and aspirations. Although the concept of ethno-development was proposed in the centre of academia it has been adopted by indigenous movements as a tool to engage with the state and civil society organizations to gain access to land and control educational projects, in order, to promote their own interests.

With these issues discussed above in mind, the linkages with the aims of this research are evident in several points. Firstly, that culture is an important element when addressing development. The importance of analysing cultural systems is that they help define meanings, values and understandings of everyday life, including local conceptions of wellbeing. This includes exploring livelihoods, political and social structures, everyday interactions; aspects of the Raramuri that we shall explore in subsequent chapters.

Secondly, wellbeing advocates for a complement to the traditional understandings of poverty and the way to measure it. By articulating this concept we are arguing for the inclusion of other criteria in which societies measure their living standards. The issue some anthropological perspectives are trying to address is that particular contexts influence the way each society defines their measures of living and articulates their wellbeing understandings.

Thirdly, we have seen that even having appropriate analytical tools anthropologists rarely engage directly on issues addressing wellbeing. In this sense, this research wishes to contribute to the recent ethnographic accounts of local perspectives on wellbeing by exploring the case of the Raramuri people in Northern Mexico. Related to this, we have seen the importance of considering an examination of the cultural system of values and beliefs following a detailed documentation of cultural practices considered crucial for their notion of wellbeing. In order to do this, using ethnographic empirical data to capture local understandings of wellbeing is an important asset. In addition, by uncovering local understandings of wellbeing, there must be a consideration of the importance of the cultural systems of meanings and values that are culturally embedded in each social group. However at the same time, Thin (2009) reminds us that while addressing cultural systems we must keep in mind their dynamic, changing and evaluative nature and we should remain far from extreme relativisms that prevent us from seeing the complexity of social interactions in any given context. As Appadurai suggests, we must have a broader concept of culture linked closely to a society's capacity to aspire to a future in their own terms and away from notions not usually associated with change and dynamism.

Lastly, the way to integrate multiple approaches of adopting a notion of wellbeing from indigenous and minority groups remains a challenge. On the one hand, there is a general recognition that there is a justified need to seek local understandings of wellbeing that in most cases show discrepancies from mainstream economic models. Matthew and Izquierdo's fundamental idea is to show that "[...] the American or Western conceptions of

wellbeing are insufficient to understand wellbeing in a range of societies across the globe, and are thus, insufficient as a basis for the cross cultural comparison of wellbeing" (2009:9). However, on the other hand, researching wellbeing in the global era cannot ignore the increasingly intense intercultural interactions among different meanings of wellbeing. In these encounters, meanings of wellbeing are being adopted and reconfigured in other cultural systems different from where they were originated, although conveyed by globalized commercial transactions and mainstream economic models (McGregor 2006).

Indigenous people in general have located themselves in opposition to mainstream approaches to wellbeing that orients it exclusively to economic growth without any tailor-made approach that accounts for the inequalities and power relations faced by marginalized people, and at the same time they have pointed out the systematic refusal of nation states to consider their local demands and specificities (PUMC-UNAM 2008). In sum, there is a need for a theoretical framework that integrates diverse conceptions of wellbeing, which could be reached through what has been called in South America, the *Buen Vivir* approach. This approach, as we shall see next, might be the bridge to a common ground of understanding between acknowledging intrinsic differences and similarities of needs and wellbeing conceptions between different localities, and the need to question development agendas.

2.2. Buen vivir approach

One of the streams of literature this research engaged with is the Latin American, largely Andean, indigenous 'live well'/*buen vivir* approach. *Buen vivir* is a term in the Spanish language that literally refers to living well and is used mainly in Latin America to describe alternative models to mainstream development models. The approach is built around two main pillars. On the one hand, it represents a critical reaction to neoliberal development mainstream policies by western multilaterals and global institutions. In this sense, *Buen*

vivir as an approach has served as an umbrella where diverse reflections and perspectives converge exploring the weaknesses of mainstream development models. For instance, conceptualizing development as a '*zombie category*' of modern western societies societies, in the sense that commonly its assumptions are subject to few reflection and critique by those who promote them (Gudynas 2011). On the other hand, it refers to alternative directions of living in society not only related to the economy but rather to comprehensive and holistic perspectives emerging from indigenous cultures in the region. The indigenous component is identifiable in the sense that the approach to living well is not limited to having a quality of life isolated from other parts of society, but considers the state where one can live well in relation to other human beings, not at their expense, nor that of the environment and cosmological or non-human entities.

Recently the discourse of Latin-American *buen vivir* has grown to be a pluralistic approach that shares critiques of growth-oriented development (Gudynas 2011). Specifically, by challenging, the ever-greater eagerness to produce, consume and accumulate that drives neoliberal policies, the *buen vivir* approach responds to the central contradictions that GDP growth oriented policies may evidence. For instance, one contradiction lies in the fact that even when a nation may experience economic growth this does not exclude possible caveats such as an increase in inequality.

In this sense, this approach challenges dominant discourses of development to decolonize economies and mindsets to broaden the understandings of non-western perspectives of development (Thomson 2011; Escobar 1995). It does this by proposing a different economic model based on the priority of seeking fairer terms of engagement in the society-society, and society-nature relationships. Thomson draws the parallels between this approach and the de-growth movement that has raised support as an alternative for mainstream development at a global scale.[16] However, differences remain between both approaches mainly in that the de-growth movement has centered its aim on the reduction

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[16] See Kallis (2011); and Bilancini & Simone (2011).

of consumption and means of life while for *buen vivir* this is not an objective but a consequence[17] (Gudynas 2011). Additionally, the degrowth movement has its critiques in the sense that it's an idea for developed economies to implement, but proves inadequate to promote and apply among poor and developing countries that are striving to enhance their economic sectors.

There are other dissenting voices within western traditions that argue for a new relationship between human society and nature. For instance, Acosta (2010) explores similarities between the 'deep ecology' perspective and *buen vivir* in the sense that "the earth does not belong to humans" as expressed by philosopher Arnes Naess.

Within the stream of literature on *buen vivir* there are diverse plural visions and concepts related to a living well discourse such as: *'Sumak Kawsay'* in Quechua language*, 'Suma Kamaña'* in Aymara*, 'Ñande Reko'* in Guarani and others[18] (Albó 2009; Gudynas 2011). These different terms are not interchangeable they have historic, environmental and cultural particularities and are often given left wing or Marxist political connotations. Many local understandings associated with the broad umbrella of *Buen vivir* have evidently existed over the years in a diversity of cultures including mestizo or peasant societies, however only recently have they made their way into academic discussions and political debates in think-tanks, NGOs, government and international organizations. In the case of the *Raramuri*, I argue that the term '*Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich'* (translated in English as 'living in the correct path') can be understood as one expressions of the broader *Buen vivir* framework as they show deep similarities and common ideas. This close epistemological, cultural and historical resemblance makes it possible to apply the *Buen vivir* approach to this study.

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[17] *(Interview with Francoise Houtart, ALAI, Latin America en Movement, 2010-03-05) in* http://alainet.org/active/36554&lang=en*)*

[18] Perhaps the well-known concept of Ubuntu, the South African philosophy that focuses on people's allegiances and relations with each other, is a non Latin-American example of a related concept to *Buen Vivir.* (Cornell and Muvanga 2012)

According to Gudynas (2011) some core ideas of the *Buen vivir* approach are that is a platform where critical views of development are shared; that it highlights the need to explore alternatives to development beyond conventional Eurocentric or Western knowledge (referred as aneed to decolonize perspectives); that it goes further than the human-nature dualism by incorporating other actors/factors such as the non-human and the spiritual, and; that it rejects the general principle that every aspect of life should be controlled either by societies or nature.

One of the main features of the *buen vivir* approach is its use to oppose the idea of living *better* at the expense of others or nature (Albro 2008). There are two crucial elements here; firstly, the subtle difference between the terms *better* and *well* conveys a much larger epistemological separation. Living well implies being content with a certain level of living in social and cosmological harmony; living better implies comparison levels with other people or in relation to time. This difference is now a central element of Boliva's constitutional framework (Fernandez 2009). Secondly, and equally important, is to enjoy a harmony that does not imply a negative externality over human societies, environment or cosmological entities. Therefore, *Buen Vivir* is sharply distinct from the idea of individual or household wellbeing or good life, and is only conceivable in a community setting. A strong recognition of community solidarity and cooperation as means to live well is a crucial dimension present in this approach. In other words, beyond economic values and the tendency to commoditize everyday interactions the approach expresses the need to recognize several different ways to give value to them such as cultural, historical, environmental, spiritual, etc (Gudynas: 2011). Cespedes (2010; 10) goes further by saying that "We must return to *being* because colonization has made us into *wanting to be* [...] We now want to return to our own path to our being".

Despite the variety of concepts -or perhaps due to it - the approach of *Buen Vivir* offers similar cosmologies and epistemologies related to ways of living and promoting livelihoods that depart from modern commoditization of everyday life and instead

identifies as main goals to live in harmony with nature and others, solidarity, fairness and dignity. Additionally, as this approach is constructed with different epistemologies most of them represent attempts to strengthen cultural identities (Gudyanas 2011). Therefore, *Buen Vivir* is a dynamic, plural and multi-dimensional approach that is still under construction (Gudynas 2011, and Acosta and Gudynas 2011); however, it holds some core principals and commonalities under its umbrella.

This stream of literature concerning *Buen Vivir* is linked to this research aim in the sense that it provides a theoretical framework that allows for the identification of the local understandings of wellbeing for the Raramuri. The Raramuri have their own ideas of affluence that are different from the non-indigenous people and from a mainstream development discourse that tend to be universalized by international entities such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

As will be discussed further in chapter IV, the complex understanding of *Raramuri* wellbeing is multilayered and far-reaching; however, I will focus mainly on two associated dimensions; the broad significance of land and subsistence farming, and; the strong sense of community based on solidarity and cooperation. These two recurrent dimensions were detected in interviews, surveys and observation in the fieldwork stage. It will be insufficient to limit these dimensions to just one concept or asset, for instance, land or social networks, as qualitative, quantitative and relational layers are culturally associated to their conception. Therefore, when discussing the case of the *Raramuri* in this thesis I am not pretending to consider a detailed analysis of the term '*Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich*' itself or its parallelism with *Sumak Kawsay* or *Suma Kamana*. This is because each term refers to specific and localized contexts and to a specific socio-cultural structure of meanings and references. However, these terms and the overall *buen vivir* approach does help to situate the *emic* side of the understandings of wellbeing as different and diverse expressions of themselves.

Therefore, after identifying important aspects and dimensions of wellbeing and discursive interpretations of the *Raramuri* 'living in the correct path', the thesis explores how these dimensions are subjected to asymmetrical power relations with the mestizo and wider society, and finally how they are kept alive through resisting mechanisms performed by the *Raramuri* people.

2.2.1 Critiques and limitations

This approach has been the target of critiques. Common controversies refer to a general tendency to promote the mystification of the indigenous giving the idea of idealizing indigenous societies and their relations with nature. However, is important to mention that the majority of it advocates is arguing for a return of a glorious indigenous past as a contestation for modernity and its negative effects, or even suggesting that past or actual indigenous societies are perfectly harmonious societies that hold the key to solving global problems. It does however, become apparent the need to envisage a new constructive critique to growth and consumption oriented policies, while at the same time consider the limitations of indigenous fundamentalism.

Gudynas (2011; 446) describes the following example when tackling this critique: "The *Buen Vivir* will not stop building bridges, and will not reject the use of Western physics and engineering to build them, but the ones that it will propose may well have different sizes and materials, will be placed in other locations, and certainly will serve local and regional needs and not the needs of global markets".

Another apparent criticism and contradiction of the term refers to the political context of leftwing political movements in South America, including Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia where the framework of *Buen Vivir* has been recognized at a constitutional level. Authors such as Fatheuer (2011) have analyzed the political environment of these countries and their relationship with the *Buen Vivir* perspective as apparent contradictions with socialist principles such as its faith in modernity and the materialist base. On a practical note, Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela under left wing governments have implemented economic

models that are based on extraction of natural resources and this in turn has created critiques among the indigenous sectors in relation to the benefits from the economic models remaining in the same hands. These countries have developed an economic model based on nationalization of the extractive industry taking advantage of the rich natural resources they own in order to support and implement internal progressive social policies such as social protection programs. However, the source of wealth being the extraction and exploitation of natural resources, and consequent infrastructure projects remain at the heart of the economic model. These challenges are recognized in what Gudynas (2011) calls transitions to *Buen Vivir*.

Having Ecuador, Bolivia and to some extent Venezuela recognize the right of *Buen Vivir* in their national Constitutions, shows that they "do not gear the actions of the state primarily toward growth and stability as in the EU, but toward satisfying the basic needs of life, which have been formulated as rights" (Fartheuer: 2011; 28). Distinguishing *Buen Vivir* as a right at a Constitutional level does not mean that all that it represents can be enacted by decree; however the same holds true with "having a government of the people by the people". Nonetheless, the political developments in the Andean countries advocate a need for alternatives to global markets oriented to control of aspects of human societies and nature. Their contribution rests in the fact that they have placed the approach of *Buen Vivir* and some critical views of neoliberalism in the public and political arena.

One of the discussed limitations is perhaps the difficulty or impossibility of measuring the degree, access level, or intensity of *Buen Vivir*. This is especially important to analyze in terms of implementation of public policy, however this does not mean that policy recommendations cannot be offered. Gudynas (2011; 446) makes the point that *Buen Vivir* presents proposal and strategies "These include reforms in legal forms, introduction of environmental accounting, tax reforms, dematerialization of economies and alternative regional integration within South America. These proposals show that many different and

even complex instruments can be handled under the Buen Vivir framework". Therefore, it can be argued that *Buen Vivir* can be conceptualized as a process that would lead to a way of living promoted by a balance of social, natural, spiritual, cultural and political integration and reinforce cultural identity.

There are several arguments that justify the *Buen Vivir* approach. One such argument is the critique drawing on the limited capacity of single mainstream economic indicators such as GDP, income or consumption to capture the multidimensionality of poverty or wellbeing. One main assumption of this type of economic analysis based on indicators such as income or consumption is that people increase their wellbeing in relation to their capacity to consume/gain assets and services. However useful and needed these indicators are to detect, for instance, differences in asset accessibility or consumption patterns among social sectors or groups, a comprehensive combination of objective and subjective measures of wellbeing can take into account social, cultural and political information that are usually left out from explanations of poverty dynamics[19]. In particular, income and consumption data usually does not take into account non-market activities and the impact of illicit economic activities specifically narcotic related; two factors that shape heavily the ethnic relations in Tarahumara region.

The clash of different visions of living well is visible in an empirical account gathered on fieldwork among Raramuri informants in the Tarahumara region. Quality of building materials including the type of flooring are common national indicators to assess poverty used by the official national council in charge of poverty measures (CONEVAL)[20]. It is considered that concrete flooring is a necessary element of sanitary infrastructure that prevents puddles of stagnant water and provides a surface easier to clean, thereby reducing the possibilities of disease. However, although this criterion holds true, other understandings exist that are important for people and could represent contradictory

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[19] An example of this is the OECD Better Life Iniciative
http://www.oecd.org/statistics/betterlifeinitiativemeasuringwell-beingandprogress.htm
[20]http://www.coneval.gob.mx/cmsconeval/rw/pages/medicion/Avances_dimensiones_de_medicion_pobreza/calidad_y_espacios_en_la_vivienda.es.do

meanings. For instance among the Raramuri cement especially in the floor is considered to contribute to making the house colder, increasing the possibilities of getting a common cold or flu (per comm. J. Miller 2010) [21] In sum, a critical consideration of other alternative perspectives without their complete rejection can be a characteristic of the *Buen Vivir* approach.

With this in mind, I find the *Buen Vivir* approach particularly applicable to understand the Raramuri wellbeing understandings as it offers a holistic view that says that the Raramuri have their own local and contextualised ideas of living well. Additionally, this approach opens up questions around what criteria are used to assess crucial concepts such as development and wellbeing. It invites us to ask who makes such crucial conceptions on which we measure and compare a society's success and standard of living. Clearly, we are dealing here with discourses of wellbeing and their clash. Although in terms of discourse I will argue that 'the Raramuri correct path of living' shows important differences from a western discourse of development, I will also argue how the Raramuri people's idea of wellbeing is situated in tension with a need to engage with official structures and markets, and hence in some contexts Raramuri orient their discourse to satisfy their demands for equal opportunities and fairness as the same as the mestizo population living in the Tarahumara area. For the moment, it is sufficient to state that the *Buen Vivir* approach serves as a tool that contributes to highlighting localized contexts, understandings of social interactions and broader local and global forces faced by indigenous groups by converging micro-macro interactions.

Now I will present the literature that links to this research in terms of exploring the disparities observed by the Raramuri and the non indigenous population in the Tarahumara region.

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[21] As seen in the previous chapter, all households of Aboreachi and the surroundings had by the end of 2009, installed cement flooring and *Raramuri* accepted these actions as they often welcome any material assets and benefits they can get from the State but then used them in their own local terms.

2.3 Persistent inequality studies

The second body of literature this study engages with concerns the study of disparities among social groups; in particular, the durability of unequal living conditions and its intricate links with power structures in Latin-America.

There is a growing body of literature that explores the durability and persistence of inequalities in Latin America.[22] Studies following this path seek to postulate a research paradigm focussed on the understanding of structural relations and their links with cultural, historical and global dimensions of inequality. This body of literature has the commonality of evidencing a paradigm shift in explaining and interpreting sharp levels of socioeconomic inequality that characterize the Latin American region. Common explanations for the sharp inequality in the region focus on inefficient social policies, pervasive effects of late industrialization and failed market integration.

However, the economic growth and global market integration experienced by some countries, such as Brazil and Mexico have increased inequality over long periods of time (Hoffman and Centeno 2003). Other authors such as Lusting, Lopez-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez (2012) provide evidence of how between 2000 and 2009, the Gini Co-efficient declined in 13 of 17 Latin American countries were data was available. Their work explored how countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Peru were able to reduce their income inequality while it has increased in other parts of the world. They attributed this trend mainly to two factors: (i) a fall in the returns to education, and (ii) effective and progressive government policies. These two complementary factors have also been identified by Cornia (2012), as offering part of the explanation of the degree of inequality decline from 1990 to 2010, while perhaps giving a stronger emphasis to the fiscal, tax, social expenditure and labour policies implemented by left to centre governments in the region.

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[22] See Gootenberg (2005) and Lusting, Lopez-Calva, and Ortiz-Juarez (2012) for relevant literature review and a discussion on diverse approaches.

In the case of Mexico, Lusting, Lopez-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez (2012) emphasise the increase in public spending in the 1990´s, especially since the implementation of the Oportunidades programme focuses on investing in education (especially primary education), health and nutrition. Although the evidence they provide is quite appealing and regenerates hope in the capacity of States to deliver effective pro-poor policies in Latin America, the fact that they do not disaggregate their data to account for ethnic differences means that we cannot make any strong claims as to whether indigenous people have benefitted from the operation of these factors in the same way as non-indigenous people. I argue, however, that even if a fall in the return to education and effective social spending do represent benefits to the poor, most indigenous people still face particular structural challenges that make it difficult for them to benefit from a possible reduction of inequality. For instance, in the case of the Tarahumara region in Mexico, access to benefits from Oportunidades and public services remains difficult for important segments of the indigenous people since the selection criteria of the programme exclude those localities that lack basic public services, and these are, arguably, the areas which experience most poverty (Sariego 2008b; Ulrichs and Roelen 2012). Considering that the Tarahumara is a remote mountain region – as are many other indigenous regions - without easy access to infrastructure and delivery of services, the state's capacity to reach marginal people remains a challenge. I will touch on this argument further in the section where I introduce the fieldwork site and the localities studied.

In addition, the quality of education, health services and nutrition is not commonly analysed in rural and indigenous areas as it is an indicator of attainment and access to services relating to those three aspects - as Lusting and others recognize themselves.

Mexico as a middle income country whose wellbeing indicators have increased during the past few years, yet regional pockets of poverty have remained unchanged, or have even

worsened. This holds true even more if indigenous populations are considered (De la Torre 2010; UNDP CDI 2006; Hall and Patrinos 2006).

By recognizing that inequalities are not only a matter of economic underdevelopment, poverty or regressive policies, this paradigm shift stresses the need to interrogate and interpret in a new light historical, cultural, global and structural factors that have produced, tolerated, and contested resilient inequalities over time (Gootenberg 2005). Additionally, the paradigm advocates a focus on structural factors as determinant causes of poverty instead of individual traits and deficiencies.

A number of recent approaches on inequality comparing social groups address the issue of persistence. Among them, Stewart's studies on *horizontal inequalities* (HI) as a perspective to analyse inequality among culturally differentiated groups (Stewart 2002; Stewart and Langer 2007) is especially relevant. Horizontal inequalities focus on cultural groups that encompass common cultural identities based on sharing history, language, behaviour and values. This concept is contrasted in comparison to 'vertical inequality' that tends to view individuals or households as part of a vertical stratification system.

Although this framework has been used largely to explore how persistent horizontal inequalities can aggravate potential violent conflict and civil unrest in a given society, the present study does not address this link directly. It does, however, help to understand how persistent, unequal conditions may be perpetuated if a group cannot access key social services and socio-political rights (Justino and Archarya, 2003). It also adds to an increasing tendency that advocates for multidimensionality in the measurement of inequality. In addition, an increasing number of studies are focussing on how race and ethnicity correlate with inequality in most developing and developed countries (Justino and Litchfield, 2002).

A number of studies using a horizontal inequality approach have used qualitative and quantitative measures to show how unequal returns from education, health, and income

can be perpetuated, affecting a specific ethnicity, gender or religion (Borjas 1995; Stewart and Langer 2007; Barron 2008; Canepa 2008). By analysing different components, such as educational levels, access to labour markets, and political participation, among other factors, this approach also recognizes the multidimensionality of inequality in terms of its evolution and persistence.

Related to this, Justino (2009) presents a framework for thinking about determinants of persistent inequality in Latin America, arguing that inadequate access to income, socio-political institutions, markets, health care and education are shaped by regressive trade policies, dysfunctional and regressive distribution policies, forms of discrimination, and corrupt political systems. This perspective, shared by diverse authors, takes into consideration the need to look at political frameworks, social arrangements, economics of historical processes of unequal initial opportunities between individuals and groups and their endurance by dominant economic models and market forces.

Specifically, the work of Charles Tilly (1998) focuses on the durability of inequality considering social categories (race, gender, etc.). He describes how opposite categorical pairs are institutionalised in terms of various inequality-producing mechanisms. One of them is particularly suitable for further analysis; 'opportunity hoarding.' This concept describes how a particular group can inadvertently seize and dominate opportunities in order to gain 'access to a resource that is valuable, renewable and subject to monopoly (...) and enhanced by the network's modus operandi.' (Tilly, 1998:10). If this clinching of opportunities and access to public resources is systematic it can lead to elites exercising control and influence over political and economic issues. Tilly's work has been very influential on the qualitative and historical studies of inequalities. For instance, Arteaga and Brachet-Marquez (2011), apply a framework based on Tilly's approach to structural inequality to their study of land conflicts in Morelos, Mexico. In their historical study, Arteaga and Brachet-Marquez analyse different processes of domination and contestation over land issues that frame structural inequality affecting rural populations.

In my research, some empirical examples from the Tarahumara region will be explored under this scope. Namely, how mestizo groups are able to hoard opportunities to benefit from governmental investments oriented to Raramuri people, and how the *ejido* as a institutional scheme has imposed a series of political structures and figures that clash with the socio-political organization of the Raramuri, by creating spaces of power hoarding by dominant mestizo people. This also holds true for the political and economic elites based in urban and semi urban areas of the Tarahumara.

Traditional sociological explanations of persisting categorical inequalities, such as race, gender and ethnicity, have focused attention on the role of the market, especially when considering inequalities in the labour market.[23] In line with this, labour market theory, as well as social mobility studies focusing on the role of ethnicity, has argued for two possible explanations: the cultural and the structural perspective.

The cultural perspective presents an explanatory model where the importance of ethnicity rests on the cultural traits, qualities and behavioural patterns of ethnic groups involved in socioeconomic attainment and in social mobility in the longer run. The second approach reviews how structural conditions are linked to social mobility prospects for ethnic minorities, especially how a stratified structure prevents some social groups from accessing certain locations where crucial resources are available (Smith 2000; Zhou 2005).

Both perspectives remain valid in terms of understanding power relations among ethnic groups. This research, however, is inclined towards the cultural perspective to a greater degree, as it focuses particularly on how behavioural patterns of social interactions relate with different livelihoods and ways of living that imply on the one hand, vulnerabilities and risks, and on the other unique forms of facing power asymmetries. However, it acknowledges the importance of structural factors associated with hindering livelihoods

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[23] For comprehensive revision of theories of persistent inequality see 'Theories of Persistent inequality and intergenerational Mobility. Thomas Piketty. Chapter 6, Handbook of income distribution, edited by. A. Atkinson and F. Bourguignon'. Chapter 6, Handbook of Income Distribution, (1998) Atkinson and F. Bourguignon (Eds).

and ways of living - in this particular case, how the wider Mexican society exerts political and economic influence over the *Raramuri* group.

Some authors, such as Zhou, argue for a combination of the two perspectives as "ethnicity cannot be simply viewed as either a structural or cultural measure, rather it encompasses values and behavioural patterns that are constantly interacting with both internal and external structural exigencies" (Zhou 2005: 131-132).

In line with this, recent research in economics has developed new theories to explain persistent poverty. This has been approached, for instance, by departing sharply from the achievement model of income determination and focusing on exploring the mechanisms that could cause poverty to persist in the so called 'poverty traps' (Bowles, Durlauf, & Hoff, 2006). These theories provide frameworks to explain how some subgroups within well-off economies - such as the Raramuri in Mexico - remain in persistent poverty. There are three types of explanations or arguments: the critical threshold of human capital investment or wealth that allows benefiting before competition becomes an impediment; the institutional arrangements of a society are also important as elites might be represented in the distribution of benefits; and the neighbourhood effects, or membership, theory that explores the influence group memberships have on individual decisions on, say, human capital investments.

Within this group of arguments, I want to focus specifically on the second and third - on institutional arrangements and on group memberships - as they relate to my empirical findings in the Tarahumara region. Institutional arrangements within a society can produce negative effects on the capacity to obtain wellbeing. The Sierra Tarahumara, as other rural regions in Mexico, has distinctive political and economic elite that maintain their positions in the region through the control of crucial institutions. Among such institutions is the *ejido* that, as a land management scheme, influences livelihoods linked to exploitation of timber resources and subsistence and commercial agriculture.

Additionally, the membership theory of inequality focuses on the social-level characteristics of factors that lead to the persistence of inequality, rather than factors attributable to the individual level such as human capital investments and others (Durlauf 1999; 2001; 2006). Drawing on the fact that family is one institutional dimension tied to poverty and inequality formation, the basic idea of this theory is that individuals tend to compare their social achievements and the potentiality of their abilities to the reference group from which they come. Therefore, people in low-wage jobs are less motivated to invest in their human capital and to acquire high productive abilities, since they have less to prove to the outside world and they can easily maintain their initial social position. Additionally, members of high wage jobs are more motivated to maintain their initial position. The implicit assumption in this theory is that individuals are motivated by their social prestige and social status.

Thus, the focus lies on analysing the influence social membership, such as ethnic and racial ascription, has on the unequal allocation of resources and opportunities between groups. Particular attention is given to social factors and structural processes that play a fundamental role in the perpetuation of inequality by shaping people's perceptions, aspirations, and opportunities. In this sense, Durlauf describes the importance of the membership theory of inequality "since the composition and behaviours of the groups of which an individual is a member plays such an important role in socioeconomic outcomes" (2006:142).

Paramount for the membership theory of inequality is the recognition that group effects not only rely on internal group generation but also on external dimensions such as behaviours, values and aspirations that are shaped by those members outside the group. Therefore not only internal group dynamics are important but also attitudes from other groups and wider society. In a way these attitudes affect perceptions of self-esteem and, if produced under conditions of unbalanced power relations, can potentially lead to stigmatization. Closely related to the reference group theory is the rational choice theory

that tries to explain how in the presence of discrimination, investments in human capital are discouraged (Durlauf 2006).

By now I have presented some theoretical approaches to inequalities that are useful for this dissertation as they implicitly consider the important role power relations at the structural level can have on building asymmetries between ethnically differentiated groups. In chapter V, we shall analyse how several inter-ethnic factors such as land conflicts, institutional arrangements and ethnically differentiated vulnerability are identified by the Raramuri as crucial constraints for walking the correct path of wellbeing as understood in their own terms. Therefore, these theories will be used to capture how fundamentally important are inter-ethnic power relations for understanding land conflicts affecting the indigenous people, and how the *ejido* system has impacted the traditional socio-political structure of the Raramuri by imposing new schemes of land and resource management and by promoting the establishment of new figures of power that in turn weaken the valued internal group identity. The *ejido* then becomes a field of contestation and force as Nuijten (1998), explored in the third pillar of the theoretical framework presented by the thesis, shows. Therefore the implications of the ejido system as part of the dysfunctional institutions operating in the Tarahumara; land conflicts that affect livelihoods of subsistence agriculture; and ethnically based vulnerability will be explored in the empirical chapters in terms of constraining local understandings of wellbeing that in turn perpetuate power asymmetries in the Tarahumara region.

However, a crucial deficiency that these theories have in relation to the aims of this research is that they usually address persistent inequality using standard criteria in terms of well established indicators to capture group disadvantages. In other words, they assume *etic* understandings of wellbeing as opposed to *emic* understandings which is one aim of this research. This discrepancy is important because one contribution of this research is precisely uncovering local understandings of wellbeing identified by the Raramuri and using them as a reference to measure the wellbeing constraints. This

contribution is based on the fact that most inequality studies neglect to consider local indigenous understandings of wellbeing and local understandings of its constraints, and how such understandings may be obscured by inter-ethnic power relations at the local level. However, the *emic* constraints or hindering factors that I explore in chapter V, are not that different from other constraints and demands identified by other qualitative studies (Hewitt 1984, Arteaga and Brachet-Marquez 2011, Lund and Lee Peluso 2011). So, although they have local specificities they represent longstanding demands of rural and indigenous populations in Mexico and elsewhere. This links with the fact that also most of the theoretical approaches presented here do emphasize comparison between groups (i.e. horizontal inequality studies), and although the study presented here does have some comparative elements with the non-indigenous people, it is mostly focused on the Raramuri people and how they are constrained and hindered by power asymmetries.

As this research focuses on the Raramuri indigenous people, an ethnic perspective on inequality allows us to define it in terms of power differentials that lead to unequal access to crucial resources, contested livelihood opportunities, policy decisions and mobilization of relevant resources between the groups. The sociological framework proposed by Tilly (1998), also based on power relations, will provide concepts such as opportunity hoarding to illustrate some fundamental inter-ethnic relations in the Tarahumara region.

Therefore, although inequality has been addressed in economics and sociology, I argue that power relations must be at the centre of the discussion of the main research question in terms of how inter-ethnic power relations can hinder what is considered to be wellbeing for the Raramuri. The way Raramuri people resist and react to oppression will be the last pillar of the research. In order to explore ways of resisting, the next set of theories is proposed complementing those presented in this section.

2.4 Resistance and power relations

A third body of literature this thesis engages with concerns forms of resistance to power relations and ethno-political oppression. A central argument this research makes with regard to the ways inequality is resisted by ethnic groups is based on the ideas of various authors (Peterson; 1978a, 1978b; Gluckman 1958; Grinker 1994; Okamura 2008). These authors place a central focus on ethnicity as the main underlying factor in unequal relations between differentiated ethnic groups. For instance, Gluckman states that by stressing dominant distinctions between them, oppressive forces are made visible to evidence the conditions of unbalanced power relations.

This thesis argues that in the Tarahumara region, ethnicity is the primary structural principle of inter-ethnic relations. Following Okamura (2008) in his study on persistent inequality in Hawai'i, it argues that social interactions and group membership are based on cultural differences and not phenotypic differences of individuals (such as skin colour or other physical features). This is in part because in the Tarahumara region the population's phenotypic attributes overlap and diffuse to a greater degree whilst cultural attributes are dominant in the construction of asserted and assigned group identities.

Okamura (2008), adapting Howard Winant's The New Politics of Race (2004), establishes that ethnic representations and social structure are linked because ethnicity serves both as cultural representation and structural principle that frames inequality. In other words, the classification by ethnic ascription of social groups responds to cultural manifestations and power differentiations. In this sense, ethnicity also structures inequality by allocating resources, opportunities and benefits unequally among groups.

The relationship of culture and power imbalances is further emphasised in the work of Royce. Royce (2009), in identifying the determinants of persistent poverty in the United States, argues that economic, political, cultural and social "systems" consist of a hierarchical structure of power that enables some groups' unequal access toopportunities, capacities and influences over decision making authorities. Focusing on the need to shift

the attention from understanding inequality as a consequence of individual self-defeating values and behaviours towards a more comprehensive structural perspective on inequality, Royce stresses the need to understand poverty and inequality as issues of power imbalances promoted by the current global political and economic institutions.

However, the approach to resistance explored in this study is heavily based on James Scott's ideas of everyday forms of resistance and the morality of economic systems described in his works. Three main books of his authorship are relevant to this study. In *The moral economy of the peasant: Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia* (1976), he explores how traditional forms of solidarity in peasant societies in Malaysia (including peasant preference for patron-client relations in which wealthier peasants protect weaker ones) break down due to the introduction of market forces. In these scenarios, rebellion and resistance forms are common[24].

In *Weapons of the weak* (1985) he further develops relations among oppressed and oppressors. Later in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: The Hidden Transcript of Subordinate Groups* (1990) he argued that all subordinate groups resist in ways similar to peasants. In order to understand structures of dominance an observer must identify the hidden transcripts shown in discourses and behaviours of the oppressed. As the Buen Vivir approach allows us to understand what a good life is from a *Raramuri* perspective, Scott's approach invites us to understand and discuss ways indigenous people implement resistance. In the cases Scott studies, as in the case of the Tarahumara region, oppressed people resist even if they have a separate system of values and understandings because they are living in a context of oppression within nation states. Indigenous people as other subaltern groups could be analyzed as being in a position where they have to decide how they are going to be seen: as autochthonous cultures with specific cultural and collective rights as a group, and sometimes as differentiated social groups within nation states engaged with a framework of citizenship. In this sense, oppressed groups who live in the

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[24] This argument has been challenged by Popkin in his book *The Rational Peasant* (1979), mentioning the preference of peasant societies for free markets.

margins of the influence of the state need to take strategic decisions in order to take advantage of that position, performing their ethnicity strategically to resist oppression and/or seek political allies. It is this idea, explored in the more recent work of Scott (2009), which resonates with the case of how the Raramuri people of our case study have decided to follow a dominant path of exercising their ethnicity to enhance cultural institutions and traditions within their ethnic boundaries rather than having influence on the surrounding environment suffused with power asymmetries.

Scott's ideas have inspired others to analyse the Raramuri forms of facing oppression. Jerome Levi (2003) is one of the most well known anthropologists who has systematically analyzed cultural change in the Tarahumara region (and others) produced by global economic forces such as extraction industries.

In this light, Levi (1999), seeks an ethnographic application of Scott's (1985) notion of discerning everyday resistance through what he calls "hidden transcripts" in the Raramuri-mestizo relations and suggests that resistance can take form of linguistic and behavioural codes. Levi understands resistance in terms of ethnic identity resilience, as it contextualizes the case of the Tarahumara region in relation to major cultural changes due to increased globalization, neoliberal policies and the influence of commoditization of economies.

For instance, silence and non participation in certain social spaces and practices can be understood as a discoursive strategy of cultural resistance, reproduction and self-reproduction to face injustices (Levi 2003).

Specifically, Levi (1999) identifies that a form of everyday resistance among the Raramuri is evasion and silence. Silence is seen in the Raramuri culture as the ability to show respect, calmness and control over situations. When describing non-verbal forms of communication Levi states: "These instances represent Raramuri use of silence and

minimal interaction as conventions for the management of deference, emotion, conflict, or uncertainty" (2003:266). These insights are helpful in the present study to understand culturally embedded mechanisms concerning social relations and reaction towards them. Silence as cultural resistance in indigenous populations is not a new topic in anthropological research, although it is often unseen (Weiner 1997, 1999). Some literature conceives silence as a sign of powerlessness and passivity, although it can also be considered as being an active form of defence and reaction to oppression (Gal 1991; Bauman 1983; Herzfeld 1991). As well as silence and evasion other subtle mechanisms of resistance are performed by the Raramuri. For instance, evasion may be experienced, if a group of mestizo traders known to be unfair in their treatment (or politicians in election times) goes to a Raramuri locality and people begin to retreat slowly to their homes and may not respond or pretend not to speak Spanish, or just play the fool. Other types of resistance including taking a long time to do a job for abusive mestizos, for example, harvest or work in a field. I will present cases of this and other forms of Raramuri resistance throughout the study.

Levi (1992:300) also explored material culture suggesting that is part of "an oppositional discourse expressing local identity and tactical resistance to the homogenizing consequences of commoditization". Supported by intensive fieldwork, he argues that certain specific types of bows and blankets used by the conservative Raramuri sub-group of *gentiles*[25] (also known as the unbaptized ones) are not inert relics from the past, but active strategies that allow them to use silence as a means to differentiate themselves, reinforcing their ethnic identity. Empirical data collected by Levi and his analysis will be used to complement my own findings as many similarities can be drawn between them when describing forms of everyday resistance employed by the Raramuri. Findings will differ from Levi's especially on the fact that latter ones broaden the scope of analysis by

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[25] This small sub-group often called the "*unbaptized*" as opposed to the "*baptized"* Catholic influenced *Raramuri*, distance themselves physically and socially from the *mestizo* influence including from the "baptised" remaining indigenous population. This "*unbaptized*" population which, according to Levi (1998) represents 5% of the total *Raramuri* group population (no official data is available), hold religious beliefs, social organization and cultural traits that show little influence from the Roman Catholic Church and wider society since colonial times.

covering material and immaterial forms of resistance, while in this research I focus on the interactions at the individual level. In this sense, the thesis offers original empirical evidence that contributes to the body of literature concerning resistance.

I have to say that I found inspiration also from other similar studies including, June Nash's (1979) study of the tin miners in Bolivia. Drawing from the sociological and anthropological perspectives, Nash considers several dimensions for the study of livelihoods and conditions of exploitation among the miners; family and intra-household relations; community and social relations; social relations with the mining company; and, supernatural order – linking cultural and traditional beliefs and mining activity for the company. The Nash study can be located in this trend as her main motivation is to understand the contents of the miners' culture and how it is linked to structural conditions of exploitation. In the first space of relation, Nash identifies three basic characteristics of mining families which are of importance; dependency, competition and cooperation: "Economic limitations in the mining family intensify the interplay along these axes of dependency and competition, but the hard reality of poverty gives priority to cooperation" (Nash 1970; 57).

In this sense, we can link Nash's work with Jerome Levi's (1999) study on the Tarahumara region. In Levi's study concerning perceptions of inter-ethnic power relations, Levi reaches a quite different, even opposite, statement: poverty and deprived conditions give way to competition of resources rather than cooperation among families. Considering this discussion of which element has more weight under poverty and unequal conditions, competition or cooperation could be essential to understand how a household or society copes, though, at the same time it could be a false dilemma. I believe that on some level both strategies could be practiced at the same time by the same agents as cooperation among others may imply competition with others; however the important question is with whom do we cooperate and compete? If one cooperates/competes with agents of the same ethnic background then we might have a typical example of ethnically bound

opportunity hoarding as understood by Tilly, but are there any special circumstances where families or individuals tend to cooperate rather than compete? Even on the intra-household level there is competition among individuals as many studies of nutritional inequality suggest (Kanbur, Haddad, Bouis; 1995).

Passin (1942 a, 1942 b), and others like Bennett and Zingg (1935), Lumholtz (1902), Kennedy (1963) Burgess (1981) are just a few of the classical ethnographers that note social, demographic and physiological isolation of the Tarahumara people. An example of an observation by Bennett and Zingg was how people hide themselves from their neighbours when they capture a rabbit or slaughter a pig in order to "not share", also they describe the spatial isolation pattern as a result of individualism. However, other interpretations of the spatial pattern could be seen as an adaptation strategy on the accidental topography; also, the choice to "hide" certain attractive goods or products may be so as to not generate resentment and envy among their neighbours, as seen in many anthropological studies. This is consistent with other empirical observations of groups of women; for example, that tend not to participate in collective activities if there's a chance of creating conflict among people (Loera 2001).

Alongside this perspective of resistance and mechanisms, a special interest will be set in this study on the inter-ethnic spaces when power relations, resistance and agency are produced. Authors such as Nuijten (1998) analyse the *ejido* as spaces where power relations lie at their centre, composed of what she calls force fields where social-interethnic interactions are held. Interested in forms of structured organizing practices in an *ejido* in Mexico, Nuijten (1998; 396) defines a force field as 'a field of power and struggle between different social actors around resources and where certain forms of dominance, contention, and resistance may develop, as well as certain regularities and forms of ordering'.

Nuijten does not analyse force fields with inter-ethnic eyes; however, I argue that the Tarahumara region provides a concrete example of how this concept can help describe accurately the complex web of living well and hindering factors characterised by processes of resilience and agency; imposition and adaptation between actors and groups. This argument is primarily based on the importance the *ejido* system has as a space of mestizo dominance in subsistence farming activities performed by the Raramuri and in decisions over natural resource management. In this way, a perspective that recognizes the complex relations produced in social spaces allows the *ejido* to be analysed as a space where unequal interethnic interactions and power imbalances are created and reproduced, while at the same time with the same scope the *ejido* can also be understood as a space where resistance and contestation result from its internal and structural organization (Nuijten, 1998). In Chapter VI, inspired by the work of Gaventa (2006) and Cornwall and Schattan P. Coelho (2006) on spaces of citizen participation, I proposed to look at the *ejido* as a "contested" political space where intra-ethnic participation over the control of land decisions can result in tension and resistance. At the same time I explore the constructions of "autonomous" spaces among both the Raramuri and the mestizo that provide spaces were decisions and participation remain within their ethnic boundaries. I argue that the articulation of "contested" and "autonomous´´ spaces provide insights into understanding the perpetuation of power asymmetrical relations among mestizo and Raramuri people.

When considering forms of resistance, the thesis will look at festive socio-religious practices and gatherings where *Raramuri* people consolidate their ethnic identities in contrast with the mestizo society. According to authors such as De Velazco (2006) and Pintado (2004) the festivities have different socio-religious meanings for the *Raramuri*. For instance, how the act of dancing symbolically represents the physical act of pushing evil down beneath the ground in order to stay outside the world *Raramuri* actually live. It is then the duty of all *Raramuri* to dance, as by dancing together evil can be defeated. The confrontation of *evil* and *good* is explored with its interethnic implications and in terms of

resistance. This will be explored in the thesis by describing the ethno political implications of the celebration of the *Noririwachi* or Easter.

The theories, approaches and perspectives presented in the three pillars of literature will then be used to address the corresponding phases of this research. Firstly, considerations on culture, power, wellbeing and the *Buen Vivir* approach will be used to frame the answer of how the Raramuri people have their own shared and culturally embedded ideas of affluence that are different from those of the mestizo population living in the area which are more in tune with a discourse of mainstream economic development models. Secondly, the body of literature that deals with persistent inequality offers an understanding of how power relations exist in the core of answering how *emic* wellbeing understandings of the Raramuri are constrained by structural factors from the surrounding environment; for instance, institutional arrangements and land conflicts that ultimately create ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities and perpetuate power asymmetries. Thirdly, approaches to resistance tell us that the Raramuri people react in symbolic ways, which as Scott suggests are in hidden ways, through for instance, the performance of rituals and festivities that express their ethnic position to oppressive inter-ethnic relations. The mechanisms of resistance explored in this research will evidence the clashing and contestation of diverse ways of wellbeing understandings. However there is an emphasis of two clearly distinct discourses: one discourse based on the idea that people should have a livelihood oriented to maximization of resources, having secure income sources and a tendency to material accumulation in order to live better; and the other discourse based on the idea that people by securing their traditional livelihoods and ways of living will promote cultural institutions and practices that, among other things, endorse communitarian cooperation over individual material accumulation in order to live well.

These three theoretical pillars provide a novel framework to explore the formation and perpetuation of asymmetrical social, economic and political relations at the local level in

the Tarahumara region. With this in mind, the study will argue that in order to understand the formation of asymmetries between the Raramuri and the mestizo, power relations must be taken into account from the moment of defining concepts such as wellbeing. We should ask who defines such crucial conceptions on which we measure and compare a society's success and standard of living. Secondly, this framework will allow us to understand that by Raramuri terms, wellbeing is constrained by a series of structural factors conveyed by economic models and livelihoods promoted from the nation state and global markets that are based on a specific idea of what development should be. The tendency to universalize development and wellbeing speaks of the clash of discourses that at the local level have diverse implications. For instance, we should see how the Raramuri people, by stressing ethnic membership and differentiation from other groups, appeal to culturally deep-seated homogenising and idealised elements of ethnicity. Consequently, by preferring to consolidate their cultural identity and the internal cohesion of the group over the choice to politically influence the oppressive environment I will make the case that the Raramuri people are complicit in their own ethno political oppression under the terms of the wider society.

CHAPTER III. THE RARAMURI PEOPLE AND THE MESTIZOS: INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN AN UNEQUAL ENVIRONMENT

This chapter will briefly describe some of the main social, cultural and historical features of the Tarahumara mountain range. I will firstly present a geographical overview and ethnographical introduction to the region's population, namely the *Raramuri* indigenous people and the *mestizo* non-indigenous group. I will argue that for many centuries this interethnic space has been highly charged with uneven power relations, effectively putting the Raramuri people into a disadvantaged position in many ways. The Tarahumara region has witnessed a long series of ideological, cultural and economic impositions from the non-indigenous world. The indigenous people have responded by contesting, resisting

and adapting to these changes. Yet long-term impositions have produced unintentional impacts on the wellbeing of the population; for example, there are many instances of poverty and inequality showing a clear ethnic division. In this sense, since the 1970s, when neoliberal economic policies and global markets started to be promote intensively, uneven allocation of wellbeing opportunities and economic and development prospects for both indigenous and non-indigenous people in the Tarahumara region.

Secondly, the chapter will present in greater depth the two towns where the fieldwork research was based: the localities of Aboreachi and the Laguna de Aboreachi within the Guachochi municipality. The first locality has a Raramuri population and the second a mostly non-indigenous or *mestizo* population. They are closely connected localities which form two centres within the same interethnic region. On the one hand, Aboreachi is the main locality of a Raramuri *pobora*, the traditional territorial unit of the indigenous people, and on the other hand, Laguna de Aboreachi is the administrative centre of the ejido, the Mexican land tenure scheme, which includes both sites. I will focus on the social interactions and ethno-political dynamics faced by both groups.

This chapter will provide the required geographical, demographic, and cultural contextual references needed to address the main aim of the research: to uncover local understandings of the concept of wellbeing amongst the Raramuri, how they are hindered by the interaction of different factors promoted by economic policies and everyday interactions with the non-indigenous population, and finally, through which mechanisms the Raramuri people respond to the ethno-political oppression they face.

3.1 The Tarahumara Region: The Raramuri and Mestizo People

The largest percentage of the 62 ethno-linguistic groups that live in Mexico is concentrated in Central and Southern Mexico[26]. However, the Tarahumara region, also

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[26] www.cdi.gob.mx. Consulted November 2012

known as the Sierra Madre Mountain Range, is located in Northern Mexico. The Tarahumara region is located across the south-eastern part of the state of Chihuahua and parts of the states of Sonora, Durango and Sinaloa. The Tarahumara region is composed of 17 geopolitical divisions called municipalities.[27] With an approximate area of 60,000 square kilometres, this is an intercultural space where different livelihoods, understandings, ways of living, and ways of relating to land and resources coexist. This differentiation is visible through culturally embedded practices and customs that the population expresses and engages in a variety of ways.

Each red dot in Figure 1 shows the location of an indigenous locality (i.e. a locality with at least 40% of the population speaking an indigenous language) in Mexico.

Figure 1. Localities with 40% or more of Indigenous Population and types of Municipalities, Mexico. 2000

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[27] Balleza, Batopilas, Bocoyna, Carichi, Chinipas, Guachochi, Guadalupe y Calvo, Guazaparez, Guerrero, Maguarichi, Morelos, Nonoava, Moris, Ocampo, Temosachi, Urique, Uruachi.
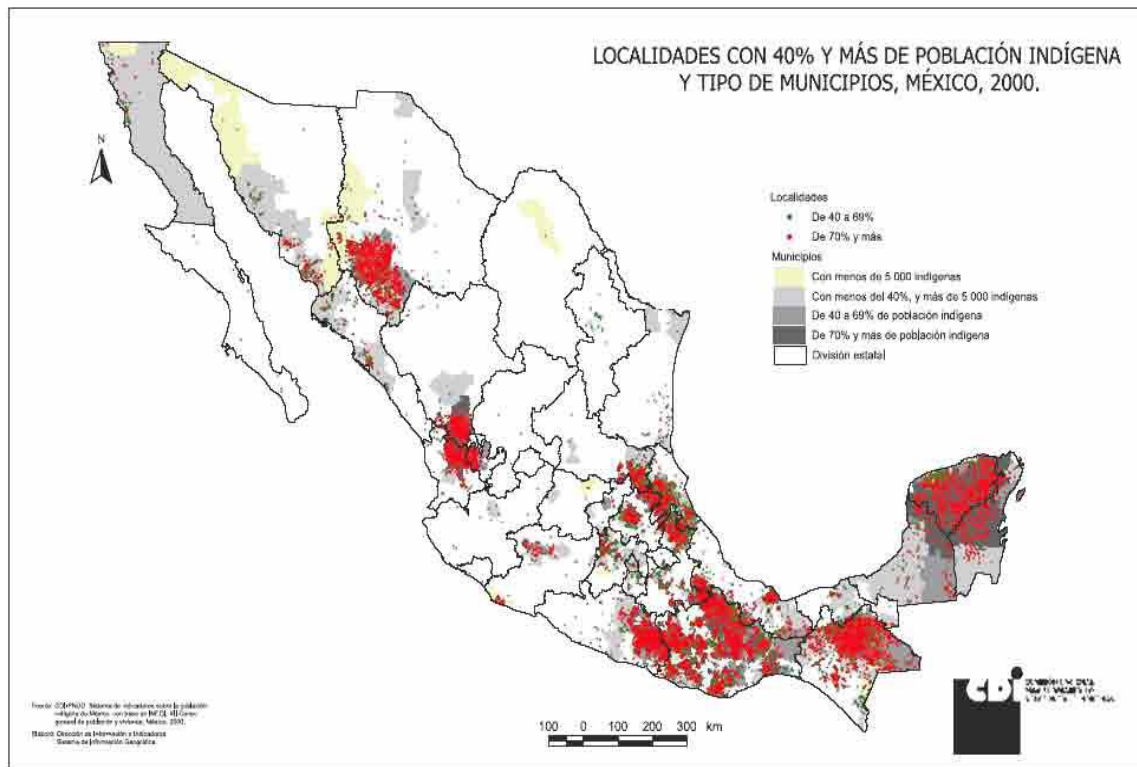
Source: Comisión para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, CDI.

The topography of the region consists of a system of deep subtropical canyons (at least five of which are deeper than the Grand Canyon in the U.S.A.), alternating with high mountains. The sharp contrast of the topography, combined with the climate, has produced a rich biodiversity. Tarahumara is home to many subtropical and high altitude species of flora and fauna, making it one of the most bio-diverse regions of Mexico (Bye 1994). One the most crucial natural features of this mountain range is its large forest area. An estimated 15% of Mexico's national forest lies in the Tarahumara region (Perez-Cirera and Lovett 2006). Predominantly covered by large stands of mixed pine and oak forests, the region has a mountain range that is 1,250 kilometres long, with an altitude of 3,300 metres above sea level. The annual average temperature in the mountains is 16°C. In contrast, the lower parts of the region are made up of massive canyons and cliffs; the climate is semi-tropical and the temperature can easily reach 40°C. The rainy season is one of the most important weather features in terms of its influence on the landscape. It lasts

from June to September and the annual average rainfall is fifteen to twenty inches. Because of this the region holds the headwaters of the most ecological and ethnically diverse sites in Northern Mexico. The rivers Yaqui, Mayo and Fuerte drain into the Gulf of California, irrigating the agricultural lands of the states of Chihuahua and Sinaloa, and the Rio Conchos drains into the Rio Grande and ends in the Gulf of Mexico (WWF/USAID 2004). Estimates suggest that over 1.5 million people in five large cities obtain clean water from these rivers (*Ibid*).

The region is named after the Tarahumara people, or Raramuri, as they name themselves. It is these people who are the focus of this research. Overall, almost 104,014 indigenous people belong to four different groups coexist with the larger non-indigenous or '*mestizo*' population, which is twice as numerous.

It is important to define the mestizo group ethnographically for the purposes of this research. The mestizo people are those who, despite living in the Tarahumara region, do not self-identify as being part of an indigenous group. Some of them might have indigenous ancestry (one parent is a common example) yet they do not identify themselves as indigenous nor are they socially recognized as such. Mestizos convey cultural differences by social means to make their ethnic differentiation evident. For instance they might speak only Spanish, wear Western clothes and articulate Western values. From the Raramuri cosmological point of view, people are divided into three categories: Raramuri meaning literally "people", other indigenous people from other ethnic denominations, which they just call by their own names (i.e. Odame, Maya, or O'oba), and mestizos, which refers to all the wider, non-indigenous society. The Raramuri further differentiate the mestizos by using the term chabochis (literally, "whiskered ones"), which refers to 'those who do not respect the Raramuri way of life, and who oppress us'[28]. The use of the term *Chabochi* by the Raramuri reflects the power relations between the Raramuri and mestizo, as it is mostly used among the Raramuri to refer to

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[28] Interview with Don Basilio Castillo, Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. 2010. This understanding of what *Chabochi* means was well acknowledged during the fieldwork stage in the Tarahumara region.

specific undesired mestizos. From the mestizo perspective, the same terms are usually used to identify themselves as different from the indigenous population and more aligned with the wider national society.

The Raramuri as a group have distinctive socio-political organization and cultural patterns. They have a much longer history than the mestizo population. Raramuri livelihoods are diverse because throughout history they have been involved in interethnic relations. They rely on a combination of income sources, including benefits from social protection programmes, temporary migration to the cities, and subsistence farming. The latter is still jealously guarded by certain sectors of the Raramuri group as it provides some degree of autonomy and security from the fluctuations of the labour market. This activity is actually the one that the majority of the population engage in. Each household constituted as a labour unit is dedicated to small-scale subsistence agriculture on small plots of land which are managed collectively. The main crops are maize, beans, squash and potatoes, although other vegetables are also grown. Small numbers of livestock such as cattle, pigs, chickens, sheep and goats are also important assets for those households that have them. When possible, livelihoods are supplemented by participation in a variety of low-paid seasonal jobs in commerce, tourism, forestry or mining. This participation in the market economy, largely dominated by mestizos, accounts for most of the Raramuri's 'off-farm' income.

Although the mestizo population engages in similar economic activities, they tend to have developed more market-based endeavours in larger towns where they can access wider sources of income to protect their livelihoods (Hard and Merril 1992). Larger towns within the Tarahumara region have a clear distinctive economic orientation towards services and commerce. In general terms, it can be said that among the mestizo population economic stratification is quite evident, as we shall explore in the next chapter. On the one hand, there are political and economic mestizo elites that control, through family relationships, the municipal governments and local-national political relations within the region. These elites also have control over - and benefit to a greater degree from - the larger tourism

and forestry projects introduced by international corporations and foreign investors. On the other hand, a dominant low-income sector of the mestizo population depends predominantly on small businesses such as grocery stores, hardware stores and mechanical garages, among other small, family-run businesses. These businesses are commonly managed within the houses giving a distinctive commercial appearance to larger towns such as Guachochi and Creel in the Tarahumara. Additionally, some mestizo diversify economically by complementing these businesses with cattle rearing or trading, renting land to third parties, or by engaging in working class jobs as drivers, builders, or carpenters. Economic diversification is also present in the Raramuri people, but for them it is generally a temporary coping strategy, whereas among the mestizo having complementary income sources is a more permanent economic strategy. Still, when available, both Raramuri and mestizo benefit from a combination of social protection programmes which are mainly government-led income transfers, such as *Oportunidades* and *Procampo*[29]. The similarities and differences of livelihood strategies and ways of living between the two groups will be further explored in chapter IV and V when discussing local understandings of wellbeing.

3.1.a Land of contrasts

Indigenous people in Mexico have historically been placed in subordinate positions *vis-a-vis* the dominant non-indigenous population (Villoro 1998; Bonfil 2006; Warman 2003; Esteva 2001; Cimadamore, Eversole and Mc Neish 2005; Hall and Patrinos 2006: UN 2009; González de Alba, 2010; Garcia-Moreno and Patrinos, 2011; CDI-PNUD, 2010; CONEVAL, 2011). At the national level, comparing indigenous and non-indigenous poor populations with other Latin American counties, Mexico shows the most striking difference after controlling for ethnicity, where indigenous are more likely than non-indigenous people to be poor (UNDP 2004). A number of studies have found inter-ethnic asymmetries on a wide range of issues. For instance, Mexico's indigenous people are disproportionately

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[29] *Oportunidades* is the leading social protection program from Mexico aiming to break intergenerational poverty by targeted interventions in nutrition, health and education. *Procampo* is a federal programme that promotes agricultural production by delivering commercial and market advice, agricultural materials and technology, among other subsidized services.

represented among the poor. Despite consisting of only around 11% of the national population, in 2008 indigenous people accounted for a quarter of those below the national food poverty line (González de Alba, 2010, p. 457). Access to public services also shows a gap between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Mexico (Garcia-Moreno and Patrinos, 2011; CDI-PNUD, 2010; CONEVAL, 2011a). Moreover, poverty levels are concentrated in rural and marginalized areas, which are where indigenous people tend to live (De la Torre, 2010). Correspondingly, in predominantly *mestizo* municipalities the incidence of extreme poverty in 2002 was 4.5 times higher among predominantly indigenous people than among non-indigenous people, up from a ratio of 3.7 times a decade earlier (Hall and Patrinos, 2006).

An additional indication of the high incidence of poverty levels disproportionately affecting the indigenous people in Mexico is the number of indigenous beneficiaries in social protection programmes such as *Oportunidades*, where a quarter of the beneficiaries of the programme are indigenous (World Bank, 2012, p.14). This has led to questions as to why social protection programmes such as *Oportunidades* do not make any special provision for the higher levels of indigenous poverty by being sensitive to the local context and causes of vulnerability (Ulrichs and Roelen; 2012).

The Tarahumara region shows the same national trend of inter-group differentials. For instance, official sources evidence high poverty levels in the Tarahumara region. The 2006 Human Development Report for Indigenous Population published in Mexico shows that the municipality with the lowest Human Development Index for Indigenous People (HDI–IP) in Mexico is Batopilas, in the Tarahumara region (0.3010). This index is lower than Niger (0.3300), the lowest HDI country in the world (De la Torre and Rodolfo, 2010). Additionally, the Tarahumara is the indigenous region with the largest disparity between indigenous and non-indigenous populations in terms of the HDI-IP, although regions such as la Montana de Guerrero, Norte de Chiapas and Chimalapas, in the southern part of the

country, account for the lowest overall Index (CDI-UNDP 2006).[30] Moreover, at the national level, the six municipalities with the lowest Human Development Index for Indigenous People are located in the Tarahumara region.[31]

Data from the Social Marginality Index created by *Consejo Nacional de Población* (National Council of Demographics) and from the new multidimensional poverty measurement created by the *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de Política Pública* (National Council of Public Policy Evaluation) also show the discrepancies on socioeconomic variables affecting the indigenous people in the region[32]. These indexes and subsequent studies show how the indigenous population is systematically marginalized from access to health services and quality public services (Monarrez and Martinez, 2000), land management benefits (Perez–Cirera and Lovett, 2006) and access to income, when compared with the non-indigenous population. These indexes and subsequent studies show how Raramuri people are systematically marginalized from health cover and quality public service (Monarrez and Martinez 2000), land management benefits (Perez-Cirera and Lovett 2006) and income accessibility, when compared with the non-indigenous population.

An alternative indicator of unequal development between ethnic groups in Mexico is infant mortality. Although the infant mortality rate in Mexico has declined constantly since the second half of the 90s, the effects are not the same across groups, the indigenous population being the group that shows the slower improvement (CEC & MEXICO, 2005). There has been research focusing on child mortality as an indicator not just of malnutrition: when compared with the non-indigenous population, it can also provide a wider picture of the sharp differences suffered by the group in terms of other wellbeing indicators (Heaton et al. 2007). For instance, Monarrez-Espino, Greiner and Martinez (2004) have established that the Raramuri infant mortality rate (95 per 1000 live

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[30] The report and the database are available at:
http://www.cdi.gob.mx/idh/informe_desarrollo_humano_pueblos_indigenas_mexico_2006.pdf
[31] Batopilas, Carichi, Morelos, Balleza, Urique, Uruachi. (UNDP 2010)
[32] See www.coneval.gob.mx for further comparisons on indigenous/non-indigenous social indicators.

births) is nearly double that of the national indigenous infant mortality rate, and triple that of the overall national rate.

Therefore these accounts are useful in identifying levels of deprivation and inequalities affecting the population in the Tarahumara region. They suggest the existence of power relations affecting the two groups differently. However, despite recognising historical and political exclusion, most studies have neglected the role power relations play in shaping livelihoods and ways of living in indigenous areas. There are a few accounts, representing exceptions to this tendency, which do emphasise power inequality and the effects of neoliberal policies on indigenous peoples' and peasants' livelihoods (Hewitt 1984, Arteaga and Brachet-Marquez 2011, Lund and Lee Peluso 2011). However, these issues have not been addressed critically enough, and what has especially been neglected is how the inter-ethnic power relations at the micro level contribute to the creation and persistence of power asymmetries which disproportionally affect indigenous groups.

Having described the characteristics of the Tarahumara region, I wish to point out that, bearing in mind the value of the previous indicators, this research is concerned with identifying factors that are usually excluded from mainstream economic determinants of poverty, especially qualitative and contextual factors. This context-based approach, in capturing perceptions and understandings of wellbeing, does not intend to undermine the value of mainstream quantitative approaches, but rather advocates complementary systematic comparison and analytical visualization of unequal interethnic interactions (Renshaw and Wray, 2004). This research is concerned with examining culturally embedded understandings of local perceptions of wellbeing by identifying different dimensions associated with a wellbeing discourse that the Raramuri understand as living the good path or *Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich* as it is called among the Raramuri. These local understandings and dimensions will be explored in chapter IV.

3.1.b. The Tarahumara region; a place of cultural differentiation through the years.

A demographic characteristic of the Tarahumara region is the distinctive wide and dispersed spatial settlement pattern of the Raramuri people, which is due in part to the irregular and uneven geography of the area. Kinship based hamlets and localities are located in the proximity of water sources and scarce patches of fertile land which are suitable for agriculture (Hard and Merrill 1992).

The Raramuri settlements are small and scattered: 52% of the total Raramuri population of the Tarahumara region lives in dispersed hamlets or *rancherias* of less than 100 people (Pintado 2004). This settlement pattern is the basis of the socio-political organization of the Raramuri people. For instance, a group of hamlets constitutes a *rancheria*, which may or may not have a political Raramuri authority called the *Seriame*. A set of *Rancherias* constitutes a *Pobora* or Pueblo, which in turn constitutes the main socio-political and religious demarcation of territory for the Raramuri. Each *Pobora* has a series of political, festive and religious figures of authority that conform to the Raramuri government structure. This structure will be described in detail in the last section of this chapter when introducing the localities of Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi, where this research was based.   Figure 2 shows the spatial dispersion of the Raramuri settlements in the region.

Figure 2. Raramuri Localities on the Tarahumara Region.
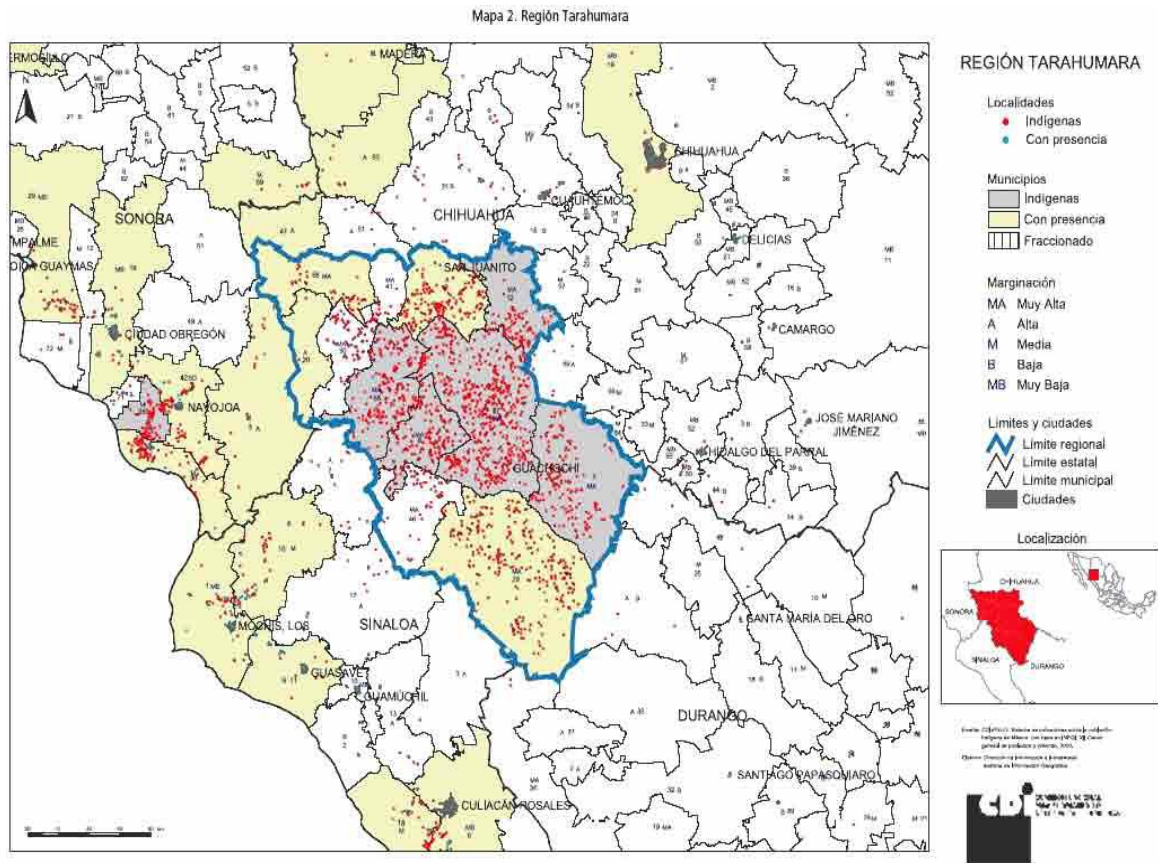
Source: Comisión para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, CDI. México

The distinct Raramuri settlement patterns constitute a clear cultural distinction between the indigenous groups living in this northern region compared to other (southern) locations in Mexico and Central America. Whilst indigenous groups in central and southern Mexico tend to have a settlement pattern centralized around larger towns, indigenous groups in the north, especially in the Tarahumara region, tend to live dispersed as households settled on such small plots of fertile land as can be found in the predominantly harsh terrain. This distinction has led to a defined cultural division between these two regions, in archaeological and anthropological disciplines. The northern part of Mexico and southern part of the United States, is known among scholars by diverse names: Greater Southwest (Beals 1932), Oasis America (Armillas 1969; Kirchhoff 1943), Arido-

america (Kirchhoff 1954), La Gran Chichimeca (Di Peso 1974), whilst the area from central Mexico towards central America is referred as Mesoamerica.

The main cultural difference between these two regions lies in the historical development of extensive agriculture, which permitted earlier inhabitants of the region to settle permanently in larger centres. In Mesoamerica, permanent human settlement permitted the construction of large scale architecture. However, in the north, with its wide, mountainous and largely arid areas, no extensive agriculture could develop as the settlements were comparatively small scale, oriented towards mobile seasonal settlement, and the people engaged mainly in hunting and gathering. The absence of monumental archaeology of large scale cities in Arido-america therefore represented an additional major difference between the regions.

The Raramuri, like other Arido-american indigenous groups, have been neglected in historical, archaeological and linguistic studies. There are only a handful of archaeological research studies on the Sierra Tarahumara; however, there is evidence that suggests that the Raramuri may be descendants of the Mogollon Culture (Lister and Lister 1966; Asher and Clune 1960). Perhaps this lack of archaeological interest is because there is no monumental architecture and extended material culture such as that left by Mesoamerican groups such as the Aztec and Maya.

The difference between the Arido-american and the Mesoamerican group also stands out linguistically. The Raramuri language is classified as part of the yuto-nahua or yuto-aztec linguistic family. Other indigenous groups in northern Mexico from the same linguistic root are the Papagos, Pimas, Yaquis, Warojios, Coras, Huicholes and Nahuas. These groups, among others, are considered to be the decedents of the early inhabitants of the north part of the continent, and small scale subsistence agriculture and hunting and gathering evolved in all of these groups.

Lumholtz (1902), Bennett and Zingg (1935), Kennedy (1963) and Burgess (1981) are just a few of the classical ethnographers that have captured the economic, political, religious and cultural aspects of the Tarahumara people. In the 19th century, the first anthropological studies about the Raramuri in the region had two main characteristics. Firstly, monographs from fieldwork portrayed the Raramuri Indians as one of the last remaining human groups still living in a prehistoric fashion. They described the simple primitive life of cave dwellers who were semi nomadic, and the drunken pagan ceremonies of the people from this remote and exotic region. And indeed, early monographs show a sense of urgency to collect and study ethnographic valuable data promptly, before the group disappeared in the mist of modern cultural change. The second distinctive characteristic of these studies related to the early stage of anthropological thinking, which was keen to explain how these groups could possibly survive the force of time. A rather pessimistic - some would argue necessary – prediction of the loss of traditional livelihoods was commonly reflected in such ethnographies. So the issue of cultural change and its implications for the social-organisational capacity of the ethnic group were constantly present.

In more recent times, a diversity of topics is considered in anthropological studies of the Raramuri. One recurrent topic is the link between the cultural way the indigenous people manage and relate to the surrounding environment and natural resources. This interest is appropriate because of the breadth of the ecological landscape and extent of biological diversity.

Accordingly, both Raramuri and mestizo inhabiting the region socially and culturally relate to, engage with and manage these natural resources distinctively. For Raramuri people, land, water and forests play a crucial role in shaping their livelihoods in terms of subsistence agriculture, herding animals and occasional hunting and gathering, as well as water availability, etc. In addition, cosmological relations with the flora and fauna represent a sense of territory for the Raramuri people. On the other hand, most mestizos

relate with nature in terms of resources, namely benefitting directly or indirectly from economic activities such as tourism, forestry and mining. These economic activities entail contestation over access to and control over the same natural resources as the Raramuri.

For this reason, the Tarahumara is a highly contested region in terms of management and tenure of natural resources. From a global perspective, economic inequality, ecological degradation and ethno-political oppression constitute the local repercussions of exchange commodities flowing towards global markets. I will argue in chapter V that the dominant *mestizo* population benefits more from global economic activities and institutional arrangements, with detrimental effects on the lifestyle of the Raramuri.

3.2 The contested region of the Tarahumara: a brief historical perspective

This section will describe how over the passing of decades the two populations have related differently to the territory and its resources. The Raramuri as a group have different socio-political organization, cultural patterns and historical background from the *mestizo* population. Obviously, the Spanish Conquest in the 16th Century had a crucial effect on native indigenous groups. It is important to note that what is now part of the Mexican State of Chihuahua remained inaccessible for the Spaniards for an additional hundred years after the colonization of the central and southern parts of the country. However, over time, colonisers – both of European descent and *mestizos* - began to exploit mineral resources in what are now the towns of Santa Barbara and San Francisco del Oro and the city of Parral, in the southern part of Chihuahua State. Discovering new deposits of metals such as gold and silver, and building new mines to extract them, was a priority during Spanish colonial rule.

Additionally, the Catholic Church under the colonizers had their own agenda, namely to convert the native population. Military incursions to secure the 'new' territories again led the way to further colonization. Shortly after, the introduction of the Catholic mission system to spread the religion became a powerful influence for social and cultural change

on the local population. The presence of these new institutions, and collateral effects such as the spread of diseases, gradually became factors that the native population of the north of Mexico had to face and react to in subsequent centuries. Some historical studies have argued that indigenous groups from the North of Mexico, including the Raramuri people, were gradually displaced, and settled on the less inhabited area of the Sierra in an attempt to avoid contact with the colonizers (Pintado 2004). This is an early indication that suggests the long history of power and interethnic relations that has affected the original indigenous population in the region.

Meanwhile the Catholic missionary system – first Jesuit and later Franciscan - penetrated gradually into the greater part of the region. Increasingly, the Catholic Church became a strong influence on Raramuri religious and socio-organisational practices. And as with other indigenous people in the region, the actual Raramuri religious and political system shows adaptations since colonial times. The missions had a presence in 28 places on the Tarahumara by 1767, which was the year when the Jesuit order was expelled from Spanish Colonies (Gonzalez 1987). It was not until the 1900 that the Jesuits resumed their proselytising efforts in the region, now focusing on founding schools and churches in remote Raramuri localities.

The Raramuri people that resisted the missionary system were classified by the Church as *gentiles* or pagans. Even today, these segments of the Raramuri population reject religious practices such as marriage and Catholic baptism, and also the imposition of the Spanish language. At present, only a few *gentile* Raramuri localities (i.e. Inapuchi and Choreachi) still remain in the Tarahumara region and they continue to maintain a defiant stance against church intervention and the wider society (Kennedy 1970). This largely monolingual segment of the Raramuri, self-excluded and living in remote areas, does not interact with the mestizos as much as the (larger) baptised Raramuri population.

Another set of reactions of this early incursion involved violent confrontation. Historical evidence confirms a series of violent insurrections during the 17th century organized by diverse indigenous groups in the Tarahumara region, including the Raramuri and Tepehuanos.[33] However, the revolts ended after further military repression by the colonizers (Gonzalez *et al* 1994; Gonzalez 1987). Some revolts appeared until the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These early revolts were directed against the catholic missions, in some cases leading to the killing of missionaries and the violent destruction of missions.

During this prolonged period of unrest, the indigenous population decreased significantly. Many indigenous people died either from epidemics or from violent conflict with the Spaniards (Pintado 2004; Deeds 1992). There is not much detailed information in historical documents to show the actual extent of the demographic impact of recurrent violent insurrections. However, the causes were clear: the impact of the introduction of the mission system, and later of land grabbing and abuses from the increasing numbers of non-indigenous people. For instance, in the Nonoava region, mestizos, protected by the laws of land confiscation that were passed in 1856, seized vast territories from Raramuri people, which led to violent confrontations. There are well-documented cases where confrontation was triggered by physical abuse from the mestizos, for example in the regions of Agua Amarilla and Chinatu in Chihuahua (Pintado 2004).

Meanwhile, the land that had been appropriated tended now to be used by mestizos for cattle rearing and farming; such is the case in the region of Papigochi and Cuauhtémoc city, near Tarahumara (Pintado 2004). All these factors contributed to the first major displacement of indigenous people, at the beginning of the 20th century, into what is now the Tarahumara Region.

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[33] Different documented revolts occurred during 1616, 1620 and 1951 where several indigenous groups organize themselves to kill missionaries and burn churches (Gonzalez 1987).

Crucially, most historical and anthropological studies agree that rather than engage in violent confrontation, the Raramuri group employed a strategy of avoidance and slow retreat to remote areas of the mountain range, their current area of residence. Still, to this day, the idea of avoidance and indirect confrontation is seen from some academic perspectives as a cultural characteristic of the Raramuri in terms of their relationship with the church and the Mexican State (Basauri 1929; Deeds 2003).

Since the beginning of the 20th century, development ideologies concerning indigenous people have been debated in theoretical and professional anthropological practice. These academic debates were focused around the relations between the state and the indigenous population and what the role the official government should play with regard to the ethnic diversity of Mexico. Implied in these debates was the idea of the economic and cultural integration of the indigenous population through economic investments and exploiting natural resources. In accordance with this, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the mestizo economic system began to consider forestry a potentially desirable resource. In government discourse, forestry and mining were seen as the activities that would lead the way to regional development (Sariego 2000). The search for economic exploitation of these resources was the reason why mestizos began to inhabit the Sierra. Over centuries, groups of largely Mexican peasants and miners began settling in the region, motivated by the possibility of land ownership and work in mines as well as other economic activities.

Most early ancestors of mestizo families were pioneers in the region's first mines, and included runaway bandits, and engineers and workers on the early infrastructure projects such as the Copper Canyon Train Route that crosses the mountains into the sea port of Los Mochis, in the neighbouring state of Sinaloa. Over the years, the mestizos tended to congregate in economic centres such as mining towns, railway stations and administrative units. These centres are now the largest towns where the mestizo population tend to be concentrated, and they are still the centres of commercial and economic activity in the

region. By contrast, as mentioned above, the majority of the Raramuri population lives in hamlets and scattered localities through the mountains of the region.

Although both populations have shared the same territory for generations, either by imposition or by historic integration, economic and social polarisation of the two groups is expressed in social, economic and political ways. The polarization led to rural-urban migration, changes in nutritional habits, and forced appropriation of natural resources (including private ownership of mining and timber rights) and the subsequent related economic activities. Taken together these represent some of the most evident signs of a shifting socio-economic context (Monarrez-Espino, Greiner and Caballero 2004; Perez-Cirera and Lovett 2006; England et al. 2006).

The search for economic profit led the way to increasing numbers of mestizos settling in the Tarahumara region. The contest for the control of resources in response to two dissimilar development projects represents a tension that lingers up to the present day. This tension implies the clash of development discourses that, I argue, has shaped in great part the determinants of living well for both indigenous and mestizo. Certainly both groups share some cultural values and practices, which has come about over decades of intercultural contact. However, at the discourse level, the two groups show clearly different ways of conceptualizing, approaching and relating to natural resources. And in practice, the clash of livelihoods has produced unequal power relations.

3.3 The Sierra and the Mexican State: economic and development approaches and discourses

The Sierra Tarahumara region is not only a contested social space in terms of natural resource management, but also a space where diverse economic and development approaches are visible. It is important to recognize the complex influences of economic globalization on local conditions in the Sierra and the wellbeing of its population. As

described, although the Sierra could be considered as a geographically isolated rural area, it is not immune to the influence of wider global economic influences. Tourism, drug cultivation and mining activity are examples of how this social space and its resources are directly linked to the global economy.

As is the case in many marginalized yet resource-rich areas, the relationship between the Tarahumara people and the global economy does not take place on equal terms. Indigenous people in general, and perhaps even more so groups like the Raramuri, have no strong political presence or organizations to redress the balance and enact their own agency in an effective way, and so tend to suffer the consequences: environmental degradation, greater wealth inequality in the region and less control of their own livelihoods.

In this way, the Tarahumara people have, like other native people in Latin America, been subjected historically to oppression from the nation-state in the form of social discrimination and geographic exclusion (Beltran 1991). Drawing from ancient cultural traditions and reacting to continued oppression, they reinforce their collective identity, become cohesive units, and rely on survival strategies to preserve their culture. For instance, forms of collective solidarity and redistributive practices, such those mentioned here, might be a safety net when a household suffers adversity. Considering the increasing pressure from the commoditization of the economy, trade and exchange would become largely economic and impersonal interactions, and therefore less socially bonding.

Because of this, the Raramuri people have been forced to deal with a wide range of developmental actors on unequal terms. The influence of economic policies on the region and its population can be analysed in terms of access to natural resources, especially land, water and forestry. These impacts are not to be taken lightly as there is increasing evidence that constraints placed on the native population in respect of their control of the means of production compromise their economic and cultural survival (Wyndham 2010).

In addition, Illegal appropriation of Raramuri lands for logging or to grow marijuana or opium poppies has been systematically recorded (Alvarado 1996; Burnett and Raimond 1996; DePalma 1995; Estrada Martinez and Vega Carrillo 1993; Salopek 1989; 1996)

Accordingly, the recent qualitative studies discussed here have been focusing increasingly on the unequal inter-ethnic relations faced by the Raramuri people. Levi (1999), for example, seeks an ethnographical application of Scott's (1985) notion of discerning everyday resistance through what he calls "hidden transcripts" in Tarahumara-*mestizo* relations, and suggests that resistance can take the form of linguistic and behavioural codes. Levi understands resistance in terms of ethnic identity on the Raramuri side. He focuses, like other anthropologists studying the Tarahumara region, on the factors leading to cultural change which result from the increasing influence of non-indigenous forces on the native cultures there. Although earlier ethnographers such as Lumholtz (1902) mention that an unavoidable - or even desirable - effect of increased *mestizo* influence may be to finally diminish the rather primitive Raramuri identity in favour of a modern national state identity, most recent studies have now acknowledged that ethnic identity and cultural reinforcement within the Raramuri group persist strongly (Merrill and Heras 1997).

On a national level, the state-led development agenda has been marked by efforts to promote and bring about socio-cultural and economic change in indigenous communities. This is constantly being articulated in terms of how the nation state should operate with regard to its ethnic diversity. It is in this context that the concept of '*Indigenismo*' relates to the academic anthropological literature by describing the process of inter-ethnic relations in terms of the modernisation and the integration of indigenous people into wider Mexican society (Sariego 2000). Development discourses and ideologies that were the driving forces of government action in the last century were applied as specific strategic economic interventions intended to promote timber extraction, mining exploration and the development of the tourist industry. These models and ideologies

often neglect the local economic and cultural practices of the indigenous population and, in some cases, they imply conflicting views (Sariego 2002). Ultimately, these have caused tension in terms of inter-ethnic relations, which have, directly or indirectly, helped maintain the status quo of political, social and economic disadvantage of the non-indigenous over the indigenous.

Some of the most common spaces for inter-ethnic interaction in the Tarahumara are in the land tenure scheme of the ejido system. Ejido*s* are communal ownership entities of natural resources, mainly forestry. The agrarian reform resulting from the Mexican Revolution during the 1920s and 30s started a process of land reforms where rural areas including indigenous peoples' territories became social "common" land in the form of ejidos. Therefore, from the late 1950s through to the 1970s, the national policy behind the creation of the ejido system was that it was thought that the rural and indigenous population might benefit from communal control over natural resources. All over the country, cooperatives were established to exploit natural resources and generate income. In the particular case of the Tarahumara region, the forest was seen as the greatest natural resource that the land could provide, hence exploiting it was the solution to poverty (Sariego 2000). The subsequent revenues from selling permits to extract timber were then collectively managed and distributed among the *ejido* members or *ejidatarios*.[34]

The main idea was to create indigenous ejidos to issue exploitation permits to private corporations. Additionally, along with the private investment, services and trade would stimulate the region economically. Through the *ejidos*, the indigenous population would administer and manage their own natural resources and fund the construction of clinics, schools and transportation infrastructure. Instead, as it turned out, by creating the *ejido* system, the Mexican state accelerated the process of *mestizo* society accessing natural resources and increasing their influence over political and economic interests.

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[34] *Ejidatarios* are members of the *ejido* (mainly but not exclusively men), who are officially recognised as possessing collective rights concerning issues such as land management.

The *ejido* has become a hugely important factor linking Raramuri livelihoods and territory. For instance*,* being a legally recognized member of the *ejido* implies having a voice and a vote in collective management decisions concerning land, and it is through the collective decisions of the *ejido* that every household is allocated access to farming land and water. An additional incentive to participate in the *ejido* is that members can benefit from certain official agricultural programmes, mainly *Procampo.* This federal programme promotes agricultural production by delivering commercial and market advice, agricultural materials, technology, and monetary resources among other subsidized services, and not surprisingly has had a great influence on the way farming is carried out.

Schemes such as the *ejido* reflect the level of penetration the Mexican state has had into rural and remote areas. Nearly 50% of all land in Mexico is "social property" in the form of ejidos. In the Tarahumara region and other indigenous regions in Mexico, it was mostly forests that ended up becoming social property contained within ejidos*,* as most productive land was already privately owned at the time of the reform (COSYDDHAC/Texas Center for Policy Studies 2000). Now the ejidos are well established forms of social organization within indigenous and rural regions in terms of management of natural resources.

However, the implementation of the *ejido* system had drawbacks in terms of inter-ethnic contestation at the local level. Even though the Raramuri people have adapted to the *ejido* system's functional implications for land management, the process of adaptation has had both beneficial and negative effects. Some of these effects directly impact on Raramuri livelihood and are particularly relevant to subsistence agriculture. For instance, through *Procampo*, the use of chemical fertilizers has now been available to a vast majority of ejidos in the Sierra. These subsidized fertilizers have served to boost agricultural productivity in the short term, but in the long term have created plots that are dependent on the continued use of fertilizers. The Raramuri people have now realised that without fertilizers crops will simply not grow enough and the harvest will be seriously

compromised. As we shall see in Chapter V, the institutional arrangements of the *ejido* system are considered to be one factor that hinders their ability to maintain a livelihood based primarily on subsistence agriculture.

Additionally, implementing the *ejido* scheme*,* far from facilitating the control of natural resources by local indigenous population, implied that communities should be suppliers of demanded resources. As this scheme requires the participation of private corporations to buy timber, the management of natural resources is influenced by national and international markets. This market influence departs from the *buen vivir*/living well discourse of the Raramuri in terms of how nature should be approached, and at the same time, resource management has led to only marginal economic benefits. For instance, private corporations – in *mestizo* hands - usually buy the timber at very low prices because little or no value is added in the process.

Additionally, along with the private investment, services and trade began to modify the region's economic and political correlation of forces. The intention of public policy on the indigenous groups of Mexico was clearly to integrate them into wider society by bringing them into the market economy and incorporating them into the modernizing trend the federal government wanted to promote by the second half of the 20th century. Instead, with the creation of the *ejido* system, the Mexican state accelerated the process of *mestizo* society accessing natural resources and promoting the consolidation of economic and political elites in the local context. Alongside the consolidation of local elites, an important factor is how little transparency and accountability there was in the ejidos' internal operations and management of resources. This has paved the way for corruption and opportunity hoarding, from which the *mestizo* benefit disproportionately as shown by the indicators explored previously, such as the HDI, health and economic indicators describing the great ethnic inequality. Over time, the largely *mestizo* elites have increased their local and regional economic influence, which is closely linked with the exploitation of

natural resources. In the end, the creation of the *ejido* promoted opportunity and power hoarding structures from which the indigenous population benefited only peripherally.

As we shall see in Chapter V, the institutional arrangement of the *ejido* system is considered to be a factor that hinders the Raramuri in their aspiration to live well in their own terms. The idea behind what I argue to be the negative effect of the *ejido* system is the unbalanced inter-ethnic interactions between the two groups, which are deeply embedded in the region. These factors in part are produced and reproduced by the *ejido* institutional arrangements, which are dominated by the *mestizo*.

A second important effect of the implementation of the *ejido* system in the Tarahumara region was the imposition of a foreign territorial structure over the existing Raramuri territorial organization. A consequence of this regime was unexpected land hoarding by private large landholders in some parts of Northern Mexico for large-scale agriculture, whereas in the Tarahumara with its mountainous and rugged surface no extensive agricultural endeavour could develop. Instead, land holding took the form of legal and illegal hoarding of land for cattle grazing, logging, or growing illicit crops (marijuana and opium poppies) as well as invasion of the few fertile plateaus by *mestizo caciques*[35] (Alvarado Licon 1996; Burnett and Raimond 1996; DePalma 1995; Estrada Martinez and Vega Carrillo 1993; Salopek 1989; 1996). The collective land management scheme of the *ejido* produced the ideal instrument for forestry exploitation on an industrial scale.

Vast areas of land in the Tarahumara region were divided into ejidos based on the location of natural resources, which did not precisely match the existing socio political division of the territory by the Raramuri and other indigenous people. This imposed land regime created a source of inter-ethnic tension as it introduced new political actors in the form of the *ejido* management board. As mentioned, these boards, which were largely dominated by *mestizos*, held authority over financial and administrative activities associated with

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[35] Local political chief.

natural resources. The tension increased when, as a consequence of the agrarian reforms of the 1990s which liberalised land property ownership, it became far easier to undertake land commoditisation and national and international investment in extractive (forestry, mining) or infrastructure projects, and tourism enterprises. The tension arises from the dominant way the *mestizo*, with the national and global investors, control political spaces such as the *ejido* and others.

In the Tarahumara region, this territorial imposition is expressed in the form of the *ejido* and the Raramuri territorial organization based on the *Pobora*. The *Pobora* can be described as the Raramuri counterpart of the *ejido* in the socio-political system. The clash is more than a conceptual imposition concerning a territorial concept. It reflects conflicting cosmological views based on different *mestizo* and Raramuri livelihoods. This clash is visible at the local level in the articulation between the *Pobora* and the *ejido* and the relations between the *ejido* management board and traditional Raramuri authorities in terms of power. Each group's livelihood is structured through the *Pobora* and the *ejido*. In the case of the Raramuri *Pobora,* this is more visible because it is related to the socio-political structure of the group.

3.4 The Raramuri pobora and the mestizo ejido: contested socio-political views on land and territory

The Raramuri socio-political system is reflected in the division of the territory. In contrast with the great majority of *mestizos* who are concentrated in larger population centres where they can develop intensive market economy activities, the Raramuri settlement pattern is based on small scattered hamlets where family members tend to live close by. This scattered pattern permits them to take advantage of scarce farming plots unevenly distributed in the region and also to maintain social networks of friends and family. Each *Pobora* in the Tarahumara region is slightly different from the others in terms of internal organization. Next, I will present the case of the *Pobora* and *ejido*, the two overlapping

entities from the fieldwork site: the localities of Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi. In doing this, I will begin introducing the site and localities where fieldwork was performed.

The *Pobora.*

Urteaga (1996) describes correctly the socio-political organization of the Raramuri with regard to settlement patterns depending on the number of households. He defines what is commonly known as the *Rancheria* as consisting of a hamlet of up to 15-20 households usually related by family ties. These *Rancherias* are the basic socio-political entity in the Raramuri territory. A cluster of *Rancherias* recognize themselves as part of a *Pobora*, a deformation of the Spanish word Pueblo. Within each *Pobora* exists a set of Raramuri political and religious authorities whose functions are to administer justice, preserve the customs and organize and coordinate the religious and political activities of the Raramuri people. This organizational system is considered to be an adaptation of that imposed by the catholic missionaries during the 18th century. It was intended to organize the population into larger settlements, and those places which had greater ceremonial or cosmological importance for the Raramuri were to be the head localities. It was in these head localities, such as Aboreachi – one of the localities where fieldwork was performed for this research - that the Spanish built a Catholic church with the intention of converting the population. Indeed, the inhabitants of the wider area of Aboreachi – that is the *Pobora* of Aboreachi - are proud of their church.[36]

The Waru Seriame (or big governor) is the highest authority of each *Pobora*. He or she is assisted by a number of *Pire Seriame* (small governors) and other officials described above. In this way, the Raramuri territory in the region is a highly decentralized structure consisting of clusters of *Pobora*, each autonomous from the other. Each *Pobora* has a head locality to which surrounding Rancherias acknowledge belonging. This implies that belonging to a *Pobora* means that people recognize its authority. The temple in each

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[36] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi , Chihuahua, Mexico. 2010

Pobora is located in the head locality, and it is here, at the side of the temple, that the people gather to celebrate religious ceremonies and discuss political decisions.

A strong tradition is the Sunday public gathering in the head locality when the authorities give a speech or *nawesari*.[37] The speech, delivered mainly by the *Waru Seriame*, although other authorities can participate as well, is given as advice and recommendations to the people; it is the opportunity to reinforce Raramuri values on how to live and behave. After the *nawesari,* other pending public affairs might be dealt with, such as a trial of someone that has deviated from Raramuri norms and laws or the discussion of a particular official intervention that affects the population. These public matters merge with religious practices, as a mass or prayers are regularly involved in the process. In the head locality, ritual and ceremonies take place throughout the year, including the Holy Week celebrations or *Noririwachi* where the people from the surrounding *rancherias* unite to participate. However, ceremonies are not restricted to the temple or the head locality. Ceremonies such as *teswuino* gatherings or those ceremonies directly related to the agricultural cycle can be held publically or privately in each household.

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[37] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi , Chihuahua, Mexico. 2010

Photo 1. Aboreachi authorities outside the Church.

Gathering of Raramuri authorities outside the Aboreachi church on the Day of the Virgin Mary. Photo by the author, 2010.

The authority of the *Waru Seriame* is acknowledged throughout the entire *Pobora*. The next in line in terms of authority are the *Pire Seriame* (or small governors). They are individuals commanding enough respect to exert political authority within a *Rancheria* or group of *Rancherias*. The *Seriame* serves as a political figure within the Raramuri people and also as a guardian of Raramuri traditions and costumes. A *Seriame* is also expected to be the political intermediary with the *mestizo* world and therefore to call and gather the people living in the *Pobora* to discuss particular issues concerning them.

The *Seriame* and the *Waru Seriame* tend to be elected by consensus in a public gathering at the temple. Although the position is normally held for a period of three years, how long he is in office is determined by how well the *Seriame's* fulfils his role in authority, as judged by the people living in the *Pobora*. The selection of candidates is based on

collective perceptions of cultural attributes such as proper use and knowledge of the Raramuri language; a reputation for being a hard worker; a strong sense of family responsibility; knowledge of Raramuri traditions and values. These social attributes are highly desirable and respected among the Raramuri people and confer high social status, especially among older persons. Women and men alike are known to be equally eligible to be elected.

In some *Pobora*, although is not the case of Aboreachi, *rancherias* are classified as being in one of two different ecological niches - mountain or valley. In these cases *Seriame* are selected from each ecological niche in turn, in order to maintain political equilibrium in the *Pabora*." This level of complexity in the territorial and socio-political organization has led the Raramuri people to maintain social cohesion as well as holding onto their values and traditions (Martinez, Almanza and Urteaga 2006).

Other Raramuri authorities that compose the Raramuri political system are: *Capitan, Soldados, Ariwasi, Sacristan, Mayori* (Almanza and Urteaga 2008). The Capitan and *Soldados* are ceremonial authorities who are responsible for maintaining order in large public gatherings, and for restraining any person that is fighting or doing any harm to others during celebrations. Both posts are also elected by public consensus based on public prestige and status.

Any case of crime or misbehaviour committed during a collective ceremony or gathering, depending on its severity, is dealt with by the *Seriame*, with the help of the other ceremonial authorities such as the *Capitan* and the *Soldados*. All trials are public, as being publically identified within the locality as an offender is in itself a punishment in a society where social status and moral perception are crucial. The trial is based on the principle of compensating for the damage. In order to do this the *Seriame* publically interrogates the parties involved and asks for an explanation of the facts and motives that led to the crime. The *Seriame* and other authorities such as the *Mayori* (an elder who is responsible for

educating the children and orienting future spouses) give advice to the persons involved as they seek mutual arrangement and forgiveness (Almanza and Urteaga 1998; Martinez, Almanza and Urteaga 2006). Acts involving physical injuries or murders are transferred to the municipal authorities, namely the Police Commissioner. This official reports to the local municipal government, and although not part of the traditional Raramuri political system, is now recognized as another authority. In some cases this post is held by a Raramuri, although it is more usual for mestizos to be elected.

This socio-political system has a large number of evident similarities to the other indigenous groups in the Tarahumara region. Each indigenous group, and indeed each *Pobora,* adapts the system to its own circumstances, showing small differences in terms of numbers of authorities, names, functions and so forth. However, the same system can be recognized throughout the region.

The indigenous conception of territory proves to be crucial for the integrity of their livelihoods. Even more so, antagonistic views from the non-indigenous about the control and ownership of natural resources build up interethnic tensions. This mainly occurs due to the *ejido* division having been imposed on the territory.

The *ejido*

Intersecting each of the 17 municipalities that make up the Tarahumara region are the geopolitical entities called ejidos, created after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the subsequent Agrarian Reform process, and characterized by a strong sense of communal management and ownership. As was bound to happen, the imposed government-led creation of ejidos failed to take into consideration the existing organization of indigenous groups, including the territorial organization of *poboras*. The creation of ejidos entailed the creation of new authorities such as the *ejido* Board Committee to which the Raramuri had to adapt once more. The board is composed of *Comisariado Ejidal*, secretary, treasurer and a few auxiliaries. The *ejido* board is generally dominated by mestizos,

especially the *Comisario Ejidal*, as this is the highest decision making authority within the ejido. The case of the ejido in Aboreachi, explored in detail later, demonstrates this point.

The incentives for being a *Comisariado Ejidal* are high. For instance, the position gives the opportunity to have access to political networks such as the state, the municipal government, negotiators of forestry industries and so on. Therefore, the position of being *Comisariado Ejidal* not only gives access to networks of political and economic power, it also confers status and respect at the local level. Ethnic discourses as to who should be the head of the *ejido* are common when elections are looming of. Villanueva (2006) recounts how during the 1990s and 2000s Raramuri and *mestizos* of Aboreachi contested for the post. A frequent compromise is for a *mestizo* to be president of the *ejido* and other minor posts on the board to be held by Raramuri. The fact that *mestizo* people tend to dominate and – as I will argue further in Chapter V - hoard political power spaces within the *ejido,* and indeed at the local government level, is an indication of the unequal ethno-political interactions that permeate the context of the region. In this sense, the *ejido* is not only a land management scheme, but also a contested space where living well constraints and agency opportunities for the Raramuri are partially shaped.

As chapters IV and V will explore, this point is linked with my main research question concerning the endurance of asymmetrical power relations, in the sense that institutions such as the *ejido* have an intrinsic role in unequally allocating resources because its members shape power relations in the region. As the *ejido* is a crucial institution in land and other resource management issues it distributes income to its members through the forestry exploitation industry and essential farming inputs and subsidies. Therefore, as the *ejido* decision-making positions are sought after and in majority of cases controlled by *mestizos* they will tend to operate through their social networks, allocating resources and opportunities unequally. The *Comisariado ejidal*, as head of the *ejido,* is a political actor within the local political system. As an authority recognised by both *mestizo* and Raramuri*,* his political influence goes well beyond land management within the limits of the *ejido*.

For instance, the *Comisario ejidal* from Aboreachi is a political actor with close links with the local mayor of the municipality of Guachochi. This network of political actors is widespread in the Tarahumara region and includes *ejido* authorities, local government officers and leaders, and is often framed around the political parties, in this case the *Partido Revolucionario Institutional* (PRI). In some other cases the networks are formed around subgroups within this party, which is politically dominant in the region. In chapter V I will explore in detail how these political elites perpetuate themselves and become contributors to structural factors explaining power disparities and that hinders the living well path or '*Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich'*.

The *ejido* of Aboreachi, based on the town of Laguna, is the other overlapping *mestizo* entity located the region. The *ejido's* administrative centre for Laguna is Aboreachi, which is the head of the Raramuri *Pobora*. Clearly they are very different in terms of function, structure and management; on the one side the *ejido* symbolizes the *mestizo* administrative unit where, in accordance with the government policies, land and forestry resources are managed and put on the market; and on the other the *pobora* of Aboreachi embodies the Raramuri perseverance in maintaining their own socio-cultural organization and ethnic identity. In Aboreachi, the *pobora* and the *ejido* reflect the interactions occurring between them, helping us to understand processes of adaptation, mediation and appropriateness of institutions such as the *ejido* shaping the power relations of the region. For instance, during fieldwork Raramuri people agreed that the *ejido* meetings must be held in Aboreachi in recognition of its status as the political centre of the Raramuri *pobora*.

Despite the territorial overlapping, the potentially conflictive nature of both entities and the unequal interactions between Raramuri and mestizo in these social spaces, the Raramuri people have learned to accept and participate in the *ejido* as a place where they can at least enjoy some implicit benefits, for instance by taking part in a negotiating space concerning territorial resources, and receiving part of the collective share of forestry

production. Nonetheless, this inclusion implies trade-offs; amongst them is the implicit recognition of the *ejido* authority, usually represented by a *mestizo* from Laguna.

In addition, they adapt to it and recognize it by seeking opportunities for agency to contest *mestizo* political dominance, in an attempt to extract whatever benefit they can from those limited spaces and resources. An example of this can be seen during election time; it is common practice for the *ejido* authorities to make use of material and monetary *ejido* resources – that is, resources meant for collective enjoyment - to support a particular candidate by coercive voting or by transporting individuals to polling stations[38].

Raramuri people engage with those practices as they have learned that they can obtain benefits by playing along. For instance, free meals and goods including building supplies are commonly distributed to persuade people to vote for particular candidates. However, there are other collective, more strategic, choices that the Raramuri make, including attempts to adjust the political imbalance they face at the municipality level. For instance, a common collective strategy is deciding amongst themselves how they would all vote in the election and support each particular candidate running for different political posts. These decisions are based on a number of criteria, including the perceived closeness of the political candidates' manifestos to their demands, whether the political party they represent has been in power for a long period, and the nature of the candidates' moral reputations, such as whether they are lining their pockets with public money. In some cases a *Pobora* collectively decides not to vote for a particular candidate on the day of the election even if they show public support for him. This is to avoid the pressure of being labelled as supporting one candidate or the other. These strategic choices to adapt, appropriate and resist power relations are the main focus of Chapter VI.

The following section is intended to describe ethnographically the particular set of localities where research fieldwork was performed. Along with the previous section of this

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[38] Fieldwork notes.Aboreachi, Mexico, June 2010

chapter, the introduction to the specific localities will provide the necessary background to explore further the clash between the discourse of the living well path or '*Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich'* and a mainstream "western" discourse of development*.* A discussion of how hindering factors play a role in persistent inter-group power asymmetries follows in chapters IV and V.

3.5 Welcome to Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi. Social relations, economic interactions and ethno-politics between two localities.

The purpose of this section is to introduce the two localities where fieldwork was carried out. A brief ethnographic account of the local features constituting the social, economic and political context will be explored. This thesis will argue that some of the features are shared by the Raramuri and *mestizo*, although there are crucial differences in how each group engages with the economic system, and further differences in socio-cultural practices of organization, settlement and interaction.

The Aboreachi *ejido* is located for socio-political purposes in the municipality of Guachochi, in Chihuahua State. As mentioned in the introduction, the fieldwork for this research was undertaken mainly in two separate places, namely in Aboreachi, which has an indigenous population, and Laguna de Aboreachi, which has a predominantly mestizo population. Laguna de Aboreachi is generally called by people just "Laguna", the Spanish word for lake or lagoon, because of its proximity to a body of water.

These two localities are part of the ejido of Aboreachi (see figure 3). Aboreachi is registered as a forestry *ejido* in the National Agrarian Registry [*Registro Nacional Agrario*] and the National Institute of Geography and Statistics [*Instituto Nacional de Geografia y Estadistica*]. The *ejido* status of collective use of land, granted by presidential decree in 1937, included 19,850 hectares which was extended in 1954, giving a total surface area of 27,612 hectares. The overall population of the *ejido* is approximately 1,347 inhabitants

(Villanueva 2006). It has 515 registered *ejidatarios* who assemble for meetings in the *ejido* headquarters, Laguna at least once every six months. Collective decisions are taken at every assembly. The *ejido* of Aboreachi is organized around forestry resources. This means that its main function is to oversee which parts of the territorial demarcation are suitable for exploitation. Trees from a given area are cut and transported to the sawmill, where they are then processed into different timber products.

The *ejido's* sawmill is one of the main infrastructure features of Laguna. It employs around 20 to 30 workers, including carriers, loggers, machinery operators and administrative staff. Timber production depends on the specifications and demand for unprocessed timber shipped to factories in cities of Chihuahua, Parral or Cuahutemoc. Timber products will normally consist of large panels, and in some cases the *ejido* sublets the extraction permits.

Figure 3. Map of the Ejido of Aboreachi and main localities.
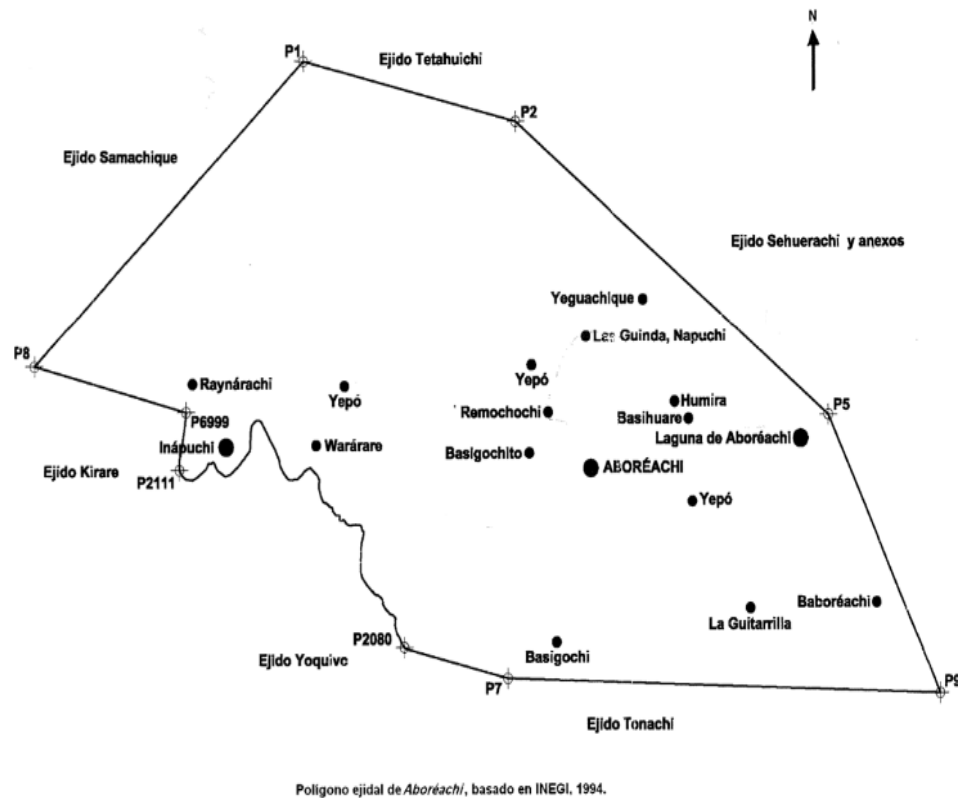
Source: National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI), 1994

The localities constitute two epicentres of interethnic relations within the same *ejido.* Laguna is situated at the side of the main road connecting the tourist town of Creel and the rather more commercial town of Guachochi. These are two of the larger towns in the Tarahumara region with a majority *mestizo* population. Both towns are considered to be political and economic centres of the Tarahumara region. Laguna is located nearly 50 kilometres from the town of Guachochi, which is the capital of the municipality of the same name.

Aboreachi is located to the west of Laguna town. A rural road passing three other localities connects Laguna and Aboreachi, and the journey takes from 45 minutes to an hour by motor vehicle. It should be noted that the condition of the road and therefore the duration of the journey depend greatly on the ever changing climate; during the rainy season, the streams that cross the road swell so that it can be difficult and sometimes virtually impossible to travel along the road. There is a walking trail frequently used by Raramuri people which can be used instead, but this means a journey of approximately two hours.

The region comprising these two localities was selected for this research on the basis of several factors. Firstly, as the research is concerned with the links between inequality and inter-ethnic relations, the localities selected had to be involved in intense, current inter-ethnic interactions. Secondly, both localities are typical examples of the Tarahumara region in terms of size of population and demographic composition. The Laguna de Aboreachi, with its 138 households, is mainly a mestizo locality with the infrastructure, economic and cultural features of other mestizo towns; the settlement is well connected by roads to other, larger mestizo towns with much contact among them as the mestizo people engage in market and other economic activity.

Aboreachi, on the other hand, has common Raramuri characteristics that make it a locality like many others in the region. Its entire population consists of 30 households, who engage in subsistence agriculture and to a lesser degree in small-scale livestock farming and seasonal paid jobs with the mestizo. As noted earlier, 52% of the total Raramuri population of the Tarahumara region lives in dispersed hamlets or *rancherias* of less than 100 people (Pintado 2004), and so the localities selected show demographic characteristics shared by many others in the Tarahumara region.

Aboreachi and Laguna constitute two of the defined areas where historical Raramuri settlements can be traced back over several generations through oral history. And at the

same time, both localities are considered by indigenous and non-indigenous people alike to be examples of persistence of ethnic identity.

An additional reason that makes these localities an interesting case for this research which is focused on inter-ethnic relations is that the *ejido* surface area matches almost exactly what is historically recognized by the Raramuri as its *pobora*. This fact, quite atypical in the Tarahumara, provides an interesting case that could suggest clear political, economic and cultural linkages between the two groups. Consequently, Laguna de Aboreachi serves as the political and economic centre for the *ejido* and, within the same territory, Aboreachi serves as the festive and religious centre and the place where the Raramuri political structure is based.

At the same time, within the *ejido* area there are localities with *gentiles*, the Raramuri subgroup that continues to resist much social and economic interaction with the *mestizo* and wider society, including with the baptized Raramuri. For an *ejido* to include both subgroups of Raramuri and also *mestizo* is rare within the Tarahumara region and adds to the importance of considering intra-ethnic and social relations among groups.

Finally, these localities are located in a municipality in the Tarahumara region that shows high levels of deprivation and extreme inequality as mentioned earlier (for instance, it is one of the municipalities with the largest disparities on the HDI compared by ethnic population (UNDP-CDI 2006), the Raramuri infant mortality rate (95 per 1000 live births) is nearly double that of the national indigenous infant mortality rate and triple that of the overall national rate. (Monarrez-Espino, Greiner and Martinez; 2004), and empirical accounts collected in fieldwork also refer to the high levels of child malnutrition in parts of the *ejido*[39]. The Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi localities therefore present a compelling combination of research conditions for further exploration of the economic,

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[39] Interview with Eliseo Gonzalez, medical auxiliary working in the *gentile* localities of Inapuchi and Wararare. he explained that 49 out of 50 children presented some degree of malnutrition.

social and political impacts of inter-ethnic interactions between the Raramuri and the mestizo.

In the case of the Aboreachi *pobora* there are four localities acting as main centres or *capitanias*: Aboréachi (locality), Umirá, Yewachiki, Las Guindas and Basigochi, with the total numbers of *rancherias* coming 43[40]. It is interesting to note that only the Laguna de Aboreachi has any mestizo population: all the other localities have a completely Raramuri population.

Aboreachi is the head town of the *pobora*, and it is here that people gather throughout the festive calendar to participate in ceremonies and political gatherings led by the Raramuri authorities. It is, therefore, in Aboreachi that the *Waru seriame,* the highest authority within the Raramuri political structure, has his power base[41]. On at least two Sundays per month this political leader delivers a public speech or *nawesari* after the religious service in the local church. The *nawesari* consists of a gathering where the speech given by the *Seriame* or other authorities commonly gives advice to those present and sometimes directly to those Raramuri who have broken a social norm. The advice relates to the importance of keeping to a good path (or *Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich*), which implies preserving and maintaining the traditions and way of life of the group (Merrill 1988). Raramuri from all over the 43 localities within the *Pobora* are likely to take part in these gatherings. In Chapter IV, the *nawesari* will be presented as an example of a culturally embedded representation of how an ethnic discourse and living-well discourse are produced in the Raramuri society. Later, in Chapter VI, a case study of the selection of

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[40] Agua Caliente, Aboréachi, Baboréachi, Basiáwarachi, Basigochi (1), Basigochi (2), Basigochi (3), Basigochito, Basuchi, Charérachi, Chipawichi, Choréachi, Epochi, Guitarrilla, Inápuchi, Laguna de Aboréachi, Lagunita de la Laguna, Las Guindas, Napisochi, Napuchi, Osérare, Otébachi, Pesachi, Rajúbachi.
Ranchería de la Laguna, Rayabó, Rekowata, Rekowata (Awachochi), Remochochi, Rosánachi, Samoba, San Pablo, Sikochi, Sitanápuchi, Umirá, Warárare, Wichuréachi, Wisarochi, Wiyórare, Yepó (1), Yepó (2), Yewachiki.

[41] Other authority positions identified in the Pobora of Aboreachi are: 3 *Seriames (authority in his home locality and helps the Waru Seriame)*; one *general (coordinates capitanes in festivities and help the Seriame)*; 5 *capitanes (act as organizers in festivities)* ; 12 *mayoras (act as advisors)*; 2 *alguaciles (act as peacekeeping judges)*; and 8 *soldados* (act as police).

the *Waru Seriame* in Aboreachi will serve as an example of political contestation between the Raramuri and the mestizo where the processes of adaptation and appropriation can be clearly seen.

3.5.a Laguna de Aboreachi, the mestizo locality

The precise origins of human settlement in Laguna are not clear; however it dates to a time well before the road was built during the 1960s. There is little doubt, taking into account the topography of the region, that the distinctive presence of water from the lake and the small plateau where the town is positioned makes it an ideal site for human settlement and agriculture.

Being connected by one of the main roads in the region, Laguna de Aboreachi has a distinctly non-indigenous feel. A dozen grocery stores, a few mechanical workshops and other small business are owned exclusively by *mestizo* families, most of whom share family ties. Most *mestizo* homes in the locality resemble a typical house in the larger cities of Chihuahua. They are composed of an average of two bedrooms, a kitchen and eating area, a living room and separate toilet facilities. The houses are usually constructed of bricks, blocks and cement. The households generally have electric kitchen appliances, interior decoration, at least one TV, a telephone, sofas. Almost all *mestizo* households have at least one car or pickup truck. Often *mestizo* families from Laguna use their pickup trucks even for short journeys within the locality. The use of trucks manifests a clear element of social prestige and teenagers are quite fond of this practice[42].

Although the great majority of the population in Laguna are mestizos settled alongside the road, there are a few Raramuri families which have settled or built a second house on the shores of the Lagoon in an area called "*Rancheria*" or "*Lagunita*". This is the case of Fernando, son of Manuel Holguin, a Raramuri settled in Aboreachi. Fernando is one of a dozen Raramuri employed by the ejido sawmill as a machine operator. Having the

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[42] Fieldwork notes, Laguna de Aboreachi, México 2010

opportunity to work, Fernando had to find a place closer to the Laguna. At first he lived with an uncle, along with his younger sister who was attending school in Laguna. Later Fernando built a house for his family, i.e. his wife and three children. Fernando's family is not the only one to relocate; the availability of elementary, secondary and junior high school and accessibility of income generating activities are the main reasons for a Raramuri to consider moving home. In this case Laguna de Aboreachi offers all three of these education levels. Generally, this change of residence is temporary as they still maintain community relations with kin in the Raramuri localities and still participate in festivities.

As in other regions of the Tarahumara, this temporary change of residency can be analysed as an adaptation strategy. It suggests that education and income are desired services well embedded within the decisions of the Raramuri household. This demand for services is also encouraged by the *Oportunidades* social protection programme, as cash benefits are dependent on a repeated use of health and educational institutions.[43] According to fieldwork interviews, both the Raramuri and *mestizo* population greatly value being beneficiaries of social protection programmes such as *Oportunidades,* or programmes that support agricultural production like *Procampo,* as they represent certainty of income in an often uncertain economic environment. The amount of money a beneficiary receives from this programme varies according to the number of children and their level of current education; however as the beneficiary database shows each head of a household received a monthly average of 770 Mexican pesos (approximately 39.5 UK pounds).

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[43] The *Oportunidades* program is especially aimed at the women and children of each household. There are five components to the program: Nutrition which is intended to help secure basic nutritional requirements and represents 420 Mexican pesos (approximately 21 UK pounds); Education, intended to help with school expenses and given depending on the number of children a household has at school, representing around 790 pesos (approximately 37 UK pounds) (for this school attendance is prerequisite); Senior adults (although currently this component as at 2010 has not been applied to the region); Energy, intended to be a subsidy for electricity used (even though Aboreachi, just like many other smaller localities in the region, lacks this service) and represents 110 pesos (5.6 UK Pounds); *Vivir Mejor* additional amount of 240 pesos (12.3 UK pounds); and food subsidy (also not currently applicable in the region). For more information on this social protection program visit www.oportunidades.gob.mx

The importance of these programmes lies in the degree of income security in the form of cash transfers. However, the effects of the implementation of *Oportunidades* on the indigenous population have not gone unnoticed (Sariego 2008b; Ulrichs and Roelen 2012). A common critique of these types of policies is that through the demand for education and health services indigenous people are required to physically travel long distances, in some cases, incentivising temporary migration from their home communities to larger centres where the services are provided, implying time constraints and transportation costs. This is particularly significant in indigenous regions, such as the Tarahumara, where health and education services are scarcer than other indigenous regions and the topographic characteristics of the terrain pose a challenge in themselves (*idem*).

Another source of income for both *mestizo* and Raramuri *ejidatarios* are the *ejido* shares for economic exploitation. Most of the households in the localities of the area have at least one *ejidatario*, including all of the households of Aboreachi. However, the *ejido* profits distributed to the *ejidatarios* varies widely depending on several factors and by no means represents a regular or even secure income for the households. It depends usually on several factors. Firstly, it depends on the market for timber products, especially the price, the size of forest being cut and processed in the sawmill, and the timing of production. There could be months without extraction, and then several more months before a profit is made and then shared. An additional factor that adds to the uncertainty of the *ejido* as an income source has to do with un-transparency involved in the *ejido* institutional arrangements, specifically, in the individual performance and willingness of each *Comisariado ejidal* to commit to accountability and transparency. Interviewees in the *ejido* of Aboreachi remembered how not all *Comisariados ejidales* shared the collective profits regularly or at least not the full amount. Even though their individual prestige and status as authorities depends on their having conducted themselves properly in office, the hierarchical and operational structure of the *ejido* means that there is little if any enforcement of transparency and accountability. Institutional arrangements such as the

ejido, as I will argue in chapter V, are crucial in the perpetuation of unequal power distribution and resource allocation, which in turn explain the differences in the well-being of Raramuri and *mestizo* people.

During the fieldwork phase in 2010, the *Comisariado Ejidal* in post at the time enjoyed positive public opinion among both Raramuri and *mestizo* as they valued the fact that he shared the profits when expected and called regular assemblies[44]. According to observation and interviews the previous *Comisariado* did not share the profits as regularly and as openly as expected, which produced much public anger. However, as we will see in Chapter VI, the Raramuri of Aboreachi have subtle and hidden ways of confronting the authorities. Even in other ejido*s* in the region, it is rarely that collective mobilization and active demands are organized.

Returning to the livelihoods and economic features of the Laguna de Aboreachi locality, the commercial livelihood of its *mestizo* population is reinforced by the increasing commoditization of services. For instance, since Laguna is the commercial centre and the only locality within a 20Km radius where groceries and services can be obtained, it is there that cash from social protection programmes, *ejido* shares and other income sources directly and indirectly benefits the small businesses run by *mestizos*.

The dozens of *mestizo* businesses (including well-stocked stores selling clothes, food, automobile parts, tools and electrical appliances) thrive on captive demand and buyers. A common characteristic is that most of the owners have kinship relations between them. Not surprisingly, members of these families have more than once been head of the *ejido*, or held top positions within it as well as other political posts in the region. A similar pattern occurs in other *mestizo* localities in the Tarahumara region. It can be said that the *mestizo* population benefits greatly from having a commercial monopoly in the hands of a few families. Indeed, the scattered settlements of localities through the Sierra act as

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[44] Fieldwork notes, Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi, Mexico, 2010

clusters where service providers are limited to a particular area, and to which farming, commercial and economic activities of *mestizo* and Raramuri population are linked.

It is common practice to ask for a loan or credit in stores in order to buy food and other goods. An indication of this is that outside the stores are notices publically displaying a list of those who have debts. Many have been requested to settle their debts for several months, including relatively small sums. The same is true of one Aboreachi grocery store, where Cesar, the owner, said that several people who have failed for months to make any payments off their loans do not return to the store in order to avoid being asked.

It is not rare to observe *gentiles* Raramuri buying products in the Laguna stores, especially during the *ejido* assemblies. This observation is relevant, as Kennedy (1970) in his study of the Aboreachi area mentions quite the opposite, stating that the isolation of the *gentile* population is such that many of them do not even travel as far as the nearest *mestizo* towns and cities. However, fieldwork evidence suggests that the apparent increased market interaction of this group is an indication of social change during the last few decades. They do, however, continue to show more reluctance to engage in social, economic and political interactions with the larger society.

A crucial service provided in Laguna is medical care. There is a small public clinic operated by the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS), under the programme of *Unidad Médica Rural IMSS - Oportunidades*. Just beside the clinic is the local office where the *Oportunidades* programme is administered for the region. Although medical care is provided universally, the clinic has to cover eight nearby localities.[45] It offers basic services and first aid care, and is run by two nurses and a doctor, all of them being *mestizo* and born in Laguna. Patients in need of specialized care are sent to larger clinics in Guachochi, or even to Chihuahua[46].

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[45] Laguna de Aboreachi, Rosanachi, Guitarrilla, Yepo, Basigochi, Yeguachique, Basihuare, and Humira.

[46] People from Aboreachi sometimes go to a clinic in the town of Samachique. This clinic, named Clinic *Mision Tarahumara,* is administrated by evangelical groups from the United States and receives financial

Observation on an almost daily basis during the fieldwork stage established that the clinic is visited quite frequently, especially by women. This could be another effect of the implementation of the *Oportunidades* programme as female beneficiaries are required to have health check-ups on a regular basis. Every two months, when *Oportunidades* cash is delivered to the beneficiaries, there is a visible increase in the amount of commercial activity in the Laguna: stores are busy and *mestizos* and Raramuri alike take advantage of the customers having cash. Even improvised markets are held outside the clinic, where Laguna store owners and small retailers from Guachochi and other towns sell products that are in demand: prepared food, second hand clothes, illegally copied CDs, household appliances, among others. According to observation during fieldwork in Laguna, there is often a high demand for alcohol amongst both Raramuri and *mestizo*. Beer and cheap tequila are sold (legally or illegally) in most of the *mestizo* stores in the Laguna and other larger localities. The demand for alcohol is especially visible when the *Oportunidades* programmes makes payments. It is important to note that *Oportunidades* makes payments only to female members of the household. The rationale behind this decision is that women tend to be better at managing resources and the needs of the household than men. There is no empirical information as to whether this female control has the intended effect or not. However, as usually men have control of other cash sources the possibility of buying alcohol is still there as women do not typically are seen buy alcohol.

An additional health service provider in the Aboreachi region is the local government health office, which provides a group of doctors and auxiliaries that visit the localities on a regular basis. Between these two instances of government, one from the local state and other at federal level, a health service is extended to the rest of the accessible localities. The health service provided by means of these medical visits is quite basic and frequently does not include any specialized equipment or medicines.

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support from USAID. The American staff offer services free of charge to the indigenous population and enjoy a good reputation for the quality of service among some sections of the Raramuri population.

According to medical records, the most common illnesses registered by the clinic are respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases. Alcohol intake also represents a public health problem, as does the increasing consumption of processed products high in sugar that result in a high incidence of diabetes among the indigenous population. Work-related fractures are common, as are injuries produced by falling, especially among the elderly population.

Empirical evidence suggests a differentiated service for Raramuri and non-Raramuri people in the Laguna Clinic. There is a series of determinants for this such as linguistic and cultural barriers in the approach to certain illnesses[47]. However, fieldwork notes suggest that most Raramuri people's perception of the quality of health service in the Laguna Clinic is low.[48] Indeed, participant observation performed in one health centre in the region corroborates these perceptions. For instance, in one account collected, a parent was desperately trying to locate a family member who was at an Aboreachi school celebration, to go with his sick child to a Samachique Hospital. His son, who was less than five years old, had not been eating and had been feeling weak for days, so the parents first took him to the Laguna Clinic. He complained vehemently of the attention this son received in the clinic: "Those girls who attended in the Clinic merely prescribed him *paracetamol* and discharged him"[49]. However, his condition did not improve, so in desperation the family took him to Samachique Clinic where an X-ray showed indications of water in the lungs. It was a case of severe pneumonia due to over exposure to cold temperatures and exacerbated by the lack of proper medical care. According to the informant and interviews with other medical personnel, this is not an isolated case in the region as similar cases of sick children with preventable diseases are under-reported.

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[47] For instance, in chapter IV we will touch on cosmological understandings of living well in relation to health and how certain diseases have a "cosmological background" and therefore should be treated by Raramuri doctors through special practices involving dreams and invoking supernatural forces.
[48] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi, 2010
[49] Anonymousinterview. Aboreachi, Mexico. October 2010.

Additionally, it is important to note that distant localities where the *gentile* Raramuri population lives are not visited by medical staff as frequently as other localities. The reason for this is that each medical auxiliary from the local state health office is responsible for several localities, and visits to the *gentile* localities which are remote might well take up two days even in normal circumstances. Evidently, the care supplied by one auxiliary alone is not enough for adequate coverage. The local medical advisor is a local Raramuri who lives in a *rancheria* called Las Guindas. He provides the Aboreachi *pobora* with medical advice and is actively engaged in national health campaigns such as vaccination and sex education. Every time he visits the localities, he keeps a record of three indicators of child malnutrition: height-for-age; weight-for-age, weight-for-height. For the *gentile* population he has recorded 49 children with some degree of malnutrition out of a total of 50[50]. He feels that this is a clear indication of the level of poverty affecting that particular sub-group.[51]

Mestizos in Laguna also have similar perceptions of the low quality of local health services; however they have greater access to other health care alternatives. For instance, an additional dimension of accessing health services in the Tarahumara region is transport cost. In the case described above, the family had to pay 3,000 pesos (143 UK pounds) to get from Aboreachi to the Samachique clinic and back, approximately two hours' journey in total. *Mestizo* families in La Laguna usually have easier access to transport and greater material and income capacity to pay the costs in such emergencies.

Therefore, the cost of transportation is implicitly an ethnic differentiator. As clinic and medical infrastructure are located in larger towns the services tend to be closer to the *mestizo* population and furthest away from the indigenous population. This is an early indication of the differentiated vulnerabilities to be explored in Chapter V: even though

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[50] Height for age is an indicator of chronic malnutrition., A child exposed to inadequate nutrition for a long period of time will show reduced growth and therefore lower height compared to other children of the same age; Weight-for-age is a composite indicator of both long-term malnutrition and current malnutrition; Weight-for-height is an indicator of acute malnutrition that tells us if a child is too thin for a given height.
[51] Interview conducted during fieldwork. February 2010. Aboreachi, Mexico

both *mestizo* and Raramuri similarly lack proper services there are different ways to face and get around deprivations. Having means of transport in this rugged and mountainous area implies more than accessing services, it can also imply an income source. Owners of cars or the very popular pick-up trucks may benefit economically from the demand for transportation, especially in urgent cases such as medical emergencies. Again the great majority of the *mestizo* families have at least one car or truck, and some have up to three. In Aboreachi only two people have pick-up trucks, both of which are old, apart from the school teachers, who are *mestizo* and have their permanent homes in Guachochi. The two pickup owners in Aboreachi are frequently asked to transport injured or sick people to the clinic in the Laguna, Samachique or Guachochi, for instance. Whether they grant the request depends on the drivers' mood and on the pickup trucks' mechanical condition – as very often they are off the road due to their precarious mechanical state. Additionally, what they can be expected to charge for the trip varies widely. Some people, *mestizos* and Raramuri alike, may charge only petrol usage for the journey, while others ask for a significant amount of money as they see it as an earning opportunity. In addition, it is not that all transportation is subject to market and income consideration: most rides among friends or family are apparently free while some others may be charged up to 100 - 300 Mexican pesos (£5 - £14.70) for the round trip from Aboreachi to Laguna and back.

Chapter IV, while exploring the dimensions of the discourses of living-well or *'Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich'*, will argue that among the *Raramuri* there is a culturally embedded incentive not to accumulate material goods. Possessing a vehicle can represent not only an income source but can also a social obligation through having requests to attend to and therefore less time for other duties.

Another significant landmark in Laguna is the Catholic chapel. The chapel is attended by a visiting nun from the community of Sisogichi. The chapel is open only during the religious celebrations of the Catholic calendar. Only *mestizo* families attend these celebrations; the Raramuri population attends the church in Aboreachi.

In the Laguna, as in other localities in the Tarahumara region, there is an increasing number of evangelical churches. There is one evangelical temple in Laguna, and more mestizo families than Raramuri participate. One central issue concerning membership of the Protestant denomination is the strict prohibition against drinking alcohol. This is crucial considering that *teswino* - mainly consisting of fermented maize - is central to Raramuri social networks of solidarity and collective work. This represents a cultural clash for some Raramuri members of these temples, although some take the alcohol prohibition rather lightly or limit themselves to drinking only *teswuino* and leaving aside beer and liquors.

Having briefly introduced some main features of the mestizo location of Laguna Aboreachi, we will now explore the second locality researched: Aboreachi.

3.5.b Aboreachi, the Raramuri locality.

If Laguna has semi-urban characterization, Aboreachi definitely has a distinctively rural setting. There are no paved roads, running water, sewerage or electricity services. Topographic and natural landmarks such as rocky mountains in the west of the locality have historical and cultural importance for the Raramuri people. At the top of the mountain there is a series of ancient funeral caves, which are referred to in a well-known myth shared amongst the Raramuri*:* the story of the *Kanoko* or giants that inhabited the region long ago.

This myth is retold with slight local variations throughout the Tarahumara region, not only amongst the Raramuri people but also amongst other indigenous people in Chihuahua. According to the myth, a long time ago there was a race of *Kanokos* or *Ganokos* sharing the territory of the Raramuri (Cruz 2000). They are described as tall, big and fearsome, so much so that it is said that with a single blow they could tear out a pine tree by its roots.

Kanokos did much harm to the Raramuri people and did not respect them: often they stoled the Raramuri women and ate their children. After some time the Raramuri organized themselves and decided to kill the *Kanokos,* but as they were so strong other clever ways had to used to overtake them. So the Raramuri decided to trick them into eating beans mixed with a very poisonous plant. The trick worked as the *Kanokos* did not recognize the plant. When the *Kanokos* were dead the Raramuri people burned them in the Aboreachi caves. Even now, the present inhabitants of Aboreachi recognize burn marks in the caves as indicating the original site where the defeat of the giants took place.

One political interpretation of the myth which is meaningful in terms of this research is how the Raramuri organize themselves collectively in order to face a shared circumstance of exploitation by a "foreign" non-Raramuri people. In the myth, it was recognized that force was not an effective practice but, rather, local indigenous knowledge of natural plants was. Chapter VI will uncover these culturally embedded ways in which the Raramuri of Aboreachi demonstrate resistance to power in inter-ethnic relations. For the moment, this fact is an indication that Aboreachi is a site which the Raramuri consider to be a centre of mythical and cultural significance.

Another distinctive natural characteristic of Aboreachi is the small stream running through the valley. Water is collected from the stream into a water basin up the hill and is distributed by gravity into hoses. This method of water distribution is the most widespread in the region as no running water or sanitation facilities exist. People bathe along the stream and it is common to see women with their children washing clothes. Most house latrines are built in the proximity of the stream, creating a potentially hazardous source of infection. People have to travel to Laguna de Aboreachi for treatment as there are no medical facilities in Aboreachi, although there is a long recorded history of diseases and illnesses affecting the locality. [52]

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[52] For instance, in 1960 there was a well-documented epidemic of bronchopneumonia affecting approximately 22 Raramuri localities. Aboreachi was particularly affected. The severity of the epidemic led to 23 recorded deaths in Aboreachi alone, and approximately 161 deaths in total. The situation was

Aboreachi is in a valley surrounded by mountainous terrain, dominated by pine tree and oak forest. Houses generally consist of two rooms: one serving as a cooking and eating area with just a few pieces of home-made wooden furniture, and a second room for sleeping. Depending on the size of the household, the cooking area can also serve as a sleeping area, especially in winter. The most common household furniture and appliances are: wooden tables and chairs, a stove made from half of a 200-litre metal container, a battery-operated radio, plastic kitchen utensils, and a flash light. The simplicity of the material possessions in most houses contrasts with those of Laguna. The latrines are located about 100 meters from the house.

Aboreachi's spatial organization also shows the importance of agriculture. The 25 houses, made of logs or adobe bricks, are scattered across the valley and the arable fields are close by. In fact, due to the limited number of plots suitable for farming, houses are built around the plots rather than the other way around.

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documented by personnel of the health department of the INI where they focus on the factors of health vulnerability affecting the Raramuri people. Among the factors are: insufficient health personnel and facilities (there were only 3 doctors to cover the entire region of the Tarahumara at the time of the epidemic), not enough medicines, demographic dispersion of the indigenous population, and inadequate culturally sensitive information related to Raramuri health. (Archive from the Coordination Centre of Guachochi for Indigenous Action of the National Institution of Indigenous Affairs (INI); Docket 9 File 9 Document 00028).

Photo 2. View of Aboreachi from a nearby mountain

Photo by the author 2010.

In some cases, where both partners inherited a portion of their family land, households farm more than one plot. Frequently the second plot of land lies on a neighbouring *Rancheria* where one of the spouses originated. In a nuclear family, both spouses work together on farming activities, although males are responsible for the physically demanding tasks. Throughout the farming cycle, a familiar scene in the locality is both partners ploughing, planting, weeding and looking after the plots. As noted, sometimes the plots are far away, so people will often visit relatives and friends during these journeys. As farming often involves physically demanding tasks, animals such as mules and

horses are needed and highly prized.[53] In Aboreachi, only 7 out of 30 households own cattle and horses. The rest of the families have to borrow the animals from these households or from other relatives. The relationship of this fact to the capacity to perform farming activities will be further explored in Chapter IV.

Among other buildings, the church and the (boarding) primary school are important. The church plays a role of great importance in the *Pobora* ceremonial and religious festivities and can be considered as its spatial centre. Like other churches in the region, the inside and the outside patios are used for distinct ceremonies. The nuns of Laguna celebrate mass and other Catholic ceremonies on special Catholic occasions; meanwhile the outer patio, just beside the church, is where Raramuri political and festive gatherings take place. It is on this patio that the Raramuri authorities - mainly the *Waru Seriame* - deliver the *Nawesari* and hold meetings to settle problems such as fights and matrimonial problems; to give advice on how to behave properly; to give information on issues concerning livelihoods and ways of living in the locality; to organize celebrations and reach consensus on collective issues.

Aboreachi's elementary school is named after Francisco Plancarte, one of the directors of the *National Institute of Indigenous Affairs* (INI) during the 1950s. The School was formally established in 1965, but Aboreachi was one of the first Raramuri localities in the Tarahumara region to have teachers or *culture promoters,* paid by the government, permanently present. Over the years, the school then became a boarding school.[54] This meant that most of the adult population currently living in the town were educated in the same school that their sons and daughters now attend. This strategy was implemented by the INI in response to the considerable distance that children had to walk from neighbouring localities to attend school. After being administered by the INI for several

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[53] A mule is considered to be more valuable than a horse for farming. Kennedy (1970), in his study of Inapuchi and the Aboreachi area, relates that most if not all the households in Aboreachi own horses and oxen; however the Raramuri own no oxen and only few horses.

[54] Archive from the Coordination Centre of Guachochi for Indigenous Action of the National Institution of Indigenous Affairs (INI); Docket 150 File 18 Document 00045.

decades, the school is currently run by the federal government through the Indigenous Education Office. In 2003, a local private charitable foundation of businessmen called the *Fundacion Chihuahuense del Empresariado (FECHAC)* rebuilt the school with new and modern equipment including a computer room with 15 personal computers and a flat-screen TV, two fully equipped dormitories for females and males respectively, a kitchen and dining room, and several classrooms. In 2010, the school is still the only installation in Aboreachi with electricity, benefitting from a series of solar panels. Throughout my numerous periods staying in Aboreachi during fieldwork, not even once did I see the computers being used at all, and some even remained in their original boxes for years. The reasons offered by the headmaster and teachers, when asked, included problems with the electricity supply and lack of the technical knowledge to even use the equipment, let alone teach the teachers. At times, especially on Fridays, teachers set up the flat-screen TV for students to watch films.[55] The school is also the only place in the locality where toilets and running water facilities are found. The investment - proudly publicised on a board at the school entrance - cost in total more than 3 million pesos as part of various infrastructure projects promoted by the FECHAC Foundation all over the state.

A total of approximately 100 children go to classes, eat three meals a day and sleep at the Aboreachi School during the day on weekdays. After school on weekdays, most children return to their homes. Some of them live in the town, others in nearby villages; however another 3 or 4 live in the '*gentile*' localities and have to walk around 5 hours to get to their homes, and these children will only return to their homes during the weekend. The school has a staff of six teachers, half male and the other half female, two academic auxiliaries, two cooks, and the headmaster. Of the six teachers, four are considered mestizos by themselves and by the community, and the other two - including the headmaster - are Raramuri. The two cooks and auxiliaries are Raramuri originally from Aboreachi. In term

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[55] I observed teachers watching and enjoying, alongside Raramuri students, well known films featuring a popular film character of the 1980s and 1990s named 'La India Maria'. These films revolve around ridiculous and foolish scenes of an indigenous woman living in the city. In my view, these films reflect a highly stereotyped view of indigenous people as being foolish, uneducated, and appropriate targets for ridicule while trying unsuccessfully to adapt to urban settings.

time, teachers live in a separate accommodation wing during their stay at Aboreachi, which usually coincides with the academic calendar. Most of them have their permanent houses in the larger town of Guachochi. Some teachers give their lessons in the Raramuri language; however the majority only speak Spanish. In general, the teachers are not well thought of by Raramuri parents. This is mainly due to the fact that some male teachers are often absent from school, especially on Mondays or Fridays, as they extend the weekend in Guachochi or other towns. Alcohol consumption, especially during weekends, is a common practice. According to the general opinion of parents, teachers fail to set an example for their children: "they do not work hard every day and sometimes they turn up drunk"[56]. Additionally, the academic calendar is not followed rigorously; vacation periods usually start a week early and last a week longer than they are supposed to. These factors combined led to there being consistently fewer hours of school than projected. Even the teachers themselves agreed about how little time they spent in the classrooms. Some explained that this was due to the extra academic paperwork the government required. Through 2010, I calculated that approximately a month's worth of schooldays were lost due to teachers' absences.[57]

The importance of school in the locality goes far beyond the educative side. As it is run as a boarding school there is also an implied dimension concerned with nutrition, which represents a secure source of food for school children and staff and their families. It is worth noting that access to food is a good incentive to keep children in school, not to mention the requirement of the *Oportunidades* programme for school registration. As at other boarding schools, the food is generally provided in sufficient amount by the Programme of School Meals run by the *Secretaria de Educacion Publica,* the Public Education Secretariat which is designed to fulfil nutritional requirements for children. It is only at school that the children, and indeed the families of teachers and other staff, have the benefit of eating three times a day. In Aboreachi as in other Raramuri localities, eating once or at most twice a day is the norm. This fact cannot be underestimated, as one of the

[56] Anonymousinterview. Aboreachi, Mexico, June 2010.
[57] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi, Mexico. June, August, October, December 2010

main reasons why Raramuri people send their children to school is for the secure availability of food. Additionally, I consider that the fact of having a boarding school helps in diminishing the likelihood of child malnutrition compared with other more remote areas of the region.

An observable effect of Aboreachi's school within the locality is the consolidation of a non-Raramuri space for social interactions. For instance, during the graduation ceremony, teachers used the space to organize fiestas in the *mestizo* style, featuring local music, which attracted numerous *mestizos* from nearby towns. Also, the school is the only space in Aboreachi where Spanish is spoken in an everyday fashion. And as the teachers have their accommodation within the limits of the school their daily routines keep them within that social space with hardly any interaction with the rest of the people in the locality. Moreover, parents and teachers agree that very little accountability is offered or demanded in terms of the students' academic progress. These factors mean that Aboreachi's school functions as a *mestizo* cluster of internal social relations with no relevant bridging interactions with the locality. In terms of power relations, this empirical fact is an important indicator of how state institutions function in indigenous localities. For instance, in this case, the Aboreachi School represents not only an educational institution, but also *mestizo* representation and influence.

Most people living in Aboreachi who are around the age of 40 were educated in primary education at Aboreachi as well, and were members of only a handful of students. In those days the school consisted of only one room, which still stands today although it is partially in ruins.[58] Comparisons through time of teaching now and then are frequent, and the differences are usually noted in negative terms[59]. For instance, frequent comments are made about what the content of the academic curriculum should be in terms of what the Raramuri children must learn. The older generation remembers how the school used to

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[58] Some elderly Raramuri still remember how before there was a school at Aboreachi, they walked to school in the distant Raramuri locality of Tonachi where there was an old and important boarding school. They remember they had to walk one whole day to reach their school in Tonachi from Aboreachi.
[59] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi, Mexico. June, September, 2010.

teach what they consider useful skills, such as carpentry, and the school even had a collective farming plot where students and teachers planted and harvested some crops. The present curriculum changed after becoming standardized nationwide and now practical skills are not taught; it "is only books", parents would say. These forms of teaching, based on applied skills linked to the socio-cultural context of the indigenous population, were in fact a central component of the educational curriculum when schools were administered by the Indigenous Affairs Office during the INI period, from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Within Aboreachi, a relevant landmark in terms of infrastructure is the local grocery store, part of the network of Diconsa community stores[60]. Cesar, the owner of the store and head of a household comprising himself, his wife and two school-age girls, mentions that even if he offers lower subsidised prices than other stores, many families are not always able to pay for what they purchase: some households struggle even to buy a kilo of salt. So credit is frequently requested, on occasion for up to 3 months. Some never pay at all, he adds. Although prices are slightly lower at the Diconsa store than the Laguna stores, the products supplied by Diconsa every two months do not represent much variety so he compensates by ordering other goods people have asked for from Guachochi or Laguna. Cesar has three different credit accounts to buy merchandise from these bigger stores, and this represents sometimes considerable debt of approximately 10,000 pesos (£517 UK Pounds). On the occasions when sales are so sluggish that he is unable to repay on time the credit given by the Guachochi stores, he resorts to going over his limit with another loan to get enough cash to pay the debt.

He would be happy to pay this debt off, but in his view there is no accessible – or at least legal - way to obtain the money to do so.[61] Cesar is the only Raramuri in Aboreachi that

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[60] Diconsa is a state agency operated by the Social Development Secretary that supplies subsidised basic food products in rural areas. They manage a network of more than 22,000 community-owned stores nationwide.

[61] During fieldwork it was detected that most of that Raramuri male headed households interviewed in Aboreachi have worked for mestizos, at least once, cultivating poppy in remote neighbouring areas. In some

has a permanent source of income in addition to those from social protection programmes and the *ejido* shares, yet the income is not enough even to pay his debt.

A local channel of communication very popular among indigenous people and some *mestizos* in the Sierra is radio. Especially popular is the government radio station concerned with indigenous groups based in Guachochi. The "Voice of the Sierra Tarahumara" radio station is one of more than twenty indigenous community radio stations across the country managed by the INI with various content of interest to indigenous people. There are programmes about traditional music by indigenous groups, news and local notices, but perhaps most importantly there is a section where individuals can post personal messages and announcements for people to hear. This is a common and quite effective way to send urgent notices. The vast majority of the radio content is bilingual, mainly Raramuri and Spanish, but there is also content in the languages of the *pima, odame* and *warijo*, the other three indigenous groups in the region.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has presented an overview of the Tarahumara region as an arena of ethnic interactions suffused in asymmetrical interethnic relations. I have argued that throughout history this region has seen contestation in terms of control of natural resources and in terms of human-land relationships among the indigenous and non-indigenous population. A crucial influence on the region is the increasing national and global economic neoliberal policies, which have led to exploitation of natural resources such as forestry, land for commercial use, tourism, narcotic cultivation and mining industry, benefitting only a few. The implementation of these policies describes a universalising discourse of development, which does not take into account how indigenous contexts are being subjected to power

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cases this activity represented the best paid job they have had in their lives. However, the high risks associated with this illicit activity, mean it is an option not to be taken lightly, but rather to be carefully thought throuhg, and when taken it largely represents a coping strategy.

relations by dominant groups that benefit more from the economic policies. The inter-ethnic disparities in socio-economic indicators, comparing the indigenous and non-indigenous population at the national level and at the regional level in the Tarahumara, disclose the power asymmetries that lie beneath.

The Tarahumara has been subjected to economic and political transformation and social change, altering the livelihoods of its population. Such processes as the *ejido* system greatly modified land and natural resource management, introducing a set of new authorities which conflicted with the Raramuri's existing social organization in the form of the *Pobora*. However, this region has been characterised by a persistent indigenous way of life that has learnt to adapt in order to maintain ethnic identities, to the extent that *gentile* localities continue to avoid much contact with the wider society. Throughout this chapter, which has introduced the region, an emphasis has been placed on the contextual differences in terms of livelihoods and way of living among both ethnic groups.

The following chapter will explore, from an analytical perspective, the dominant living-well discourse also referred to in the Raramuri language as '*Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich'* or 'the right path' as identified by the Raramuri of Aboreachi. This will be explored and their limitations based on inter-ethnic relations will be scrutinised. In accordance with this dominant discourse, two main dimensions of living well are explored which build up the culturally embedded understanding of wellbeing: the significance of farming and the importance of having a strong sense of community rooted in solidarity and cooperative practices. Additionally, this discourse is explored in relation to cosmological beliefs and cultural drivers. This will form the basis of the argument, later in Chapter V, that asymmetrical power relations between both groups are expressed as hindering factors for the Raramuri's sense of wellbeing, explaining some intra-group differentials. Subsequently, chapter VI will explore how Raramuri people resist and react to those hindering factors.

CHAPTER IV. THE DISCOURSE OF LIVING WELL IN THE TARAHUMARA: RARAMURI VOICES.

"The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives. This may appear to be simple truth, but it is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth" (UNDP; 1990:9)

The aim of this chapter is to present empirical evidence collected in fieldwork concerning the local, *emic* Raramuri understanding of living well. I will argue in the chapter that narratives and empirical accounts collected from fieldwork describe an identifiable discourse which the Raramuri manifest in different ways. This discourse, identified through ethnographic methods, manifests itself through localised and contextual narratives embedded in everyday activities, and through inter- and intra-ethnic interactions among the indigenous population in Aboreachi.

The discourse gives an indication of what is valued, the aspirations and the motivation to live how you live, what are the dimensions and priorities of what constitutes an ideal of living well for the Raramuri people. In doing so, the evidence presented here relates to the fundamental principle that human wellbeing is neither universal nor static but rather is bound by cultural and social references and context. Specifically, I argue that the Raramuri group has historically chosen a path of living that distinguishes them from other groups and the rest of the population in the Tarahumara region and in Mexico, and has also led to differences in their understandings of wellbeing. This indigenous group's differentiated ways of living and livelihoods have changed over time. They have adapted, changed and evolved to deal with vulnerability and subordinate status. Nonetheless, the Raramuri, like

the other 62 ethno-linguistic groups in Mexico[62], have maintained to varying degrees their own cultural institutions, socio-political organisations, language, cosmology and religion, which continue to show ethnic differences from the wider society. These differences link to diverse ways of relating with nature and living in society that reflect important differences in livelihoods and ways of living from those of the wider society. Accounting for these important differences are dissimilar understandings of how to achieve wellbeing, and broader life aspirations and goals in comparison with those implied by a neoliberal agenda. Additionally, these differences have to be contextualized in the arenas of asymmetries, social injustice and exclusion produced by the effects of unrestrained capitalism and its implicit power relations.

Building on the previous chapter, I argue that the Tarahumara, being a contested intercultural arena, is witness to a clash of wellbeing discourses. That clash comes from the mainstream universalising development discourses that drive international and multilateral agencies through global economic policies (Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995; PUMC-UNAM 2008), which are channelled through specific national economic policies and official interventions; and the local and *emic* understanding of wellbeing drawn by normative ideals shown by a dominant sector of the *Raramuri*. The first discourse is based on a universalising premise that in order to achieve wellbeing there must be an improvement of living conditions, what I call *living better* through material and financial accumulation; while the second discourse focuses on preserving a way of living and livelihoods which allow *living well,* discouraging material accumulation because of the risk to social cohesion.

Additionally, the discourses are not automatically bound by ethnic identities; however, as argued, in general terms the mestizo population tends to associate with the first and the Raramuri people with the second. The incongruity helps define different aspirations and wants, which are maintained by forms of livelihoods and ways of living. As we are dealing

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[62] www.cdi.gob.mx, Consulted November 2012

with different discourses of how to live well and how livelihoods and social relations should be, there is a normative and moral element implied in the discourse, an imperative and idealised conception of how to follow certain social premises. The chapter will then explore Raramuri people's crucial local understandings of wellbeing that show differentiated ways of conceiving and achieving livelihoods, aspirations and ways of relating with nature. They constitute, in the words of Nancy Fraser (1992), the struggle between mainstream and subaltern understandings of wellbeing as two oppositional discourses.

The discourse identified among the Raramuri, then, is in a subaltern position in relation to the dominant universalistic discourse described by economic neoliberal policies and followed, arguably, by the non-indigenous wider Mexican society. However, amongst the Raramuri people I also identified examples of what can be described as non-indigenous discourse in relation to how to achieve wellbeing and what matters in life. These utterances are aligned with what I have called the universalistic discourse; therefore they are in themselves in a subaltern position in relation to the most frequently articulated discourse in the context of the Raramuri socio-cultural setting. Therefore, acknowledging the diversity of wellbeing discourses among the Raramuri studied, I inferred that there is not just one single discourse of how to live well, but one that is dominant amongst the Raramuri people, with intrinsically normative and ethnically bound characteristics. The Raramuri dominant discourse of wellbeing was identified in most of the narratives, empirical accounts and information gathered, but it was especially evident among Raramuri individuals (men and women) who were currently or previously in positions of authority in the socio-political structure.[63] On the other hand, the subaltern Raramuri

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[63] This discourse is visible through a diversity of understandings that are manifested in different social spaces and scenarios. Throughout the chapter I will present narratives gathered in fieldwork and empirical observation, backed up by references to ethnographic studies carried out in the Tarahumara region. The narratives came from interviews and surveys carried out in the Aboreachi locality throughout 2010. As mentioned in the methodology section in Chapter 1, the interviews took place inside or in the proximity of the informants' houses. Special care was taken to interview male and female, young and old, and there were in total 30 interviews with Raramuri people and a further 30 with mestizo people. All 30 households in the locality of Aboreachi were covered in the survey process and a total of 60 surveys were conducted, including the mestizo population in Laguna de Aboreachi.[63] A few informants lived in neighbouring localities within

discourse of wellbeing is focalised in narratives expressed by young people. I will explore further these differences and the possible implications of the change in the discourse over time.

In the following chapters I will explore the dimensions and the dynamics of this dominant discourse of wellbeing amongst the Raramuri. The dominant discourse of the Raramuri is linked to what authors such as Merrill (1988) have called 'living in the correct path' or *Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich*. The idea of living in the correct path illustrates an important aspect of wellbeing, which is pivotal for the Raramuri: endurance and an ability to make do with whatever one faces in life. Being content with what custom and tradition dictates as necessary to make a living, and to have the necessary elements for a secure livelihood, are typical of the normative and ideal ways of living, which are implicit in the idea of wellbeing. I will conclude that the Raramuri *correct path* has to do with striving to find contentment in what you can achieve within certain culturally bounded and ideal livelihoods and ways of living. To do so, the Raramuri seek to maintain cultural practices, customs and traditions that stress ethnic differentiation from the larger society, and aim to control the socio-political processes that might affect them. In a sense, the Raramuri path to wellbeing implies an ideal state where one seeks not necessarily the improvement of living conditions, but to make sure it is possible to live well by their own cultural standards. I conclude that the clash of living well discourses reflects their differences; the orientation towards living *better* implied in the universalizing and mainstream development discourse, and the orientation towards living *well* implied in the locally contextualized discourse of the Raramuri. Additionally, I conclude that some livelihoods and ways of living, namely those of the non-indigenous population, fit better with a

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the Aboreachi *Pobora*. Mestizos were interviewed in the locality of Aboreachi. However, narratives and evidences of the discourse portrayed by the Raramuri were manifested in different social spaces, so participant observation was conducted in order to capture relevant information in *teswuino* gatherings, collective farming activities, journeys on foot to other towns, and everyday activities. During the journeys and everyday activities I participated in, I made a special point of capturing opinions, statements and expressions related to what makes people happy, what their ideas are of how life should be, what makes someone feel good, and their future aspirations, both as individuals and as part of a group. Also, I was careful to listen to their problems, their fears and the obstacles that people mentioned as hindering factors.

mainstream discourse of development than others, such as those portrayed by a dominant sector of the Raramuri people. As a result, this chapter seeks to contribute to the search for a new paradigm of development that can learn from understanding indigenous discourses of living well (Thomson 2011).

Therefore, in order to engage in and contribute to this endeavour the chapter presents the following structure. The first section is a brief theoretical introduction to approaches to wellbeing, development and poverty in the context of indigenous people and the inevitable resulting clash with a wider mainstream discourse of wellbeing. This is followed by the identification of several dimensions and assets that build the dominant discourse by analysing empirical accounts given by Raramuri people during interviews, informal talks and participant observation during everyday activities. As mentioned, the dominant discourse is portrayed by local figures of power such as *seriames* and authorities in keeping to a correct path of living (or *Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich)* that implies preserving and maintaining the group's traditions and way of life (Merrill 1988). In the main, narratives expressed in key interviews, and analyses of the propagation of traditions by *Raramuri* authorities such as the *nawesari,* are presented as supportive evidence of this local discourse. The following section presents evidence of two crucial dimensions concerning wellbeing which were identified in fieldwork: being able to engage in subsistence farming and having a strong sense of community based on networks of solidarity and cooperation. These two dimensions relate to the Raramuri way of living in intra-group relations; therefore, they not only reflect livelihoods, but also relate to contextualized understandings of living well. After describing other factors and dimensions present in the narratives, the next section explores the cosmological side of local understandings of wellbeing by providing two empirical examples of how cosmological beliefs amongst the Raramuri are embedded in their understandings of wellbeing. These examples involve interpretations of shooting stars (*orema*) and of minor earth tremors affecting the region. These cases are described as culturally normative

drivers that enforce and socially reproduce the dominant discourse. The final section concludes the chapter and introduces the following one.

4.1 Wellbeing for whom? Approaches to and discourses on development and living well

The Tarahumara region has been the arena of development approaches for a long time. However, these approaches have typically lacked the necessary analysis and evaluation by their promoters. A recent example of this is how the local municipal and national government approach indigenous people living in remote localities away from the influence of public policies. In August 2010, the local media in Chihuahua reported the 'discovery' of an un-contacted village of *gentile* Raramuri living in the midst of impressive canyons[64]. Journalist on site reported about a "lost" village which had just been discovered within the boundaries of the Aboreachi ejido in the municipality of Guachochi. The reports told of the high levels of poverty and marginalization of people, who lacked access to water, social security programmes and proper jobs. The livelihoods reported were not that different from other Raramuri communities, including Aboreachi itself. For instance, the reports mentioned that people engaged in subsistence agriculture, tending to cattle and sheep. The report goes further, saying that Raramuri living in this hidden community do not even know their full names or dates of birth. Local and federal officials interviewed on the matter promptly declared with uncanny uniformity that the first government-led actions to be taken in order to officially recognized the locality must be: to register everybody 18 or older to obtain their official ID and to get their birth certificate from the government registrar's office; to set up a school; to build a road connecting the village to the main transportation network in the region; and to propose to the inhabitants that they should constitute themselves as a 'tourist community in order for them to preserve their traditions and ancient culture'. Some of these actions proposed were implemented at some stage in the subsequent months: for instance, the

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[64] *Inapuchi: pueblo olvidado y marginado en la Sierra Tarahumara*, El Heraldo de Chihuahua, September 13th, 2010.

construction of a paved road that connected this locality with 'the rest of the localities' went ahead with no deliberation, evaluation or any form of consultation or questioning of the possible social and cultural consequences of these official actions. The urgency to address the lack of public services and utilities was the central point, not the nature of the public policy response.

Ironically, the report - and indeed the official response and that of the dominant society- to the 'discovery' of this untouched locality failed to recognize that in 1970 an American anthropologist by the name of John Kennedy published the well-known book titled 'Inapuchi', which described his fieldwork experience in that very town. And even more importantly, in it, Kennedy acknowledged the existence of solid mechanisms of reciprocity such as the *teswuino* network, which acts as a culturally embedded traditional welfare system. He documented how important security of farming was to the people, and even the numbers of cattle the *gentile* families possessed in the locality at that time. This is not an isolated case; it is just one example of how most State interventions take place in indigenous regions. There are numerous accounts of government interventions during recurrent droughts that have affected the Tarahumara region since the 1990s, showing the Raramuri to be a political football within the socio-politics of the region.

The official attitude towards Inapuchi exemplifies the approach of government-led initiatives and of broader, non-indigenous society towards indigenous people, especially those living at the margins of the state. The need to invest in what officials call 'productive projects' seems to be the only development recipe considered appropriate for the indigenous population. This mainstream universalising development discourse which drives international and multilateral agencies through global economic policies such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank is channelled through specific national economic policies and official interventions, such as the attitude of the government towards Inapuchi just described. This discourse is based on the need to

enhance commoditization of the everyday life of indigenous people to promote their economic, social and political integration into national life.

The approach taken by the government, and faithfully transmitted by the local media, shows fundamental weaknesses at its core. Firstly, it does not recognise local needs and necessities: it is assumed that these people lack all the appropriate forms of livelihoods and therefore want and need all the aid they can possibly get from the State and non-indigenous society (PUMC-UNAM 2008). This is a clear example of a universalizing development discourse that fails to see 'the others' outside the sphere of the State in equal terms, and involves labels implying power, such as "outside the law", "violent" or "uncivilized" (Scott 2009).

Secondly, embedded power relations and discrimination within ethnically differentiated interactions are clearly not questioned. For instance, although recognition of the value of multiculturalism and cultural diversity might be promoted officially, the universalistic development discourse in general suggests that indigenous people have pre-modern societies based on archaic ways of living, behave in ways which are contrary to the logic of accumulation and have no motivation to integrate themselves into national life. This lack of motivation is commonly expressed by social stereotypes describing the indigenous peoples as physically lazy (Servin y Gonzalez 2003). This confirms their backwardness and helps perpetuate their marginality (Ferguson 1994).

Moreover, the approach lacks the modern perspective which considers indigenous peoples as entities with collective social and cultural rights in accordance with their social-political organization and cultural values. For instance, there is no recognition of international instruments such ILO Convention 169, which grants indigenous people the right to actively participate in policy processes affecting their own future, and obliges the government to consult them on development projects and investments. As things stand

indigenous people cannot engage on equal terms with the State, national and global markets (Lopez-Barcenas 2006; Lopez-Barcenas and Sauceda 2003).

The government officials who visited the 'discovered' *gentile* community to announce the delivery of services and the implementation of projects appeared in their official trucks surrounded by the symbols of power. This intervention represented the development apparatus penetrating the communities in an effort to bring change to improve their quality of lives without any consultation. Additionally, the development approach implicit in the policies discussed in the Tarahumara fails to question possible unexpected consequences of these official interventions, such as undermining welfare institutions and reconfiguring pre-existing social orders. If the Raramuri question or refuse these official interventions, it can be seen not only as ungrateful and problematic in a way that forces a reconfiguration of implementation (Mosse and Lewis 2006), but also as going against the natural path of progress and therefore dangerously playing outside the rules of the game (Shankland 2010). Therefore, understandings of what is considered wellbeing take place outside the contested spaces infused with power, such as the delivery of goods and services by the government. In this case Raramuri people take a strategic position when they see themselves involved in these spheres (Scott 1990). As will be explored later, this strategic position consists of conceptualizing their wellbeing as fluctuating between the **need** to engage with the official institutions that might represent benefits and the **right** they have to continue perpetuating their own cultural systems. In this way they will accept and engage with the official interventions to which they have been subjected as long as they have control of cultural practices and social spaces that allow for the reproduction of their culture. It is in this marginal context that the Raramuri discourse of living well develops and makes sense; fluctuating between the tension of having the right to live differently and the need to be part of the larger society.

The identification of contextually-based wellbeing understandings among the Raramuri implies a discursive clash with the universalistic approach that informs public policies regarding the indigenous population that has been described above. This clash of

discourses makes visible a complex scenario. For instance, an approach based on the principle that the State has a responsibility to provide services, and the people acknowledge their right, would level the playing field between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Mexico. I am not arguing that the State should abandon its responsibility, nor for a return to idealised indigenous societies, nor for exclusion of indigenous people and ethnic minorities from broader spaces and markets of participation, and neither have I interpreted those ideas from my informants or the data I have gathered. But rather, it is evident how inter-ethnic interactions such as those described are suffused with implicit power relations and confronting meanings of life. Therefore, there is a clear need to recognise the clash implied in power relations.

Jackson (2011) states that wellbeing, on its many abscriptions, can be understood as the result of a struggle. In trying to contribute to the further understanding of living well among the Raramuri, I argue that empirically is visible how conditions for living well can be understood as a result of two forces. Firstly, the **right** to maintain a 'traditional' livelihood based on maintaining subsistence agriculture and the relationship with nature and land, and the perpetuation of practices of solidarity and cooperation which build a strong sense of community. The second component is the **need** to engage with the dominant society through economic, social and political relations. This need to engage in interethnic relations is based on the recognition that in modern times livelihoods are part of wider socio-economic and political systems. I will explore further the tension between rights and needs later in the chapter, when discussing empirical evidence of the dominant discourse in section 4.2.1.

So what does the development and anthropological literature say about discourses of living well amongst indigenous people? As mentioned in Chapter II, anthropology has not yet made a substantial contribution to the debate of linking and understanding the dynamics between dominant/subaltern discourses, mainstream/contextual and *emic* perspectives. It is, however, well positioned to do so if one takes into account the long

tradition of academic interest in studying people's lives and livelihoods, and ethnographic accounts of historical, socio-political and economic processes. As Kavedžija (2012; 2) mentioned, "[…] anthropology has always been interested in wellbeing, and ethnography has always given us insights into people's ideas of the good life and living well".

One of the streams of literature that this research - and especially this chapter - focuses on is the Latin American - largely Andean - indigenous 'live well/*buen vivir'* approach. Recently the discourse of the Latin-American '*Buen vivir'* approach has grown to become a pluralistic concept that shares critiques of growth oriented development with other alternative approaches to wellbeing (Gudynas 2011). This approach challenges dominant discourses of development to decolonialise economies and mindsets, and to broaden the understandings of non-western perspectives of development (Thomson 2011; Escobar 1995). Thomson draws parallels between this approach and the degrowth movement on a global scale. Within these streams of literature, there are diverse plural visions and concepts related to a discourse of living well such as: '*Sumak Kawsay'* in Quechua, '*Suma Kamaña'* in Aymara, '*Ñande Reko'* in Guarani and others (Albó 2009). These concepts, although related, are not synonyms: they share historical roots and are often used in left wing or Marxist political contexts. Despite – or perhaps because of - the variety of concepts, the approach of living well/*buen vivir* offers similar cosmologies and ontologies which are related to livelihoods and ways of living that reject accumulation, identifying instead goals of living in harmony with nature and others, and of solidarity, fairness and dignity.

One of the main features of the living well/*buen vivir* approach, the recognition that living well does not imply living at the expense of others or nature, (Albo 2008) is now a central element of Boliva's constitutional framework (Fernandez 2009). Living well implies being content with a certain level of living in social and cosmological harmony; living better implies a comparison with other people or over time. Therefore, a strong recognition of community solidarity as a means to living well is a crucial dimension of this approach.

This subtle distinction between *well* and *better* resonates strongly in the discourse of some human rights activists and Catholic Jesuit priests in the Tarahumara region who have promoted and adapted to the specific circumstances of the *Raramuri*, such as Ricardo Robles (2008) and Javier Avila (cited in Ramirez 2010).[65] As seen in Chapter II, the difference between living well and living better has a significant connotation in the case of Mexico as ironically the current social policy strategy of the Social Development Secretariat of the Mexican government is precisely called *Vivir Mejor* (or Live Better), and indeed articulates a similar logic to the non-indigenous *vivir mejor* approach.[66]

Discourses of living well, especially the opposition between "living well" and "living better" also reflect social stereotypes and labels of ethnicity among Raramuri and mestizo. For instance, according to the survey carried out by the author in Laguna and Aboreachi, the vast majority of mestizos, when asked about their attitude to Raramuri people in general, gave answers which tended to include denigrating labels such as 'dirty' or 'without ambition' and often called them "tarahumaritos", a diminutive form with belittling connotations. Mestizos associate the *gentile* Raramuri with being primitive and behind the times. These labels were associated with frequent comments about their lack of economic ambition to live better. Meanwhile the Raramuri describe the mestizos in terms such as 'abusive', 'individualistic' and 'money-driven'.[67]

The adaptation of a living well approach to context-specific cases is important because this approach entails the risk of oversimplifying complex and diverse concepts and understandings of how to live well by failing to consider the historical specificity and

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[65] In fact, in Latin America this approach has been promoted by other Jesuits activists who advocate for indigenous rights, such as Xavier Albó.

[66] This strategy incorporates a human capacity approach: investing in health, education and nutrition; provision of a social protection network (especially through *Oportunidades* program); and greater coordination between social and economic policies. See http://portal.salud.gob.mx/sites/salud/descargas/pdf/prog_vivir_mejor.pdf

[67] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi, June 2010.

context of each indigenous group, even within ethnic boundaries. This has been explored, for instance, in a study of the dynamics of aid delivery among pastoralist communities in Africa and its implications at the local level (Scott-Villiers: 2012, 2009; Mosse 2005, 2006; Lewis 2006). There is a need to incorporate and adapt the living well approach, according to local voices and interests, into the analysis of the unequal power relations that lead to poverty (Narayan et al. 2000). This also holds true when exploring the dimensions that the Raramuri say are crucial to living well, which can be understood as *emic* narratives and discourses associated with ways of living, maintaining a livelihood, rituals and community practices at an individual and collective level.

There are two studies that I want to refer to which focus on the objective of exploring an *emic* sense of living well/wellbeing amongst the Raramuri: one of them is Ramirez (2010), a piece of academic research presented as the dissertation for a Masters of Anthropology; the other is a report prepared by the Centre for Alternative Indigenous Development (CEDAIN), a local non-governmental organization based in Chihuahua[68].

In the first study, Ramirez (2010:140) analyses interviews with Raramuri informants, activists and priests living in the Tarahumara for decades. He identifies three different dimensions or meanings of Raramuri wellbeing: communal, ritual and territorial. The communal dimension of wellbeing has to do with the strong sense of social responsibility within the ethnic group and within one locality. This responsibility is demonstrated and maintained by participating in festivities and practices that build community. This participation implies a commitment, for instance in sharing part of your maize harvest if you have a particularly good farming year. As mentioned before, there are communal, culturally embedded ways to share farming surplus: through *teswuino* gatherings where

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[68] Acercamiento a la Concepción Raramuri de Bienestar. Reporte final de la primera etapa de Reflexión. Centro de Desarrollo Alternativo Indígena CEDAIN. [Approximation to a Raramuri concept of Wellbeing. Final report of the first phase of reflection. Centre of Alternative Indigenous Development CEDAIN Author: Victor Ojeda. Unpublished manuscript]

the host offers *teswuino* in working *faenas*[69]*,* in religious celebrations, or thorough the social responsibility of the *korima*[70] sharing. The social responsibility of sharing farming surplus falls more upon those households that have more farmland or a better harvest, and obliges them to share their surplus instead of obtaining a profit in the market. This denotes also a general tendency not to accumulate for personal gain but rather to focus on solidarity and social cohesion.

The ritualistic approach refers also to the farming cycle but stresses the relationship with *Onorúame-Eyerúame* (father and mother god). Participating in dancing and religious festivities to keep on good terms with the supernatural world is crucial. The ritual dimension involves holding festivities in order to live well. That is, in order to obtain something – a good harvest, for instance - it is necessary to observe not only the responsibility of sharing with other people, but also the responsibility to *Onorúame-Eyerúame*. This responsibility is kept through the celebration of festivities and the religious calendar. These ritualistic practices are performed even if they contradict principles of maximizing resources in a context of scarcity. For instance, even if the harvest has not been plentiful, there must be an offering of (usually the best) corn to *Onorúame-Eyerúame.* This ceremony is enacted in a special collective gathering where households from the locality give as ritual offerings the first and best corn cobs of the season. After dancing and drinking *teswuino*, some of these corn cobs are distributed among the people attending and the rest are offered to *Onorúame-Eyerúame* by leaving them in a field to rot.[71]

The territorial dimension refers to the importance of the physical and socio-cultural space. Territory in this sense incorporates farming land, forestry, and diversity of flora and fauna. Accordingly, individuals, as opposed to the sense, use a rather different sense of usufruct

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[69] Working gatherings based on solidarity and cooperation.
[70] *Korima* is a social practice and also a key tradition which places a moral obligation on those who are better off to give help someone in a deprived condition who asks for it (Kennedy 1978; Levi 1992). It usually takes the form of food or money sharing.
[71] Fieldwork notes, Aboreachi, Mexico. September 2010.

and property for natural resources that are not, and cannot be, owned which is common in the non-indigenous and dominant society. Land and territories are understood, then, as the space where natural resources are used and managed communally, in contrast to private ownership. It also the social space where community is created. These dimensions identified by Ramirez (2010) express Raramuri values that involve living well, and not living better. They are articulated as parts of the *costumbre*, the way of living of the Raramuri which is offered to God or *Onoruame* as a way to maintain harmony and equilibrium in the world.

Empirical data from fieldwork presented here is also consistent with a report from CEDAIN (*Centro de Desarrollo Alternativo Indigena* or Centre for Alternative Indigenous Development), a local NGO in Chihuahua, Mexico. The report, compiled under the supervision of Victor Ojeda, systematizes elements that build up a vision of wellbeing among the *Raramuri*. The study aimed to capture a vision of wellbeing under of four broad headings; those elements that give a meaning of life; those that give happiness; those elements that interest the Raramuri; and those to which they dedicate time (Unpublished manuscript; 6). The methodology consisted of in-depth interviews with *Raramuri* people from different localities, and with activists working in the region, and of systematizing bibliographical studies, mainly anthropological studies of the indigenous group.

The study focused on several points:
 a) A sense of wellbeing cannot be limited to an individual dimension; it builds and refers to a collective dimension involving solidarity among Raramuri people and community cohesion.
b) There is a prominent sense of holistic integration in every aspect of living. Every aspect of life is deeply interrelated and one aspect cannot stand separately. "Gatherings build community, community is sustained by tradition, and tradition by authorities [...] gatherings do not exist without food, food cannot be obtained without labour, labour

cannot be done without the community, etc."(Unpublished manuscript; 37). There is a deep sense of everyone and everything in the world making one living being.

c) The fiesta, *teswuino* and gatherings play a fundamental role in the Raramuri way of life. Collective participation in ceremonies and social events are essential for a sense of community and to maintain respect for traditions. Dancing not only involves responsibility to the community but also being in harmony with *Onoruame* (God) and with the *anayáwari* (the ancient peoples) that show the way of tradition.

d) The aspiration of the Raramuri is to walk a living well path without individual comparison to others: in a way it is not to live better, but to live well. This is understood as an antithesis of the "western world which assumes that sophistication and achieving more will make us better. In the western world, essential and simple aspects of life are considered the start of something but never the end result of a process [...] simple aspects of life are assumed to be subject to technological and specialized technologies" *(Ibid)*

Both sources, Ramirez (2010) and the CEDAIN Report, have in common a strong sense of community and cohesion within their understandings of wellbeing; the importance of fiestas and following of ceremonies and gatherings that makes ways of living. The different elements that build up a sense of wellbeing are interconnected in an integral and holistic way of living. A point to analyse, however, is that both sources stress the notion of wellbeing from an ethnic perspective that links primarily to 'the traditional side' of the Raramuri people. In other words, in Ramirez accounts ethnic differentiation is overrepresented in the understandings of living well among the Raramuri people.

4.2 Elements of wellbeing discourses in the Tarahumara region.

Narratives concerning living well obtained from the Raramuri of Aboreachi during fieldwork make discourses visible in a number of ways. The dominant discourse appeals to essential cultural elements of ethnic reference and homogeneity. For instance, as seen in

the previous chapter, a general sense of homogeneity is identifiable, concerning a household's material possessions and the collective infrastructure in the locality. When asked about the poorest households in the locality, Raramuri people interviewed tend to agree that everyone is in roughly the same condition of wellbeing, mentioning for instance that all households maintain their families by working hard on their farms, and that risks and harsh conditions affecting the locality are shared collectively. Even where differences in family size or the size of the farm are evident from household to household, the Raramuri population living in Aboreachi do not express or show them openly. "Here [in Aboreachi], we all live the same, we suffer from the same things (…) is not like in Chihuahua [city] or in other places. If somebody needs something, we must help him as it could be ourselves that might be in that situation tomorrow".[72]

This tendency to express collective uniformity is a socially expected behaviour that reflects aspects of their ethnic identity as Raramuri people, in the sense that desired homogenous conditions are linked to the membership of the ethnic group. This homogenisation of living conditions is based on the fact that informants claimed to share the same level of climatic vulnerability, and roughly the same livelihood options and opportunities, access to assets, etc. An example of such a narrative is the following: "All of us are related somehow; we share farming tools or even animals for our plots and if someone needs a lift to Laguna we ask for the favour, so we must be ready to help too […] If it doesn't rain we all suffer equally; if it rains and the crops grow well we are all happy."[73]

The motivations of having a shared experience observed among the Raramuri conform to culturally embedded mechanisms oriented to keeping communal cohesion and avoiding confrontations, coercion or envy. As with other rural populations, the Raramuri recognize that envy and conflicts originating from bragging about being relatively better off, or showing off material assets, produce a negative effect that endangers the sense of

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[72] Interview with Pablo Castillo, Aboreachi, Mexico, February 2010.
[73] *Ibid*

cohesion and homogeneity and the social networks within the locality. "We do the same things, so we are at the same level. God wants us to live happily without conflict; if we keep fighting and shouting at *teswuino* gatherings we only create problems."[74]

These mechanisms are evident when practices and myths are analysed as cultural drivers (explored in section 4.4). However I want to point out that this tendency to homogenise living conditions and shared circumstances is a characteristic of dominant discourses, in contrast to subaltern discourses which tend to focus on making unequal living conditions visible.

The opposite of homogenization of living conditions hold true in the case of the mestizos of Laguna, amongst whom public perception of social stratification within the locality is more evident. When asked, mestizos can clearly and willingly identify those who are richer or poorer. For instance, when the mestizos are asked on what grounds the stratification is based, the responses always relate to the ability to accumulate assets and material possessions, such as the size of house, number of pickups or cattle, but also to the fact of enjoying a stable source of income that provides economic security over time. "There [pointing at a number of houses] you can see the families that are better off, look at the cars and the nicely decorated houses; those on the other hand [pointing in another direction far away] are the ones that don't have much […] I know all of them, most don't even have proper jobs"[75]

This narrative is an example of how, at the discourse level, the mestizo population based their perception of living well more on the commoditization of everyday life, and the evident accumulation of material goods, than the Raramuri (Ramirez 2010). It also relates to the evident stratification which is expressed openly within the mestizo social setting.

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[74] Interview with Catalino Castillo, Aboreachi, Mexico. June 2010
[75] Interview with mestizo, Laguna de Aboreachi, October 2010.

This distinction between the discourses portrayed by the mestizo and Raramuri on the visibility of homogeny and shared living conditions is important because it suggests differentiated understandings of how living well can and should be pursued by the two groups. As we shall see next, there are differences and commonalities between both dominant discourses. A crucial difference in the discourses of the *Raramuri* and the mestizo population lies in the perceptions and social constructions around material accumulation. For the Raramuri the discourse is associated with maintaining a livelihood based on subsistence agriculture and complemented occasionally by market participation at the local level.

4.2.1 A dominant discourse of wellbeing for the Raramuri through the case of Don Etanacio, Dona Maria, and the tradition of Nawesaris.

During fieldwork it was possible to empirically identify a dominant discourse concerning different dimensions of living well among the Raramuri. We shall see how this dominant discourse relates to a culturally embedded idea of *living in a correct path* or *Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich* as is expressed by the Raramuri. We have seen how a tendency to homogenise - and to a certain extent idealise - living conditions among the Raramuri is one element of this discourse. This section presents various narratives that speak of an ability to be content with a livelihood and ways of living followed and expressed by a dominant section of the Raramuri group. The narratives build a discourse that distinguishes them from the rest of the non-indigenous population in the region, who generally aim to improve the living conditions in terms of material and income accumulation. This does not mean that Raramuri people do not take advantage of accumulation opportunities when they have the chance. However, at a discourse level, this need does not take centre stage and is even discouraged as it may rupture crucial intra-group social harmony and cooperation networks. People may hope for the best, even if that does not mean better. The path of wellbeing for the Raramuri, then, is oriented towards a different direction from the mainstream way to achieve wellbeing. The

argument about the Raramuri dominant discourse which I discuss here makes it necessary to contextualise Jackson's (2011) argument, in the sense that existential discontent is a universal aspect of the human condition. This discontent, Jackson argues, makes people aspire to improve and strive to live better regardless of their circumstances. This is an issue that has been raised by other anthropological studies concerning wellbeing, which consider the centrality of discontent an overstatement in every socio-cultural context (Kavedžija; 2012).

There are subaltern discourses within the Raramuri as well. I am referring to a subaltern discourse of how to live well, especially articulated by young people. Teenagers or other household members that for some reason felt marginalized or stigmatized by the Raramuri collectiveness – perhaps due to the fact that they migrate frequently or that they have been accused of fighting in gatherings - tend to express the aspiration and desire to have a way of life similar to that displayed by the wider society and the *mestizo*. It should be noted that such narratives and accounts were recorded a few times in Aboreachi and the surrounding localities of the *pobora*, so I want to acknowledge them appropriately. The dominant discourse distinguishes itself from its subaltern counterpart because it is clearly discernible among the informants, and was articulated in particular by figures of power within the Raramuri society. For instance, it was noticeable that this discourse was voiced by political and religious authorities within the Raramuri political system, and respected, elderly persons who might have been traditional authorities in former times. It can be said that if there is a correct path to live by (*Gara Wachi Inaropo nai gawich)*, the subaltern discourse expressed by some Raramuri describes another path to follow, arguably in the same direction as the mestizo and the non-indigenous population.

To introduce the general sense of this discourse I will begin to explore the narratives of two interviewees, Don Etanacio and Dona Maria, who are both respected leaders in the locality of Aboreachi. Subsequently I will briefly explore the message behind the *Nawesari*

speech given at public gatherings by *Raramuri* authorities. The narratives of these particular interviewees were selected because they were representative of the responses collected during fieldwork, and because of how clearly they reflect the implications of the discourse presented. Narratives of other interviewees and empirical accounts follow as evidence of the importance of subsistence agriculture and solidarity networks as dimensions that build up the discourse.

Don Etanacio has a health problem: his vision is seriously impaired, especially in one eye. He has been treated on several occasions without success. Once he even travelled to Chihuahua city for surgery and specialized treatment, but still his condition persists. Although he can walk and work unaided, he is particularly careful and slow in his movements. Despite his health condition, Don Etanacio mentioned that on certain occasions he is perceived by the rest of households in Aboreachi as being rich[76], not due to accumulation or any sophisticated material possessions of his household – which is strikingly similar to others in Aboreachi - but for his capacity to farm effectively. His capacity, he mentions, is based on farming the 'traditional Raramuri way'. So what is then farming the 'traditional Raramuri way'? Don Etanacio relates farming to values and behaviours such as social responsibility and dignity that come from self-subsistence. For instance, he expresses his pride in being able to maintain his family by his own means, without needing to work for others. In the context of the Tarahumara region, few economic alternatives other than subsistence agriculture offer such a possibility.[77] Subsistence agriculture is a **right** that implies more than an economic activity or food security. To be employed by a third person, especially richer mestizos that are able to pay others to farm a number of hectares, is considered a coping strategy of last resort, and carries the social connotation of not farming effectively or not able to subsist by one's own means. Additionally, this way of farming, which resembles more a way of living, also brings social responsibility. This responsibility has to do with participating in religious festivities, preparing *teswuino* and taking part in gatherings and solidarity networks. For

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[76] Interview with Etanacio Cruz, Aboreachi, Mexico. Julio 2010
[77] *Ibid*

instance, subsistence agriculture enables people to maintain the *teswuino* gatherings, the religious festivities related to farming, and exchange and sharing practices such as *korima*. Therefore, living from farming is not conceived as work with a tedious or negative connotation: farming entails the right to live according to Raramuri traditions and enforce their cultural self-determination. Hence, practices, motivations and ways of living cannot be conceived in isolation; there are always expected behaviours from the group.

However, Etanacio acknowledges that subsistence farming by itself is not enough in present circumstances to achieve self-subsistence.[78] There are factors that affect and influence the effectiveness of farming that make it risky to depend on farming alone: climatic vulnerability, quality and size of land, and physical ability to work on the farm. Among these factors there are crucial inter-ethnic factors that limit the capacity to farm effectively, which will be explored in Chapter V. Hence, besides engaging in subsistence agriculture, the context of food insecurity, that is, of not being able to harvest enough in a particular agricultural cycle, imposes the **need** to relate with broader safety nets like the one *Oportunidades* can offer.

Etanacio' household receives money from the *Oportunidades* and *Procampo* social protection programmes, and the shares from the ejido profits which complement his subsistence farming. This extra income is considered valuable as it has allowed him to save a small amount of money to respond to food shortages. Saving is essential to manage the unexpected consequences of climatic conditions on farming. Even if the sum is small, they take good care of it, trying to save as much as possible rather than wasting it all at once on beer "as some young Raramuri do", he says[79]. This indicates how at least for some young Raramuri Etanacio's ideas on complementing economic activities and saving benefit payments responsibly do not resonate, making them the exception that proves the rule or rather the dominant discourse. The Raramuri that are not prudent with their income are few in number, mainly the young, teenage members of five or six households

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[78] *Ibid*
[79] *Ibid*

in Aboreachi who are perceived as regularly getting drunk on beer, fighting and deliberately rebelling against the 'norm'. Nonetheless, this contrary behaviour influences other Raramuri in the community from time to time and is in turn influenced by other mestizo teenagers from Laguna of Aboreachi. As mentioned, commercial and economic transactions in Laguna increase considerably when ejido profits or *Oportunidades* and *Procampo* payments are delivered to beneficiaries. In this sense, Etanacio refers to obtaining and spending money irresponsibly as one of the factors that depart from the 'Raramuri way of living' and ultimately lead to poverty.

Etanacio's case tell us that living well involves the **right** to preserve a way of living based on the ability to farm effectively. This right is associated with values and behaviours such as the dignity of being self-sufficient; and with the responsibility for participating in religious festivities, *teswuino* preparation and sharing in gatherings and solidarity networks. It also involves the recognition that in present conditions, there is a **need** to be part of mestizo-led economic initiatives such as social protection programmes, and to participate in the market economy and sell labour as a coping strategy (Varese 1996). This relationship between rights and needs will be visible throughout the empirical dimensions of living well explored in the chapter. In this sense, the thesis argues that a discourse of Raramuri understanding of living *well* implies a tension between those rights that broadly represents maintaining control of traditional livelihoods and the need to engage with diverse sources of income. The Raramuri livelihoods and way of living are based on the right to engage in subsistence agriculture and solidarity networks and, by extension, the preservation of elements of ethnicity, and at the same time the need to interact with the dominant society.

A similar view is shared by Maria Gonzalez. At the time that the fieldwork was conducted, Maria was the *Comisaria de Policia* or Police Commissioner, having the authority and responsibility to solve disputes and serve as assistant to the *Seriame*. To reach this position of authority implies a favourable social reputation for being an individual driven

by values of fairness and honesty. Like Don Etanacio, Maria also takes great pride in being able to support her family by herself. Maria is a single mother of three children: two older sons already married with families of their own, and a young, nine-year-old girl. Maria lives with her mother and her younger girl. The fact that her household composition differs from the nuclear family model commonly found in the Tarahumara region among both in *Raramuri* and mestizo localities does not represent an insoluble situation. She receives the unconditional help of brothers, extended family and friends through labour, solidarity and sharing networks. So for instance, Maria's brothers help her farm her land in exchange for a part of the harvest and shared *teswuino*. Hence, having this social network does not imply not having to farm, it implies receiving additional help when needed and the reciprocal responsibility to share what you can in return. Besides farming, at times she sells prepared food, sometimes for Laguna stores to re-sell. She and her mother are *Oportunidades* and *Procampo* beneficiaries, and both receive ejido shares as well.

For Maria, life implies hard work, '…a feature Raramuri people must have'[80]. Having land and being able to cultivate it means that you will not go hungry, and a sense of income security is given by social protection programmes. For her, poverty is when you have no way to secure food and hence need to ask for it. "How are you going to ask your neighbours and friends for *korima* or reciprocal sharing if you waste you money on alcohol and don't conduct yourself properly? A person needs to have dignity: not to have many things, but to work hard in order to gain yourself *teswuino* and a means of living"[81]

Maria's case gives support to the fact that it is not only farming and subsistence agriculture that are important for living well: solidarity networks or reciprocal sharing are crucial, particularly for those households whose labour capacity might represent a challenge for self-subsistence in terms of the number of hands available to engage in agricultural activities, and the number of income sources. Maria relies on the solidarity of her extended family and network of friends to help and support her, this being a

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[80] Interview with Maria Gonzalez. Aboreachi, Mexico. June 2010
[81] *Ibid*

relationship based on reciprocity, not on asymmetrical giving and receiving. Hence, the collective and communal dimension of living well is visible in this socially embedded solidarity mechanism of mutual cooperation.

As with Don Etanacio, Maria's case also reflects a discourse of living well as she describes the individual qualities Raramuri must show, and the social responsibilities and behaviour they are expected to demonstrate towards their locality. Both narratives are representative of the great majority of interviews carried out in Aboreachi.[82] They both also illustrate how a livelihood and way of living for Raramuri are based on subsistence agriculture, with complementary income from market activities.

Let me now explore the case of *nawesari*, which I argue also describes elements of a *Raramuri* living well discourse kept alive through the social customs of Raramuri society. As seen in Chapter III, a *nawesari* is the speech Raramuri authorities give at public gatherings once or twice a week depending on the region, and also when they settle disputes, in which case it serves as public advice for the parties involved and for everyone else to avoid future confrontations. The speech, common practice among the Raramuri in the Tarahumara region, is one of the responsibilities of the *Waru Seriame* or *Seriames* as the main authority in the *Pobora*. It is closely linked with discursive understandings of wellbeing as it is intended to orient Raramuri people 'to follow the right way' (*Gara Wachi Inaropo nai gawich*). A *nawesari* makes clear the 'proper' way for a Raramuri to behave and live in order to be content and happy, and how to avoid sadness, illness and suffering (Merril, 1988; Ramirez, 2010). During the *nawesari*, the *Seriame* talks about the importance of maintaining a livelihood based on farming, dance and making and sharing *teswuino* so that people can be happy when giving thanks. The message of the *nawesari* is filled with religious ideas and references to following the path desired by *Onorúame-Eyerúame* (father and mother god).

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[82] Another two interviews referred to additional dimensions that are explored in section 4.3.c of this chapter.

This is just one example of a *Nawesari:*

"As I said before and now, these are rules that all Raramuri must follow to be equal in the community. You must be sure to have good behaviour wherever you walk, as your conduct will have a place where you go. When organizing a party (gathering) always try to share equally without leaving anyone behind, because you must understand that all baptized-pagótuame (Raramuri) see us as brothers. You'll have to take care of those disabled ones who for some reason cannot sustain themselves if you have done well; if not you should be ashamed of being Raramuri. The teswuino you drink must be honestly earned by your work or by participating in the gathering. Then you will be glad to offer it to Onorúame-Eyerúame. Drink the teswuino belonging to others in the proper manner for a sacrifice won. You must understand that you drink not with the intention to get drunk, but rather to live as brothers and be happy [....] when you're drunk, watch your words, for you do not want to be offensive, nor cause problems without reason that might embarrass you when you wake up from the hangover. For those young ones that have started to drink, you must not lift your voice against an old man or compare your physical strength with him, because very quickly your own strength will be reduced and you would not have the right to face this world without shame." Nawésari of Siríame Jose Eduwiges Richuárare. Narárachi the municipality. Karichi. 1996. Cited by Almaguer-González and J. Mas-Oliva (2010:61) (Translation by the author)

The *nawesari* is a tradition offered regularly by the *Seriame* of a *Pobora.* It reflects a dominant discourse of ethnic identity among the Raramuri. This discourse, which shows clearly in the words of the elders and authorities, entails the expected elements of a Raramuri livelihood: preparing *teswuino* (implied farming activity to produce maize); sharing and mutual reciprocity with others that might be deprived; showing respect to others; and showing 'proper' social behaviour. The message behind the *nawesari* not only states a desired and 'ideal' way of living and livelihood among *Raramuri*, it also shows the

'correct path' to live well, through values of cooperation, respect and unity: a path that I argue is associated with living well.

Indeed, a strong sense of maintaining the community is present in the three narratives I have presented. Those that depart from this 'correct path' either face social pressure to align themselves with the dominant social contract, or are at risk of falling into deprivation due to lack of reciprocity in farming activity and support. For instance, during fieldwork on one of many Sunday gatherings I observed that a recently married couple were receiving a *nawesari* from the *Seriame* of Aboreachi. The couple were summoned after several allegations that they were fighting with each other and consequently were not being invited by others to help with farming and *teswuino* gatherings. The *Seriame* on that occasion give a *nawesari* on the importance of working together within the family and with extended family and neighbours of the locality, since if cooperation was not shown then the consequences could be undesirable for everybody. Although the *nawesari* was directly intended for the couple in question, the gathering was public so that everybody who was present could witness the advice.[83] The teenagers mentioned earlier who were identified for getting drunk and fighting were also summoned to public gatherings by the authorities when they were involved in actions that broke social norms. Therefore, networks and safety nets are important because, as explored further in this chapter, people in the Tarahumara region would be much more vulnerable and would find it much harder to get by without being able to rely on others. Additionally, in a cultural context where social perceptions are highly valuable, the shame and embarrassment of being publically pilloried is a frequent social sanction.

The narratives expressed by Don Etanacio, Maria, and the meaning of the social practice of the *nawesari*, reflect the complementary approaches to Raramuri wellbeing explored by Ramirez (2010) earlier: the communitarian, ritualistic, and the territorial approach. Even more so, there is a tension between maintaining a livelihood based primarily on

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[83] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi, Mexico. October 2010

subsistence agriculture and the performing of religious practices supported through social networks understood as a right and the interethnic economic interaction with dominant *mestizo* society understood as a need.

Until now we have just started to introduce a general idea of what living well means to the Raramuri people. I have argued that a dominant discourse of living well is identifiable through empirical narratives collected from fieldwork. These narratives are not limited to just one concept or a few dimensions, but rather they conform to a comprehensive framework that deals with a desired homogeneity in living conditions; an ability to endure and make do with what one faces in life by the control of one's own cultural practices and spaces. Hence, this framework is influenced by the right to have control over socio-political spaces within the group and the need to engage on equal terms with the State and wider society. The condition of living at the margins of the influence of the State is central to understanding why the Raramuri must adopt a strategic position between this right and this need. As explored in the next chapter, the need to incorporate interethnic relations occurs in an arena suffused with power relations that hinder the dimensions the Raramuri associate with living well. Although these narratives express diverse dimensions and elements associated with a dominant discourse of living well, there is a focus on the significance of land and farming and the importance of a sense of community. Therefore, the next section will focus on the role these two dimensions play in the discourse of living well.

4.3. Two crucial dimensions to living well according to the Raramuri.

There are two crucial dimensions to living well identified from the Raramuri during fieldwork: (a) the significance of land and farming, and (b) the importance of building community through culturally embedded practices of cooperation and solidarity. These dimensions do not represent all the complexity of the dimensions associated with living well for these people as they overlap and fuse with other determinants, some of which

are explored in subsequent sections. There are two main reasons for including these dimensions, however. The first rests on how frequently and regularly they appear in interviews, questionnaires, participant observation and other ethnographic accounts from the fieldwork stage. Their inclusion then is a true reflection of the voice of my informants which will serve as evidence to analyse and back up particular claims. The second reason is that relevant ethnographies, socio-cultural diagnosis and anthropological monographs based on the Tarahumara region recognise the importance of farming activities and the social importance of solidarity and collective practices among the Raramuri people. Both sources support the importance of these dimensions.

The significance of land tenure, and specifically of being able to engage with subsistence agriculture and the closely related social networks of cooperation, is important it relates to Raramuri values, aspirations and livelihoods that are separate from those of the wider society and of the mestizo people living in the area. Evidently the distinctiveness of what matters most, what makes people happy and the values attached to them is not ethnically or group bound; permeable group boundaries that stress distinctiveness are guarded, but not closed. The two dimensions presented do, however, constitute building blocks of discourses that are articulated. Additionally, these two dimensions are important because they are typically bound to and interconnected with other spheres of life that provide an understanding of a distinctive way of life for the Raramuri. As a result of their importance, and as argued in chapter V, both dimensions map onto persistent forms of inequality because they are linked through institutional arrangements that permit unequal power relations to endure, such as hoarding of political power in the ejido system, land conflicts and ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities.

I argue that at the discourse level, both dimensions of wellbeing evidence the conflictive tension between Raramuri and mestizo livelihoods and conceptions of wellbeing. This tension becomes clear if we analyse how Raramuri and *mestizos* engage differently with economic opportunities in the region. As seen in Chapter III, while the predominant

livelihood of mestizos is fundamentally based on participation in the market economy and the commoditization of everyday life, the Raramuri maintain a dual path evident on interviews: a dominant form of Raramuri livelihood and way of living is based on the right to engage in subsistence agriculture and a strong sense of community, and at the same time on the need to maintain economic relations of exchange with the external market. Let us firstly explore the significance of effective farming.

4.3.a The significance of land and farming

Among indigenous and peasant communities throughout the world, land and farming are important and recognized elements of maintaining identities and livelihoods as part of living well. However, the importance the Raramuri people place on land and farming does not just represent an asset linked with self-sufficiency: land ownership is also an asset that has been strongly associated with the probability of an individual being poor in developing countries (Rodriguez and Smith 1994; IFAD 2001; Deininger and Olinto, 2000; cited in Justino 2009). This makes land and territory a highly contested resource among national and global economic actors as well as the Raramuri. For instance, indigenous people in Mexico still have on their political agendas a long-felt demand for recognition of and respect for cultural territories (EZLN 2005; Eversole et al 2005; UN 2009). However, land and territories must not be conceived in a limited way as merely a material asset to achieve self-subsistence: a broader meaning of territory also includes the cultural space and the surrounding environment, along with its fauna and flora. This resembles the territoriality dimension explored by Ramirez (2010), which was described previously.

The way Raramuri people engage with land and the territory where they live, the pine and oak forests covering valleys and canyons, speaks of maintaining a livelihood based on knowledge and use of flora and fauna. For instance, in Aboreachi people still remember how in previous decades they use to hunt and eat wild animals such as deer, squirrels and

lizards in the forest.[84] Ethno-botanical knowledge including the use of medical and edible plants is still present in social relations among the Raramuri, for instance in family health care and food sustainability (Bye 1985; Cardenal 1993, Miller 2002), although it has been argued that a process of cultural change drawn by a shift from an educational model based on informal, community-based interactions and transmission of empirical knowledge to an educational model that dictates a homogenous national curriculum has modified and arguably eroded local processes of environmental learning in the Tarahumara (Wyndham 2010). However, people in Aboreachi still engage in a minimal way with occasional collection of wild edible plants such as *quelites* (greens) and on rare occasions in hunting wild animals.[85] Additionally, some plants and animals are associated with spiritual and supernatural forces that are part of the cultural and cosmological repertoire of myths and stories. Therefore, forests are not only resources as in a profit-oriented economy, but are considered by the Raramuri people to provide rain, springs and rivers, to contain nutritional and medical substances and to be repositories of cosmological and religious beliefs.

The pines and oak trees surrounding Aboreachi are important resources in the Raramuri livelihood. Timber provides firewood, the essential fuel for cooking. It is also the preferred building material for houses and the raw material for construction of all kinds. Furthermore, land is also related to the relatively new industry of forestry and timber. Since Aboreachi is a forestry ejido, that is, an ejido oriented to profiting from timber, both mestizos and Raramuri benefit economically from its industrial exploitation. As previously mentioned, the economic shares distributed by the ejido do not represent much security, as in terms of regularity and amount of money they cannot be compared with social protection programmes. To be an *ejidatario* represents not only being entitled to a share of the collective profit produced by the ejido but also having a voice and representation in the management of natural resources, at least in theory. This representation has been

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[84] Interview with Catalino Castillo, Aboreachi, Mexico. June 2010
[85] Fieldwork notes, Aboreachi, Mexico, December 2010

appropriated by the Raramuri as a space for negotiation and adaptation in order to have greater control over their territories; this will be discussed in subsequent sections.

There are studies such as Azarcoya (2003) stressing the importance of a well-kept forest as it is a source of wellbeing for Raramuri, especially on those *ejidos* where the majority of ejidatarios are indigenous. When deforestation is evident due to legal and illegal logging by *ejidos*, the Raramuri consider themselves to be poor (Azarcoya: 2003:25). This is not only because of the reduction in available profitable forest area in terms of timber, but also because of the deeper sense of knowing how to use plants, linked with their way of living. Furthermore, Lartigue (1983), exploring the forestry industry, argues that the difference of conception of resources such as forest and land between the *mestizos* and the Raramuri partly explains the unequal distribution of wealth in the Tarahumara region.

So land and territory link with diverse dimensions of living well where Raramuri people relate in different ways with forest, fauna and flora. Another side to the issue of land is that it creates the possibility for subsistence agriculture. Farming takes centre stage in the Raramuri livelihood and ways of living. Although the Raramuri people in Aboreachi (and other localities visited during fieldwork) engage in a range of subsistence practices, including temporary migration, production of handcrafts and other informal income generating activities, a vast majority greatly depend on subsistence agriculture, maintaining a livelihood based primarily on farming mainly corn and beans, along with complementary crops of other vegetables such as cabbages. All 30 households have at least one farm plot in the vicinity of their homes. The average size of farm per household is four hectares, with two hectares being the smallest and five the largest. Farming plots are inherited by both spouses so it is common that in some households both spouses tend the land. Additionally, new plots can be prepared and used by new families if the community agrees at a communal gathering. Thus we see that farming constitutes the main livelihood activity in Aboreachi and the surrounding *Raramuri* localities.

Therefore, in the view of indigenous people, access to farm land, water, climatic security and other elements that make farming possible are crucial for maintaining a livelihood that is based on self-sufficiency. For instance, a common idea often expressed by Raramuri people is "If a Raramuri household works its plot of land well – that is, according to the group traditions and as the ancestors used to do it - then it will be fine and won't be deprived"[86]. These ideas, widely held among elderly and traditional Raramuri authorities, relate to the moral obligation of a household to tend and properly care for the farm land which is accessible to them. Ethnographies of the region show how farming is a crucial activity embedded in cultural systems of values and beliefs, and at the same time is an economically necessary activity (Lumholtz 1902; Bennett and Zingg 1935; Kennedy 1963, 1978; Merrill and Heras 2007, among others).

Farming also echoes the dominant discourse of living well. This discourse implies having a livelihood that is primarily based on maintaining their ancestors' way of living, i.e. subsistence agriculture, and only secondly aiming on engaging with the market economy and pursuit of income sources. This is important in terms of ethnic differentiation from the non-Raramuri population in the sense that it is considered a culturally embedded right to deliberately engage in subsistence economy and refuse to depend completely on the principle of material and economic accumulation. So even if the need to maintain economic relations with the wider society is recognized, for instance in seeking temporary income and being beneficiaries of social protection programmes, this need is not a high priority when it comes to living well. It could represent, on the other hand, losing internal equality in the community, command over cultural resources such as solidarity networks to face shocks and uncertainty, control of autonomous social spaces and resistance mechanisms needed to face power relations, and losing ethnic identity.

Consequently, the dominant discourse of living well among the Raramuri gives special attention to farming, and a sense of community through social networks associated with

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[86] Interview with Ramiro Castillo, Aboreachi, Mexico. October 2010.

preserving a way of living that acknowledges ethnic differentiation. To a certain extent, for the Raramuri farming constitutes an embodiment of their ethnic identity; if a household does not engage regularly in farming and with the related *teswuino* production it can be perceived as not sharing the same cultural references, practices and social networks that build their group identity. As mentioned in chapter III, mestizos living in Laguna de Aboreachi do not engage widely in farming but rather in market-based economic activities such as commerce and services. Farming implies, therefore, acknowledging openly in a social context an identity marker of an ethnically differentiated group and acting according to its expectations. For instance, the few self-defined mestizos interviewed who regularly farm described themselves as working the land "as if they were Raramuri".[87] Although this does not mean that a specific activity determines ethnicity, it is generally associated with a livelihood and way of living typical of the indigenous population. On the other hand, among traditional sectors of the Raramuri, if a head of a household engages in other economic activities and leaves farming behind it is considered to be a step closer to being a *Chabochi* (non-Raramuri).

Additionally, through farming a Raramuri household maintains close social relations within the ethnic group and the locality where they live. Empirical evidence from fieldwork suggests that the Raramuri relate land, and more precisely the act of farming, with traditions of moral solidarity and religious and collective beliefs. For instance, through the farming calendar, participant observation conducted in Raramuri localities confirmed that neighbours participated in traditional healing practices in crops, dances and feasts organized with the clear intention of procuring a abundant harvest, to ask for rain and give thanks for the harvest. Anthropological and ethnographic studies undertaken in the region back up these empirical observations (Martinez *et al.*, 2006; Urteaga and Stefani, 2004; Saucedo, 2003).

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[87] Interview with Justino Armendariz, Laguna de Aboreachi, México. June 2010

In this sense, a livelihood based on subsistence agriculture alone is not enough to live well. This dimension is linked with other dimensions, such as individual and collective responsibility to engage with a wide range of festive practices, cooperation and solidarity networks. At the same time, these solidarity and cooperation practices and networks play a significant role in maintaining the ethnic identity of the Raramuri.

Let us explore this point further by discussing the second wellbeing dimension.

4.3.b Strong sense of community.

Enjoying a strong sense of community is highly valued by the Raramuri. As often mentioned in interviews and data gathered in fieldwork, being alone and isolated makes you sad, being happy means participating in gatherings, having friends that can help you and that you can help, having a family. [88] For a Raramuri, being in a state of isolation, without friends or kin, is the worst thing that can happen. The importance of community in the region of Aboreachi is echoed in ethnographic and anthropological approaches to the Raramuri (Bennett and Zingg 1935; Kennedy 1963, 1978; Merrill and Heras 2007; Urteaga and Stefani, 1994; Saucedo, 2003). Throughout this section I will explore the importance and linkages of this dimension as an important part of what the Raramuri conceive as necessary for their wellbeing.

Having a community implies reciprocity and mutual help to face food vulnerability and scarcity in the Tarahumara context. It is intimately related to securing a livelihood. Farming in the rugged and mountainous areas of the Tarahumara region implies adapting to the physical terrain. As accessible arable land is scarce, most farming plots are small in surface area. As mentioned earlier, as both spouses inherit plots of land separately, households usually have two plots, and although some are scattered near the area of Aboreachi, many others may lie in different localities from one to three hours' walk away.

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[88] Fieldwork notes, Aboreachi, Mexico. June 2010.

This adaptation to the terrain represents an additional element that makes farming in the region a physically exhausting activity. A household usually requires a greater work force at particular times of the farming calendar in order to tend their plots properly. For this reason, the help of close friends and relatives is called upon. Cooperation in farming activities can happen in a variety of ways; commonly an extra pair of hands is required for several days to plant, weed the plots, plough and harvest the crops. Additionally, working animals (horse and mules) and farm tools are often loaned among friends.[89]

Like other indigenous groups, the Raramuri have traditions and practices that promote social cohesion and create and fortify their identity. Among these traditions are *rohonama,* the term meaning that one should share, divide and distribute things among family and friends. *Korima* is a social practice which implies the moral obligation of reciprocity from those who are better off to someone in deprived condition asking for help (Kennedy 1978; Levi 1992), and is also a key tradition. It usually takes the form of food or money sharing.

Additionally, Levi (1992), studying trading mechanisms and the exchange of commodity goods within and between the Tarahumara and *mestizos*, has suggested that among the Raramuri there is an implicit sense of reciprocity, of giving and receiving, that extends to wider social forms of exchange such as gift, barter and sharing. In this sense, trade is basically done at an individual level. This is conceived, therefore, as a personal relationship among known individuals involving friendship and trust, rather than a mere economic transaction. Is fair to say that this also holds true among mestizo people as *mestizos* social networks are also heavily based on extended family relations. However, the Raramuri often engage in commerce with buyers and traders from outside their community, where interactions are not based on trust and often occur under asymmetrical circumstances.

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[89] Fieldwork notes, Aboreachi, Mexico. June-July 2010.

In the same study, Levi suggests that close friendship ties - or *norawa*[90] ties - might be developed with both indigenous and non-indigenous people and, ideally, would last a lifetime. To this effect, although the Raramuri differentiate between mestizo and their own *norawa*, mestizos in some circumstances are the preferred partners as "[…] certain economic relationships enable one strategically to cut across these ethnic boundaries. Thus, inter-ethnic *norawa* relationships enable Raramuri to gain access to many cultural and economic products of the mestizo world" (Levi 1992: 9). The practice of *korima* involving food sharing and exchange is common among the Aboreachi and *gentile* Raramuri from other localities. The first tend to share the maize or beans they have harvested, and sometimes they exchange them for *nopales* (a wild vegetable) which the *gentiles* collect in the canyon region[91]. Hence, this is an indication of how access to relevant resources corresponds to a mixed livelihood strategy benefiting from inter- and intra-ethnic ties in terms of market participation and subsistence agriculture.

This systematic cooperation based on community ties within the group allows *Raramuri* people to engage in a network of mutual co-responsibility where they are expected to participate in collective sharing and solidarity practices. This network not only acts as a safety net, but is also a crucial part of the societal base where core cultural values and essential information are shared, produced and reproduced. As Ojeda (unpublished text) argues, no indication of wellbeing for the *Raramuri* would be complete if the notion of collectivity is not taken into account.

Perhaps the most obvious expression of the social network is the *teswuino* gatherings (Kennedy, 1963). *Teswuino* is a drink made of fermented maize, which in the *Raramuri* culture is considered a gift of God and therefore only drunk at religious ceremonies and work-related gatherings. In these collective reunions, the household hostess offers a

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[90] *Norawa* in the Tarahumara language refers to "persons who are friendly and trustworthy, persons with whom they have spent enjoyable hours talking, drinking, or working together" (Levi 1992:10)

[91] Fieldwork observation, Aboreachi, Mexico. 2010

generous amount of *teswuino* in exchange for help received to those guests who have performed physically demanding activities for the household's benefit. These gatherings are an essential part of an effective solidarity network consisting of family members, neighbours and close friends carefully invited by the hosting household. Indeed, the sacred and social dimensions of *teswuino* gatherings are closely interrelated. The preparation and sharing of the drink involve complex rituals. During fieldwork *teswuino* gatherings were observed commonly and repeatedly among the great majority of Raramuri households, especially between May and June when crops begin to grow, and in October to December when the harvest takes place. Therefore, the beverage is also intrinsically related to labour and the sense of earning the right to drink it by working on farms and helping others (Urteaga, 1998). *Teswuino*, through ceremonial practices, is ultimately used to perpetuate the farming cycle.

The following quotation collected from the fieldwork is helpful to illustrate this last point and further exemplify how both farming and social networks interlink.

> 'As long as we have land to work on and to bequeath to my offspring there is no problem about poverty. With maize it's enough: it is the base to have *pinole*, *teswuino* and tortillas; food can be complemented by other vegetable gathered seasonally, like *quelites*, mushrooms and such ... And if you have friends and family to help you that's also helpful. That's why we must make *teswuino* to offer it to *Tatadiosi* (God) and to your friends for helping you when you need it ... If you have money and a lot of possessions people will have envy and that's not good, they will tell that you don't need help, you have too many things' (Interview with Alberto Castillo, Aboreachi, Chihuahua, México. June 2010).

In this way, *teswuino* not only plays a part in what some authors have called the agricultural calendar and ritualistic cycle of the Raramuri (Martinez *et al*., 2006), it is also a crucial binding element, reinforcing social bonds of friendship in networks of solidarity, work and communal cohesion (Kennedy 1963, 1978). Additionally, *teswuino* gatherings confer social status on the host household, as the quality and quantity of the *teswuino* are appreciated by society: some traditional ways of preparation are thought to be of higher quality, which implies the acknowledgement of local knowledge. Likewise, large amounts of maize are needed for the preparation and, therefore, generosity is another status-generating element.

In more than one way, land, maize and *teswuino* are determinants of social cohesion and requirements for propagating ethnic identity. For instance, collective farming activities are repaid, again collectively, with *teswuino*; hence, if a household asking for help has large quantities of *teswuino* to offer, then it has a larger capacity to recompense and a greater number of potential helpers. In this sense, Levi (1992) argues as well that that *teswuino* for the Raramuri people is equivalent to money for mestizos.

The importance of social interactions for the Raramuri people outside the *teswuino* dimension can be exemplified by one particular case observed in the locality of Aboreachi. Paco lives with his wife, son and his elderly father Beto. They had a house just inside the limits of their farming plot, but a few years ago they decided to change location to a rocky and high spot a few metres away. As it was at a slightly higher altitude, the new site had a beautiful view over the valley where Aboreachi lies. This new house and its lovely setting had an air of tranquillity. However, after a few months Paco and Beto noticed a drawback in the location of their new house; it was much further from the paths leading to other houses and this meant that they were not receiving as many visits as before. So they decided to move back to their previous wooden house where they had been frequently visited. This decision was taken despite the cost in terms of time and physical work involved in building the new house. This case illustrates the importance of frequent social

contact with neighbours, much desired in the Raramuri world. There are additional cultural practices that also indicate the importance of social networks in determining wellbeing for the Raramuri. Like other ethnic groups, the Raramuri possess cultural traditions that enhance social cohesion so as to fortify their identity. Among these traditions are *rohonama,* the obligation to share, divide and distribute things among family and friends; and *korima,* the moral obligation for those who are better off to help someone suffering deprivation who asks for help, particularly in the form of food or money (Kennedy, 1963, 1978; Levi, 1992).

4.3.c Other important dimensions related to living well.

During fieldwork, other assets and dimensions were identified as being directly related to a context-based understanding of wellbeing and the construction of a notion of poverty.

For instance, *mestizos* and *Raramuri* both attach importance to having good health. This dimension is clearly significant in itself; however among Raramuri health and the physical ability to be well are strongly driven by a collective sense of community (Cardenal 1993). In this sense, in section 4.4, I shall describe the cosmological side of living well, including an empirical case where sadness and envy within the community can affect an individual's health. Additionally, both indigenous and non-indigenous people have a general perception that the Raramuri *gentile* population live in the worst living conditions. This is due to the lack of secure means of subsistence, mainly accessible water. Indeed, during the dry season in the *gentile* localities of *Inapuchi* and *Wararare* within the Aboreachi *pobora*, people have to walk up to four hours to access water.[92] Obviously health and water, among other assets, are universal needs; however, in this section I will focus on the ownership of livestock, the surrounding social setting, household life cycle and seasonality. The contextual factors explored in this section were selected by analysing

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[92] Fieldwork notes. December 2010

interviews with the Raramuri people in Aboreachi and identifying the factors most often mentioned, apart from farming and the sense of community which were explored earlier.

Livestock

Among the assets which the Raramuri consider important to a livelihood associated with wellbeing are those that have an implicit economic and nutritional importance. Cattle play an important role in the subsistence strategies of some households, and are often a local marker of wealth.

Some of the early ethnographers such as Kennedy (1963) and Bennet and Zing (1935) wrote about how cattle and goats were important assets within the economy of the region, and the scale of ownership was used to define wealth. Their narratives, especially Kennedy's, show how, in the case of Aboreachi, livestock ownership was much more common a few decades ago than it is today. For instance, they establish how someone owning around 50 cows or more was considered wealthy by Raramuri standards. As mentioned before, at present only seven of the twenty-five households in Aboreachi possess cattle and horses, and none of them has more than 10. It is not only the number of cows that has reduced: numbers of goats, horses and oxen have reduced even more dramatically and it is now very rare for them to be amongst a household's possessions.

Animals like horses and bulls are not only used for agricultural work, but are also an important way of saving. Animals are appreciated for their intrinsic value and are in great demand from mestizo middle men buyers, so they are immediately transferable to respond to a particularly severe crisis (Rosenzweig and Wolpin 1993). Indeed, when asked about the reasons for this reduction in numbers, interviewees often mentioned the need to sell them because of a medical emergency or debt suddenly being called in.

Clearly, owning cattle as material possessions is important among the Raramuri, so how do they react in terms of envy when people accumulate wealth? Firstly, owning cattle does not necessarily imply accumulation. Additionally, as mentioned before, bragging about material possession can lead to feelings of envy so there are cultural mechanisms within Raramuri society to inhibit bragging about material wealth and about accumulation. I argue that expected behaviour and individual responsibility towards the group are relevant to the understanding of this question. An individual or household that possesses a number of cattle is morally and socially obliged to donate meat and participate in public festivities where meat and food is prepared and distributed, such as *teswuino* gatherings, during Holy Week (*Noririwachi*) and other important religious ceremonies. This responsibility to share meat at gatherings is directly linked with the household's own capacity and wealth. Families considered wealthier or better off, then, are expected to participate and share in greater proportion than those considered worse off[93]. I argue, hence, that active participation in these gatherings ensures the behavior expected within the group and therefore minimises envy.

As we analyzed in the section about benefiting from social protection programmes, it is behaving in the expected manner and accepting the responsibility implicit in having material possessions – not bragging, or engaging in practices that are essentially conspicuous consumption– which are crucial for wellbeing, and not accumulation *per se*.

Social setting and life cycle

The social setting matters when defining a strategy for living well. As seen in last section, the social setting influences material and intangible aspirations concerning what the Raramuri dominant discourse defines as the correct path of living well (*Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich)*. This discourse, as mentioned, implies clearly defining group boundaries and is grounded in a specific social setting. Interviewees during fieldwork in

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[93] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi, June, September, December, 2010

Aboreachi show a strong relationship between what are conceived as basic needs and aspirations and their changing nature over time within the surrounding social setting. For instance, Seleno Gonzalez is one of a few Raramuri people in Aboreachi that have migrated temporarily to Chihuahua City on various occasions to work in agricultural fields for large companies. He explains:

> *'Here in Aboreachi, one has so few desires and cravings; for instance one can be happy with just enjoying a coke bought at the store - or if someone gives it to you as gift, even better! But in the city you can't be happy with just yourself, or with your family, because you are surrounded by all kinds of desirable things: food, and nice clothes, cars, and other needs. [...] If I go with my family to the city, my kids want all sorts of things that I cannot afford'.* (Interview with Seleno Gonzalez, Aboreachi, June 2010) Translated by the author.

Seleno's testimony show how material aspirations are imposed by an urban lifestyle. In most cases, these social desires are not met, leading to different criteria for deprivation being developed when one compares oneself with the wider society. This testimony relates to the comparison of the living better vs. the living well approaches discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Social living aspirations and notions of deprivation change in urban settings, where lifestyles are different from those in the rural sierra of Tarahumara. Seleno's case provides also some reflections on alternative discourses of wellbeing. As described earlier, there is a dominant discourse among the Raramuri based on the traditional and normative figures of power and prestige within the group. Traditional leaders and individuals perceived as enjoying social prestige, such as the narratives of Maria and Etanacio, and the principles of the *Nawesari* – the public speech regularly given by the *Seriame* as an act of authority - are examples of this. Unavoidably, these narratives are associated with individuals of certain age, such as the elderly. In this case, relatively young people migrate from their late teens in search of temporary income and cultural

experiences in urban settings. Kavedžija (2012) acknowledges the difference in understandings of wellbeing amongst different age groups. For instance, young people might emphasize the hope of a better future for themselves and their families. The experience of working, at least temporarily, in the city brings aspirations of new possibilities opening up beyond the context of scarcity on the Tarahumara and outside the shared normative values that discourage material accumulation and promote communitarianism, which are building blocks of the dominant discourse of wellbeing. In a way, migration provides a new path to wellbeing which is experienced mainly (although not exclusively) by young people, and which may represent benefits at both the individual and the collective level in terms of securing livelihoods. This idea relates to Jackson's (2011) argument that humans are intrinsically never satisfied with their present circumstances and thus engage in different ways to satisfy their needs and improve their circumstances. The findings presented in this research concerning the Raramuri dominant discourse of wellbeing should be considered in the context of this universal desire to improve human conditions.

However, as Seleno's case shows, these experiences, with the aspirations and expectations attached to them, more often than not come with a price. Many young Raramuri, like Seleno, become frustrated by the lack of security of life in the cities, in terms of being unable to find work, make a life of one's own, and provide for their families. Over time, these experiences of frustration and despair can make the contentment offered by life in the Tarahumara region seem far more attractive.

Aligned with the dominant discourse of wellbeing in the Tarahumara, endurance and the ability to make do with what one faces in life is learned and accepted after experiences such as Seleno's. The changing nature of aspirations and understanding of wellbeing over the lifespan of an individual has been explored by others, such as Kavedžija (2012) when reporting her findings concerning perceptions of good living among the elderly and young people in Japan.

Additionally, this testimony relates to existing literature on the subject of social aspirations and relative notions of poverty in terms of one individual's or group's subjective condition in comparison with another's. As early as Runcimann (1966), stress was placed on analysing relative deprivation in intergroup relations. Runcimann identifies two important differences in the perceived deprivations of an individual; *egoistic* and *paternalistic* relative deprivation. Egoistic is the perception of dissatisfaction of an individual in relation to other individuals in the same group; correspondingly, paternalistic refers to an individual's feeling of dissatisfaction as part of a group in relation to a second group. (Olson, Herman, Zanna: 1986) This distinction is important to bear in mind as it stresses the individual ethnic ascription allowing the intergroup relationship analysis in terms of perceived deprivation. This links to the issue of urban versus rural livelihoods: the rural livelihood and way of living practised by the Raramuri*,* which is largely based on subsistence farming and includes a strong sense of community, does not fit easily with the rather impersonal, profit-oriented, commoditization of urban life in large cities. Additionally, my informant, Seleno, says that living among the Raramuri people in the social setting of the Sierra you lose control of your means of existence: '(…) you must farm and work hard in order to survive, but in the city you don't have anything, the only alternative is to work for others, to find a job to get money'[94]. An *egoistic* perspective of the Raramuri people's dissatisfaction is not commonly portrayed, at least in terms of deprivation determinants.

Household cycle

Household demography, such as the number of children, is also a social characteristic associated with whether families are living well. But it is not an automatic association. In Aboreachi, those households that have small children at home (10 out of 25) reported that often they find it harder to make ends meet as they have more mouths to feed.

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[94] *Ibid*

However, arguably, in early stages of a household with small children living at home, it becomes more difficult, but once they grow up they create new households, extending the support network and hence potentially increasing the protection against economic upsets. This illustrates that demographic indicators do not act in isolation from other features. It is by observing them in action over time that we get a clearer picture of the relational dimensions of wellbeing.

Seasonality

Seasonality is a dynamic element observed in fieldwork which is important for understanding the multiple implications of living well and deprivation levels. Far from understanding poverty as a fixed, permanent condition, a seasonality perspective, gained from empirical research on poverty dynamics, can show how variable and cyclical conditions of scarcity and vulnerability can be for a given deprived population. As farming societies depend greatly on agricultural cycles and weather conditions, for instance, the rainy season represents a celebratory period crucial to their livelihood and food security. It is also the season where workload tends to increase so people have an increased need for calories and nutrients. However, it is also connected with a sharp increase in gastrointestinal diseases (Interview with medical staff, Laguna de Aboreachi, August 2010).

As noted, the agricultural cycle is closely linked with seasonality. From December to May, lack of rain and diminished agricultural production contribute to the period often being called "the cold, dry and sad season". During the winter months, until the beginning of Holy Week or *Noririwachi* (coinciding with the beginning of the rainy season) households are forced to ration their reserves - if any - of maize, beans and other crops from the previous year's harvest.

Alberto, a *Raramuri* living in Aboreachi, expresses the mood during these months very clearly: "during these months even the cattle become weak and thin". Afterwards the rain starts to fall, and planting begins in May. From that month to September is a period characterized by intense farming activity, which is crucial to productivity. This is when the demanding physical works takes place, and at the same time social interaction through help and solidarity practices reaches its peak; animals, tools and extra hands are needed and asked for. During this period *teswuino* gatherings take place as part of the collective work, and there are constant invitations to work and drink together. The harvest stage starts from October - November, and demanding and collective activities continue. Moreover, it is during these months that a household will have an indication of the amount of food that will be produced and how much they can save, and even more importantly how much *teswuino* they can produce to invite friends and family. It is in then that crucial decisions concerning seed, crops and monetary savings for the next agricultural ritual cycle need to be taken. Throughout the year, each farming stage is accompanied by rituals intended to purify and cleanse the crops of bad spirits, or to ask for good rain, although this type of ritual tends to be more frequent between September and December when harvest and abundance are a reason for giving thanks. Over the next few months this abundance slowly dwindles until the next rainy season comes.

Subsistence agriculture in Aboreachi is a highly risky livelihood for the *Raramuri* people because of climatic fluctuations. People in Aboreachi, as in other many locations in the area, increasingly need to engage in income generating activities. This is because subsistence agriculture often carries a wide range of risks, including being unable to farm due to illness, pest damage, incorrect care of crops, too little or too much rain and other natural hazards, poor soil quality, and more. Indeed, in many informal conversations with the Raramuri of Aboreachi I could observe a general perception of constant vulnerability in terms of farming.

Consequently, if the harvest of maize and beans is inadequate in a given agricultural cycle there will be food scarcity. As mentioned, solidarity networks and culturally embedded practices of sharing help to create a safety net that serves as a first resort measure to secure food. However, climatic disruptions often affect all households' harvests leaving little capacity to respond. When this happens, Raramuri people often need to engage in a range of remunerated activity, either working as peons for mestizos in neighbouring towns, or helping other Raramuri who might require extra hands in exchange for food. Subsequent sections will explore this further, and present empirical evidence of the causes and consequences of temporary migration.

During fieldwork I noticed that informal conversations with Raramuri often touch on climate predictions and risks associated with farming. Information sharing on climate vulnerability leading to food insecurity is common. For instance, Raramuri people remember 2008 as a particularly rainy year compared with others, to the extent that crops were lost due to the excess of rain. People had to plough and plant twice that year, although not all households had the capacity to do this; availability of seeds on that occasion was a particularly important factor. As a consequence, the timing of that year's ceremonies and rituals shifted; double farming activity was needed; and eventually the harvest production was seriously undermined. In that particular year, temporary migration to cities was common practice, and social protection programmes were crucial.[95]

Among the mestizos, seasonality manifests itself with intensified periods of cash flows from commercial activity in Laguna. For instance, even if Laguna de Aboreachi is relatively small in comparison with other mestizo localities, the fact that it is on the main paved roads connecting the different towns of the Tarahumara region makes it an important commercial centre. Consequently, high and low tourism seasons affect the flow of visitors

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[95] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi, Mexico June-July, 2010.

and potential customers. Again, the mestizo population shows greater links with local and national economic activities.

Until now this chapter has discussed different dimensions and elements that the Raramuri identify as building up a sense of living well. Two dimensions are central: land and farming, and a strong sense of community through solidarity and collective practices. It has been argued that both can be understood as the right to maintain a livelihood based on subsistence agriculture and to maintain a way of life whilst engaging and participating in local economic processes thorough labour and commerce and benefiting from government programmes. Other elements are associated with the particular mode of subsistence and way of life in the Tarahumara: livestock, the surrounding social setting, household cycles and seasonality. As mentioned, the dimensions and elements explored here are related to ways of securing livelihoods and way of life. However, living well for the Raramuri is also related to deeper cosmological and religious beliefs. This fact contributes additionally to the argument that Raramuri livelihoods and way of life are distinctive in comparison to the wider society in the region. In the following section, I will explore how the wellbeing discourses identified by the Raramuri described earlier are put in practice, reproduced and reinforced by cultural cosmological beliefs and practices.

4.4 Cosmological beliefs, cultural drivers and living well

Living well for the Raramuri involves more than permanence of livelihoods and ways of life; a strong cosmological component is part of understanding it. Doyal and Gough's (1991) Theory of Human Needs argued that meeting human needs requires the production and reproduction of the social structures where people live and participate. This functioning implies having the ability to transmit understandings and values considered important through institutional practices. Secondly, a political structure of authorities that safeguard and protect the reproduction of meanings and associated practices. In a way, these functions of social structures speak of cultural drivers that guide, sanction or incentive particular behaviours, values and attitude over others.

Cosmological beliefs are mirrored in everyday life: festivities and practices, and ethnic discourses associated with idealized ways of living and how hindering and constraining factors are understood. This involves interpreting extraordinary events often understood within the framework of ethnic oppression and wellbeing constraints. I argue that these interpretations shape how living well is conceived and understood by the Raramuri people through both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic interactions. The interpretations of natural events are socially configured in terms of health, a dimension not yet explored in this chapter. I would argue that the Raramuri share knowledge and understandings of health in terms of the interplay of supernatural powers that are shaped by social interactions within the Raramuri localities, as also in their relations with the mestizo population and wider society. Specifically, unequal inter-ethnic power relations can influence and are sometimes seen as preventing Raramuri from living well. Furthermore, I would argue that religious and festive practices act as cultural drivers contributing to the production of the dominant discourse of living well by articulating shared understandings of social sanctions if a Raramuri is involved in envy or material accumulation, traits associated with the mestizo way of living.

Based on empirical evidence and ethnographical research, two cases will be presented as cultural interpretations that show how living well for the Raramuri is a collective dimension that deals with intra- and inter-ethnic relations. The first case describes diverse cultural interpretations of shooting stars or (o*rema* in the Raramuri language) as an example of enforcing social behaviours within the Raramuri, to follow the correct path of living or '*Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich'*, and not a non-Raramuri way of living. The second case involves the interpretation of small earthquakes that take place in the Tarahumara region, which are understood as effects of unequal power relations from some mestizo livelihoods - especially drug dealing - which prevent the Raramuri from living well.

The cases to be described reflect the relational aspect of living well as a notion articulated by social relationships. Some of them relate to intra-group relationships, other to inter-group relationships. They to serve as an example to understand how a dominant discourse is reproduced through cultural drivers in Raramuri society.

4.4.a. *Oremas* as intra-group relations among the Raramuri.

Cultural and social understandings of living well imply that all social interactions must be on equal terms and with a sense of homogeneity. If, for instance, interactions are based on distrust, envy or coercion then the probability of having an illness affect you is increased. So, health - or rather lack of it - is perceived as a cause and consequence of multiple factors; not only biological factors but cosmological and socio-culturally embedded factors are understood to have a role in it.

As noted earlier, material accumulation among Raramuri can sometimes lead to envy among people and consequently material accumulation is subject to social and health penalties, as are as other traits associated with a non-Raramuri way of living by the discourse explored earlier. Sometimes, if persistent, a Raramuri offender runs the risk of being punished by supernatural manifestation under the control of traditional healers.

A concrete example is the *orema*. Among the Raramuri and other indigenous groups living in the Tarahumara region, when an individual comes into conflict with another, because of envy, jealousy or suspicion of creating harm, it is possible to seek the services of a benign healer (*owiruame*) or evil healer (*sukuruame*). Reputable healers are rare and hard to find in some areas, so sometimes they are brought in from great distances to attend to cases where western medicine has not achieved the desired result. Bennet and Zing's (1935) description of the Tarahumara region dated nearly eighty years ago recounts in great detail how this specialized role played an important role in Raramuri society, taking care of natural and supernatural relations. These two powerful figures, the owiruame and

sukuruame, are the repositories of secret wisdom and shamanic power to protect or weaken individuals, and are considered to command supernatural power through practices and rituals not available to the rest of the people, such as curing with dreams or plants and invoking supernatural forces (Urteaga; 2004) . There is a strong belief in the power of these healers. Among other things it is said that they are capable of creating supernatural creatures to do their bidding. One such creature is the *orema* or (*oremaka* in plural). Hence, oremas are the product of invocations of traditional healers which protect or induce illness in individuals that have ruptured social norms.

The o*rema* is often described as a bird of fire with bright red feathers, which a powerful *sukuruame* commands to enter a person and take hold of his or her soul (Urteaga, 2004). Among the Raramuri*,* some illnesses, mostly those that happen suddenly and involve dreams, are considered to be caused by the departure of one 'soul' from the human body[96]. Women are considered to possess four souls and men three, the difference in numbers being because women have the potential to give birth (Merril 1995, Martinez 2008). When one 'soul' departs from someone's body that person needs the specialized services of a reputable *owiruame* to recover the 'lost' soul by complex procedures, including healing by dreams.

During fieldwork in the Aboreachi locality, one clear night I witnessed an *orema* along with two elderly Raramuri.[97] We were talking, and when I spotted a bright, white light in the sky I drew their attention to it and asked what that was. The light appeared to be moving and heading towards us in a steady and straight trajectory, until finally after a few seconds it passed above our heads and appeared to have fragmented into a few pieces and crashed a few hundred meters away from where we were standing. The two Raramuri men were seriously concerned and worried. They told me that it happened because there were people doing 'bad doings', and that produced great unrest in the locality. Although

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[96] A common interpretation of sadness among Raramuri also relates to one soul departing the body (Merril 1995, Martinez 2008).
[97] Fieldwork notes Aboreachi. December 2010

they did not mention a particular individual or situation, two days earlier there had been a noticeable and much-discussed fight between two Raramuri in a *teswuino* gathering, resulting in one man being injured by a knife wound in an arm. He had to be taken to the clinic in Laguna of Aboreachi for medical attention. The prohibition of fighting during *teswuino* gatherings is common advice in the public speech of the *nawesari*, as in the case described earlier. This case is evidence of how extraordinary events are interpreted as punishment for social breaches, and therefore the understanding of living well and the 'right path' is maintained and reinforced by normative guidelines.

Therefore, *oremaka* can be understood as culturally embedded drivers to ensure social cohesion within the group and are practical examples of how a dominant discourse of living well encourages an 'ideal' collective uniformity based on the threat of punishment for behaviours such as public expressions of wealth and accumulation, and other anti-social behaviour. In this sense, the *oremakas* and *nawesari* share similarities as they reflect the same implicit egalitarian principles and strong sense of creating community and homogeneity. The *nawesari* is the public manifestation of the discourse which needs to be socially reproduced, the *orema* in this case, and reflects the realisation of the penalties that apply pressure and maintain the dominance of the discourse over other discourses of living well among the Raramuri. Both represent clear examples of how the dominant ethnic discourse of the Raramuri is reproduced and enforced by the threat of losing a sense of living well and ultimately one's health. Urteaga (2004) understands this type of understanding as a reflection of a hidden power structure that manifests itself within the religious beliefs of the Raramuri, and therefore has meaning within their values and culture. The meaning implied is the social penalties for behaviour which disrupt balance and harmonic social relations among the Raramuri.

When an individual repeatedly brags about being better off than others or displays material possessions when the surrounding households show deprivation, or on the other hand gets involved in fights or antisocial behaviour with others during *teswuino*

gatherings, or does not participate in reciprocal collaboration, then he or she runs the risk that an injured party might seek a *Sukuruame* for reprisals. This option, however, remains a last resort and does not happen frequently. Offenders first receive individual advice and guidance from the authorities of each Raramuri pueblo or pobora (*Seriame*, *Mayora* or *Comisariado de Policia*) during a public gathering. Again the *nawesari* plays a crucial role here in the production and reproduction of the dominant discourse concerning identity and wellbeing among the Raramuri.

Seeking the services of a *Sukuruame* or *Owiruame* is more an individual decision than a collective one. This is not to say that they are arbitrary decisions. The traditional healers, having high social status and being respected members of the Raramuri system of *cargos*[98], must also consider whether to get involved, and decide whether each particular case deserves their intervention or not. Additionally, the fee that the offender is required to pay to the healer serves as a deterrent. The fee is usually negotiated between the parties and takes the form of food and/or money.[99] This system, which preserves social norms, also illustrates social hierarchies and power relations within the Raramuri group as only a few doctors and healers who are socially in demand for their services are considered capable enough to create and command an *orema*.

The fact that this dimension is interconnected with a state of wellbeing (in terms of health, enjoying social interactions, etc.) is often overlooked in wellbeing frameworks, in part due to its subjectivity and the complexity of its implications. However, the way cultural interpretations link and reflect conceptions and understandings of how to live in a particular setting adds depth to a wellbeing perspective.

4.4.b. Earthquakes as interpretations of interethnic relations.

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[98] Position of authority in the traditional political of the Raramuri.
[99] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi, Mexico. December 2010.

The second case describes how Raramuri people interpret slight earth tremors as inter-ethnic power relations from the oppressive wider economic and political context, which prevent living well. Northern Mexico is not known to be a tectonically active area and seismic activity of any magnitude is unusual in the region. However, small earth movements occur from time to time in the Tarahumara region, and they are subject to a variety of interpretations. During fieldwork I experienced one of these small earthquakes in Aboreachi. On one particular occasion the movement lasted approximately five seconds. It was felt in several localities in a wide area and instantly became the main topic of conversation[100]. When asking people their thoughts about the recent event, mestizo people in the Laguna told me that small earthquakes do happen and nothing more. Past events were remembered and information on local radio was mentioned as a source of information, but no further interpretation was detected.

However, among the Raramuri people a different story emerged. Catalino Castillo Armendariz gives an example in this account: 'This is not normal and not good (…) the shaking of the earth was caused by a large serpent living deep inside the earth and when it senses people fighting and arguing it moves, causing the movement (...) it moves because of the *linea*.'[101] The *linea* Catalino is referring to is an armed group that operates in some parts of the Tarahumara region. It is part of the Juarez Cartel, concerned with drug trafficking and organized crime. This group has been linked to massacres and looting in the region and its presence has produced great stress and concern in the population.

As opposed as the *orema*, this case describes how negative effects from the mestizo and wider social setting are interpreted as 'not normal and not good'. The negative effects of narcotic activities put pressure on farming land availability, and make people feel insecure and fearful on remote paths and roads and in localities where the Raramuri population tend to concentrate. Wide areas of the Tarahumara region are completely controlled by armed groups. Both indigenous and mestizo people engage in illicit cultivation as one of

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[100] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi, Mexico. June 2010.
[101] Interview with Catalino Castillo. Aboreachi, Mexico. June 2010.

their available coping strategies. However, they do so in a condition of exploitation and subordination. The drug dealers coerce them to grow marijuana and *amapola* (opium poppy) and they are subject to frequent physical violence and abuse, which is often under-reported due to its nature.[102]

In this way, the interpretation of earth tremors embodies the collective feeling and oppression suffered by the Raramuri people. The community response for dealing with this type of structural violence within the Raramuri cosmology is to persist in their social practices. Often, when there is a dispute at the personal level or between groups, *teswuino* gatherings are a way to promote a solution, by keeping both father and mother god happy (De Velasco; 1987). The fiesta or gatherings to dance, give thanks and work collectively are how the community expresses its unity, and where information is shared, problems and concerns are discussed and solutions are proposed. The collective sense is again present in addressing Raramuri wellbeing.

The two examples described here help to illustrate how social interpretations of extraordinary events act as cultural drivers that ensure the reinforcement and continuation of discourses. These discourses relate to non-conventional expressions of wellbeing that are often overlooked in development literature, despite a deeper perspective on how intra-group and inter-group interactions can express values, perceptions and culturally embedded reactions to oppression from the outset. Additionally, the two examples encourage us to analyse them as consequences of the Raramuri reaction to oppressive social economic and political dominance on the mestizo side.

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter presents empirical evidence about the Raramuri group and their dominant discourse of living well. In this light two main qualitative dimensions of Raramuri living

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[102] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi. June-July 2010

well were analysed: (i) the importance of land and farming and (ii) the strong sense of community based on social networks of solidarity; a series of diverse factors also complement the construction of a dominant discourse of living well through the good path (or *Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich)*. This dominant discourse highlights differences between *mestizos* and Raramuri in the sense that for the latter the search for living well implies maintaining living conditions that allow them to live well, and not necessarily to "live better" by improving conditions through material accumulation. The dominant discourse is based on a desire for homogeneity in living conditions and an ability to endure and make do with what one faces in life by controlling one's own cultural practices and spaces.

Living well is made possible by the right to maintain livelihood strategies such as subsistence agriculture, communal rather than individual ownership of means of production, social systems based firmly on kin relations and the practice of culturally-embedded forms of sharing and reciprocal exchange (such the *teswuino* gatherings in the case of the Raramuri). These strategies entail collective returns rather than focusing on individual accumulation. Therefore, social and cultural mechanisms maintain a dominant living well discourse and understandings through social practices that create 'traditions' and through social sanctions that shape behaviours and aspirations. In this way, the Raramuri reinforce their identity and self-definition.

Additionally, living well for the Raramuri implies a cosmological understanding that adds to the subjective and complex implications of our understanding of living well among indigenous people. In this sense, the Raramuri group enacts, through a powerful discourse, a response and strategy of fighting to define itself as an ethnic group and defend this social spaces and practices in a context of ethno-political oppression (Long 2007). However, we have also explored how living well from the Raramuri perspective does not limit itself to the right to maintain autochthonous practices of self-consumption agriculture and collective networks, it also implies the need to have equal relations with

the nation state and wider society. This was demonstrated by the case of earthquakes being interpreted as a negative consequence on the Raramuri of events in the non-indigenous world.

The findings explored in this chapter are important because they provide evidence that there is no universal understanding of wellbeing, nor a single way to achieve it. Analysis of local dynamics and contextualization are required in order to fully capture the complex colours of wellbeing understandings. Therefore, if we are to answer the main research question of how persistent asymmetries are formed and perpetuated we first need to explore these local understandings. We have seen that through discourses, the Raramuri are able to articulate a culturally embedded alternative of living well that questions and departs from the universal desire to live better, the need to accumulate material possessions, dependency on participating on markets, and the required change in their lifestyle that the mainstream development agenda suggest and promotes. There are other ways of living that depart, to a certain extent, from the notion that social groups, regardless of their historical and cultural uniqueness, must live with the same understanding of wellbeing. These local understandings of wellbeing among minority groups must inform the inequality agenda by providing evidence of what people conceptualize as needs, wants and desires in terms of wellbeing, in order to address persistent asymmetries between groups.

The empirical evidence described here suggests that the Raramuri people, like other social groups living in the margins of the influence of the State and wider society, had to adopt a strategic position to tackle economic vulnerabilities resulting from processes of exclusion. They also benefited from the opportunities inherent in that position which could reinforce their identity and self-definition. It is in the context of their fluctuating at the margins of the wider society that the Raramuri discourse of living well takes place and makes sense: where the people fluctuate between the tension of having the right to live differently and the need to be part of the larger society.

The Raramuri discourse is in a subaltern position when compared to the mainstream discourse imposed by the wider society because providing alternatives opens up the possibility of discourses clashing. As Scott (2009) argues, people living at the margins of the State and society are seen as abnormal and posing a threat, as they are not subject to society's control, and they are depicted as being outside the law, violent or uncivilized.

In the next chapter I will argue that the same two dimensions explored here are hindered by inter-ethnic factors related to asymmetric power relations between the Raramuri and the mestizo. The factors referred to are land conflicts, the institutional arrangements of the ejido system, and ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities. I will focus on how these factors operate at a local level in a way that affects to different extents and in different ways the two dimensions of living well we explored previously. Also, empirical evidence will be presented as to how power relations are embedded in economic, political and social relations in the Tarahumara region and in the wider social setting. These empirical cases are explored in terms of the role they play in determining asymmetric power relations among both groups leading to opportunity hoarding.

CHAPTER V. HINDERING FACTORS MAINTAINING POWER RELATIONS.

The last chapter explored how understandings of living well are formed and reproduced among the people of the *Raramuri* region of Aboreachi. The 'path to living well', or *'Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich'* in the Tarahumara context, is perceived as a result of complex interactions of various dimensions. Two main qualitative dimensions were discussed as being perceived as crucial for the *Raramuri* people to live well: the importance of land and farming, and a strong sense of community though solidarity networks. These dimensions are marked by a strong sense of communal reciprocity and ethnic homogeneity in livelihoods and everyday life. The discourse of living well deals with the recognition that a livelihood and way of living is based on subsistence agriculture; communal rather than individual ownership of means of production; social systems based heavily on kin relations and the practice of culturally-embedded forms of sharing and reciprocal exchange bringing about collective returns. This discourse maintains a dominant position in the *Raramuri* society by being well embedded in cultural practices and shared traditions as well in the social penalties for breaches of acceptable social behaviour.

In this second empirical chapter, I explore how these dimensions needed to live well - the importance of land and farming, and the importance of community - are hindered by factors associated with power asymmetries based on inter-ethnic relations between mestizo and *Raramuri* livelihoods and way of life. This is done in order to shed light on how the articulation of multiple and complex factors combine to produce differentials, power asymmetries and deprivation levels when compared to the non-indigenous population (see Chapter III). In these senses, the thesis advocates incorporating an understanding of relationships that systematically constrain livelihoods and ways of living associated to wellbeing options for *Raramuri* people. The rationale for exploring what prevents or affects the living-well dimensions already explored earlier should focus on precisely on the inter-ethnic categories related to land and farming and on the sense of

community. Therefore, this chapter argues that land conflicts, the ejido system and ethnically differentiated vulnerability contribute to the local or immediate factors that limit the possibilities for the *Raramuri* people to enjoy land, to engage in subsistence farming and to exercise a way of living based on solidarity networks, and therefore prevents them from following the correct path or *'Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich'*. Is important to remember that the rationale of why am I focusing on that specific factors and not others is because informants and empirical evidence collected in fieldwork evidence their weight. Therefore, the hindering factors explored –land conflicts, the institutional arrangement of the ejido system and ethnically differentiated vulnerability- are also *emic* categories identified by the Raramuri people as having a role on the constraining their living well dimensions.

Throughout the chapter, the argument that certain institutional arrangements and social spaces - such as the ejido - can be understood as force fields (Nuijten 1998) will be presented in order to explain how power asymmetries are maintained between mestizo and *Raramuri*. Moreover, other factors operating at the national or global level add to the multiple and complex levels that build interactions that are an obstacle to living well for the *Raramuri*. Among these last factors explored are power relations visible in economic, social and political activities in the region. These factors lead to a state of vulnerability and opportunity hoarding affecting predominantly the *Raramuri* population. Additionally, these are key factors identified by empirical accounts and narratives which I have collected from fieldwork in the Aboreachi area, and also by the fact that relevant monographs and studies give important evidence to back up the conflicting relationships between livelihoods commonly portrayed by mestizo and *Raramuri*. Furthermore, the component of the *Raramuri* living well discourse referred to as the *need* to benefit from exchange relations with the wider society and economic participation in markets also experiences the same hindering effects from power relations, as explored later. Therefore the local and national/global factors will capture the relational nature of power asymmetries, including the participation of different economic, political and social sectors

in sustaining the state of constant power asymmetries in which most *Raramuri* people are trapped.

The subsections of the chapter are as follows. The first section will argue that land conflicts, institutional arrangements of the ejido and differentiated vulnerabilities are important local hindering factors that affect *Raramuri* livelihoods and way of living. By exploring how these factors are present in the Aboreachi region I will show how they ultimately obstruct living well for the *Raramuri* living there. The second section explores empirical evidence on how power relations are embedded in the economic, social and political inter-ethnic activities which build the ethno-political context surrounding the Tarahumara region. These are inter-group economic interactions leading to vulnerability, and inter-group political relations and institutional arrangements leading to opportunity hoarding. The decision to incorporate contextual elements into the analysis of how social and ethnic interactions are detrimental to living well dimensions is important due to the recognition that Aboreachi and the Tarahumara region cannot be not considered an isolated region as they are naturally being subjected to national and global economic and political forces. Additionally, the justification for focusing on the surrounding context is based on the fact that land conflicts, the ejido system and ethnically differentiated vulnerability as hindering factors of *Raramuri* living-well is embedded in social structures at the local, national and global level. I argue that social structures must be considered in order to coherently understand the economic exploitation and ethno-political oppression faced by *Raramuri* people, and thus contribute to understanding the causes of the present power asymmetries in the Tarahumara region. As was the case in the last chapter, I will explore and analyse some of these factors in their linkages with power asymmetries through the use of empirical narratives collected from fieldwork.

Additionally, the hindering factors explored here were identified in fieldwork as acting at the local level. They also show similarities with those factors identified in the report from

CEDAIN (Centre for Alternative Indigenous Development) referred to in the previous chapter.[103]

The following section will address the local factors that directly affect the two dimensions of living well expressed by the *Raramuri*.

5.1 Interethnic factors that hinder the Raramuri 'path to living well'

During fieldwork when interviewing, performing ethnographic observation and living among the *Raramuri* of Aboreachi, it became evident that land conflicts, the institutional arrangement of the ejido and ethnically differentiated vulnerability were local factors that implied inter-ethnic interactions and on many occasions were charged by uneven power relations between the *Raramuri* and the *mestizos*. The factors explored in this section were empirically identified as having greater impact on the capacity to maintain a livelihood based on subsistence agriculture and on the way of life articulated by collectivism and solidarity practices. In other words, those factors that affect the living well dimensions for the *Raramuri,* as recalled from the previous chapter. Let us explore the first local factor.

a. Land conflicts

Land conflicts are a known and well-researched source of poverty and inequality in many areas around the world. Recent literature has given an account of the recent trend of

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[103] This report identifies six factors that play a role in preventing a sense of wellbeing for the Raramuri people: a) 'Lack of good health' (body and spirit wise); b) Food insecurity; concerning mainly farming vulnerability but also access to other income generating activities; c) A sense of weak community cohesion, associated with a diminishing role in decision making of traditional leaders;
d) Lack of respect towards Raramuri authorities; not only from the mestizos but also from young generations not willing to participate in ceremonies and communal gatherings; e) Envy affecting family and social relations producing conflicts within the Raramuri localities; f) Intromission of mestizo affairs on Raramuri; associated with land grabbing, cattle rustling, forest exploitation, drug related violence, unjust commercial interactions. (Unpublished manuscript; 36)

global land grabbing – or large-scale land acquisitions - and the subsequent consequences and warnings regarding the potential effects on peasant and indigenous livelihoods and way of living by multiple forms of appropriation and privatization (Borras, et al, 2011; Lund and Lee Peluso, 2011; Borras and Franco, 2010; Fairhead and Leach, 2012). Land conflicts are also present in the Tarahumara region.

Land conflicts in the Tarahumara region have diverse causes. The influence of economic policies and activities drawn up for the Tarahumara region by the non-indigenous population has produced constraints on the enjoyment and the accessibility of natural resources, especially land, water and forestry for the predominantly disadvantaged *Raramuri* (COSYDDHAC/Texas Centre for Policy Studies, 2000; Quiroz, 2008; Wyndham, 2010). Recently land invasions have been the result of global economic activities in the Tarahumara region (Alvarado Licon 1996; Burnett and Raimond 1996; DePalma 1995; Estrada Martinez and Vega Carrillo 1993; Salopek 1989; 1996). The growing tourist industry, mining, forestry, commerce and illegal drug cultivation and dealing are economic factors that have increased inter-ethnic tension among both groups (COSYDDHAC/Texas Centre for Policy Studies, 2000; Rivero, 1987). For instance, in the Tarahumara region a large scale Tourism Project of the Copper Canyon or '*Barrancas del Cobre'* have created a rush for land acquisition by local elites, national and global private groups of tourism entrepreneurs (Mancera, et al 1998). The project to exploit the natural wonders of the Copper Canyon located at the heart of the region has begun the construction of huge infrastructure investments such as five star hotels, airports, roads, cable cars crossing the Copper Canyon, golf courses and convention centers. This 320 million peso project[104] was funded and promoted by the Federal and State governments. As a consequence of the start of the project, collective ejido land has been acquired by investors usually with the compliance of local mestizo elites. Some of the more affected *Raramuri* localities have opposed the project and have legally challenged the illicit or irregular acquisition of land

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[104] See: http://www.ah-chihuahua.com/?p=2181 and
http://www.sectur.gob.mx/es/sectur/sect_Programa_Mar_de_Cortes__Barrancas_del_Cobre

by third parties[105]. For instance, the indigenous community of Huetosachi, with the legal advice of local nongovernmental organizations and advocacy groups such as *Consultoria Tecnica Comunitaria* (CONTEC), has won a legal challenge against private groups of tourism entrepreneurs in what is the Cooper Canyon Project whose efforts to appropriate tracks of land threaten to change dramatically their way of subsistence and cultural identity. The Mexican Supreme Court of Justice granted the locality's demand to stop the land acquisition attempts in this Raramuri community on the grounds that indigenous people have the right to be consulted about the development plans and to decide on social investment and tourist infrastructure that affect their territories and natural resources[106]. These rights are recognized in Article Two of the Mexican Constitution and in ratified international treaties such as Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization. Although this is an ongoing case, the legal victory for the indigenous demand - despite death threats and reprisals towards Raramuri leaders - was well documented in local and national media as the legal decision set a precedent for future cases of land conflicts affecting indigenous people in Mexico. [107]

Irregular acquisition of land promoted by large-scale tourism projects is not the only cause of land conflicts. For instance, in other areas of the Tarahumara region, legal challenges over demarcation and topographical limits of ejido areas have caused friction among local communities. In some cases mestizo *caciques* have taken advantage of legal loopholes to justify land grabbing, often of the most fertile land or that which is most suitable for livestock. Although several similar disputes have been reported, a well known case is the so-called Pino Gordo legal dispute in the Municipality of Batopilas where the Raramuri

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[105] http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/12/23/estados/028n1est

[106] http://kwira.org/wp-content/uploads/SCJN-HUETOSACHI-04-2012.pdf

[107] See http://uri.oseri.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1120:raramuris-logran-amparo-federal-y-paran-proyecto-turistico&catid=61:indigenas&Itemid=116, and http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/86754.html

locality of Choreachi is engaged in a long-standing struggle for land rights with the mestizo locality of Coloradas and with the Raramuri locality of El Durazno (Almanza; 2012).

Raramuri *ejidatarios* have adopted and articulated specific land demands through the use of the ejido institution, as demonstrated by the growing number of legal cases in national and international courts presented by indigenous population of the Tarahumara. Raramuri people have learnt that land conflicts, demarcations of limits between or within the same ejido or the other similar figure of *agrarian communities,* have to be settled by means of these collective forms as subject of rights in ways that the *Pobora* or other indigenous forms of collective organization cannot. On the face of it, the lawsuits and public demonstrations resulting from the conflict are founded in the premise that *ejidos* are subject to agrarian rights and therefore used to enact national and international legal frameworks such as the 169 Convention of the ILO to articulate broader social and cultural demands. This contestation and resistance mechanisms used by disadvantaged *Raramuri* will be further explored in the following chapter as they are not only articulated in relation to the ejido system but have diverse manifestations. However, I would argue that the agency and resistance mechanisms employed by the *Raramuri* are primarily oriented towards a local immediate level, and therefore exercise little influence on dominant power structures embedded in the region and thus can do little to shift current conditions of asymmetry.

The Copper Canyon Project is one example of how national and global investments can influence the means of subsistence and way of life for the *Raramuri* people. It has localized implications affecting one area of the Tarahumara region. Aboreachi lies outside the area of influence of this project. However, land conflicts are also present in other - perhaps less visible - modalities.

When *Raramuri* people from Aboreachi were interviewed for this research, it was apparent that, in their opinion, land conflicts were a predominant factor affecting

subsistence farming. As the reader will remember, all the households of Aboreachi engage in subsistence agriculture, and the same holds true for most of the small localities in the Tarahumara region. Subsistence agriculture and culturally embedded activities related to farming depended to a certain extent on self-determination and their own command over territory, forest, flora and fauna. At the same time, people's ability to farm and the group's social networks are deeply linked to agricultural work, making land issues crucial to maintaining livelihoods and cultural identities.

One form of land conflict is land grabbing. Seemingly, Aboreachi has been subjected to land invasions by *mestizos* in recent history. Let me illustrate this with one conflict in the Aboreachi ejido beginning in 1961, which serves as an example of land disputes and abuses from mestizo people recorded by official records from the former *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (National Institute of Indigenous Affairs).[108] Since the start of the 1960s there were numerous complaints in the localities surrounding Aboreachi that a wealthy *mestizo* individual recurrently committed a great number of felonies despite being a member of a different ejido than Aboreachi.[109] Specifically, he was accused of letting the considerable livestock he owned run free within the Aboreachi ejido, thus causing damage to crops and destroying entire family plots. The *mestizo* did not take responsibility for the constant damage done by his cattle, which endangered food security for a number of families. As the years went by, other reports from the same archive accused the same individual of cattle rustling and of taking over a piece of land of over 3,000 hectares.[110] There are written testimonials that suggest this was done with the help of members of the same National Institute of Indigenous Affairs: INI acted in complicity with him. "[*The mestizo*] took over three thousand hectares that he claims as his own and for which he arranges the boundaries in complicity with a federal employee of the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs." (Archive of the Coordination Centre of Guachochi

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[108] Archive from the Coordination Centre of Guachochi for Indigenous Action of the National Institution of Indigenous Affairs (INI); Docket 104 File 16 Box 135; Docket 37 File 21 Document 00001-00006, Docket 36 2nd part; Docket 84, File 14 Box 115. Consulted on October 2010, Chihuahua, Mexico.
[109] The name of the mestizo individual is anonymised substituting [*the mestizo*] for the name.
[110] *Ibid.*

for Indigenous Action of the National Institution of Indigenous Affairs (INI); Docket 84 File 14 Document 000003).

After repeated complaints to the local government and the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs, the *mestizo* was held in detention, only to be released after a short period of time. A report from the Legal Department of the Coordination Centre Office part of the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs [*Centro Coordinador Indigenista parte del Instituto Nacional Indigenista*] reads:

> "As a result of the investigation and considering the evidence presented against [*the mestizo*], a mestizo living in the *ejido* was arrested" […] "For an unknown reason [*the mestizo*] returned to the ejido of Aboreachi after eight days away. He returned in company of the Chief of the Rural Police who received eight heads of cattle from [*the mestizo*]. After that, [*the mestizo*] persuaded the *ejidatarios* that he had abandoned his illicit activities; however from a place called Guazarachi, he continues to send his people to steal cattle from the *ejido*." (Archive from the Coordination Centre of Guachochi for Indigenous Action of the National Institution of Indigenous Affairs (INI); Docket 84 File 14 Document 000002-000003).

Reports continued for almost 20 years detailing physical violence, beatings, deathsthreats and cattle robbery. It is unclear how the conflict turned out. However, in Aboreachi and other nearby *Raramuri* localities, interviewees still recount this case when describing the conflicts they have faced with *mestizos*. The last written evidence describes the gathering of two hundred *ejidatarios* from all localities of the ejido, together with civil and traditional Aboreachi authorities, to discuss the case. The following is a transcript of a section of the letter from the Aboreachi community:

'[…] We are tired of demanding guarantees from the appropriate authorities, and to date we have not received any. Some authorities have intervened in the issue, but the problem persists. We believe that authorities have received money. For this, we demand the intervention of the State Government, the Secretary of Agrarian Affairs and the Federal Forces in order to solve this issue once and for all: stop cattle rustling and threats against the poor Raramuri, and vacate the land being occupied by livestock. Because if this is not met, it would seem as if we don't have any government to do us justice and put an end to the abuses committed. […]'[111] (Archive from the Coordination Centre of Guachochi for Indigenous Action of the National Institution of Indigenous Affairs (INI); Docket 79 File 4 Document 000033).

The case described is an evident illustration of how unequal inter-ethnic relations hinder the *Raramuri*'s access to the farm land they need to maintain a livelihood based on subsistence agriculture, a dimension of living well explored previously. Additionally, it shows a concrete example of how access to land can be achieved illegally by means of corruption and bribery resulting in explicit forms of asymmetric power relations at the local level. Arguably, both legal and illegal access benefit the mestizo population in greater proportion, as no evidence was found of *Raramuri* involvement in such practices. Moreover, historic evidence of *Raramuri* being dispossessed of land by mestizo was acknowledged since the 1950's and 60's by the former National institute of Indigenous Affairs in several official documents (Sariego 1998). For instance, the anthropological research authored by Prof. Francisco Plancarte, head of the local INI in the Tarahumara, which seeks to inform public policies towards the indigenous population in the Tarahumara, recognized that "The fundamental economic problem of the indigenous groups of Chihuahua is that being mostly an agricultural society, they lack sufficient and adequate land for their subsistence due to its scarcity in the region and to the systematic

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[111] Translated by the author.

dispossession that they face continuously [...]"[112]. The document goes on to express the need to put an immediate stop to legal claims of land promoted by mestizo caciques under the assumption that land remains 'vacant' or idle while in fact it is used and occupied by indigenous people.

This case also suggests that the Raramuri people have the need to negotiate with the State and its institutions in issues of land management and prosecution of justice. This negotiation is sought despite its ineffectiveness in defending indigenous demands and rights. Additionally, the rule of law is not imposed by the state in the region and longstanding demands remain unresolved, adding to the insecurity of land ownership and therefore the vulnerability of Raramuri livelihoods. Thanks to the ineffectiveness of regulatory bodies, incentives to hoard resources and opportunities and inequalities remain. Lastly, the case also shows the implications of institutional arrangements fostered either by corruption and illegal practices or by ineffective policies that lead to abuse, illegal appropriation of land and hoarding of economic opportunities, benefiting predominantly the mestizo. The following section explores the extent to which the institutional arrangements, especially those promoted by the ejido, have the potential to hinder the Raramuri ability to farm and subsequently to live well.

Meanwhile, it is worth emphasising that access to farming land is not the only important issue arising from land conflict: quality and sufficient size of plot are equally crucial. In some of my journeys during fieldwork, people talked about the time when families had enough land to share with and bequeath to their offspring. Over the generations, plots became more and more segmented and divided. Thus the quality and size of household plots change over time. These factors have produced an additional increase in competition for arable land among Raramuri localities, and a tendency to over-fragment plots in order to supply land to new generations. As an elder and traditional Raramuri authority said, accounting for the reduction in the extent of farming land due to

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[112] Archive from the Coordination Centre of Guachochi for Indigenous Action of the National Institution of Indigenous Affairs (INI); Docket 13 File 22 Document 00040-00052

population growth: 'Good farming land is finishing ... plots and harvests are smaller than when I was younger' (Interview with Etanacio Cruz Castillo. Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. June 2010).

Another important yet underreported factor limiting the extent of fertile land is drug related activities. Illegal drug demand in the past decades has produced a lucrative option for rural populations. *Mestizos* and Raramuri alike engage in growing cannabis and poppy; however, non-indigenous people dominate the production chain whilst Raramuri tend to engage in temporary micro plantation for *mestizo* buyers. This activity has been reported in the area surrounding Aboreachi although not with the intensity of other more remote areas where it is much more evident. In the shadow of this clandestine and illegal activity, discrimination and repression towards indigenous people persists. For instance, *mestizos* tend to be better paid when they sell the same quantity of cannabis and poppy than Raramuri and others (Anonymous interview. Chihuahua, México. October 2010).

These findings are important because they show how the rapidly shifting context of the region has had a negative impact on the *Raramuri* and their aspects of wellbeing. Due to the aforementioned factors, productive and good farming land has become scarce, impacting on the frequency of the *teswuino* gatherings, as it seems to have become more and more difficult to harvest enough maize and produce sufficient *teswuino*. Therefore, the solidarity network and social relations associated with farming also impacts upon the living well state of the Raramuri.

These empirical findings are consistent with theoretical approaches that focus on the role of institutions in inequality in Latin American countries, especially those that argue that land policy is a historical factor that contributes to the perpetuation of unequal conditions (Engerman and Sokoloff, 2006). These findings suggest that land policies and economic models are closely associated with the construction of power asymmetries among Raramuri and mestizo in the region. In this sense, the second hindrance to *Raramuri* living

well will be explored through the institution of the ejido. It is argued that unequal interactions are sustained by non-indigenous actors occupying positions of decision making and political power leading to opportunity hoarding.

b. The institutional structure of the ejido system

As mentioned in chapter III, from the late 1950s through to the 1970s, the idea behind the creation of the ejidos was that the rural and indigenous population would benefit from communal control and profits from natural resource exploitation. In this sense, the ejido works as a cooperative scheme for communal tenure of natural resources, mainly forests. Ejidos in Mexico have been analyzed through literature in various ways. Of particular interest -in terms of power relations- are those authors such as Nuijten who analyse the ejido as spaces where power relations are in their central interest. The environment characterised by power relations can be analyzed as composed of force fields where social-interethnic interactions are held. Interested in forms of structured organizing practices in an ejido in Mexico, Nuijten (1998; 396) defines a force field as 'a field of power and struggle between different social actors around resources and where certain forms of dominance, contention, and resistance may develop, as well as certain regularities and forms of ordering'. Nuijten does not analyse force fields with inter-ethnic eyes. However, I argue the Tarahumara region, the concept provides a concrete example of how this concept can help describe accurately the complex web of living well and hindering factors characterised by resilience and agency, imposition and adaptation between actors and groups. This argument is primarily based on the importance the ejido system has as a space for mestizo dominance of subsistence farming activities performed by the Raramuri as for example in decisions about natural resource management. In this way, a perspective that recognizes the complex relations produced in social spaces makes it possible to analyse the *ejido* as a space where unequal interethnic interactions and power imbalances are created and reproduced, while at the same time with the same

scope the ejido can also be understood as a space where resistance and contestation result from its internal and structural organization (Nuijten, 1998).

As mentioned, all the population of Aboreachi as well as *Raramuri* interviewed from other localities during field work were active members of the ejido or *ejidatarios,* or were part of an *ejidatario* household, in the case of teenagers.[113] Therefore having access to this space of decision making does not seem to be an issue for the *Raramuri* people: it is rather the concentration of decision making power within the space where the real challenge lies. As Lartigue states, the majority of the *ejidos* in the Tarahumara region are managed by a mestizo minority even though the Raramuri are dominant in terms of *ejidatarios* (1983; 87). The *ejido* of Aboreachi enjoys collective use of 27,612 hectares of land, including 19,850 hectares were granted by presidential decree in 1937, and an extension in 1954.[114] It is the *ejido* in the Municipality of Guachochi which has the second highest level in terms of amount of money received from PROCAMPO in the period of 1994-2009, with $3,716,271 pesos.[115]

Schemes such as the ejido reflect the level of penetration the Mexican State has in rural and remote areas where being an *ejidatario* has become crucially important to farming. For instance, nearly 50% of all land in Mexico is "social property" in the form of *ejidos*. In the Tarahumara region and other indigenous regions in Mexico most forests ended up becoming social property contained within *ejidos* as most agricultural lands were already privately owned at the time of the reform (COSYDDHAC/Texas Center for Policy Studies 2000). Now, the *ejidos* are well established forms of social organization in terms of management of natural resources. Through the ejido*,* collective decisions concerning natural resources are taken. Among these decisions, are approvals of concessions allowing third-party companies to exploit natural resources within its territorial limits, especially

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[113] In total, 515 *ejidatarios* for Aboreachi.

[114] According to PROCAMPO, *ejidatarios* from Aboreachi an average plot size of two hectares to grow corn, receiving an average of 1,300 Mexican pesos per hectare.
http://www.aserca.gob.mx/artman/publish/article_1424.asp

[115] http://www.subsidiosalcampo.org.mx/mexico/estados/chihuahua/guachochi/top/PT

timber. Needless to say, these companies – administered by *mestizos* - have a strong presence in the region and some have economic importance in promoting the political ambitions of politicians and political parties at the local municipal level. However important forestry activity is in terms of profit sharing for the *ejido* for now this section will emphasise the influence the *ejido* has on subsistence farming for the Raramuri as one crucial living well dimension.

Farming activities and a sense of community elements for the Raramuri people to live well are influenced and shaped by the ejido in different ways. For instance, some official agricultural programmes of subsidised funding such as PROCAMPO are also accessible to *ejidatarios*. This federal programme promotes agricultural production by delivering commercial and market advice, agricultural input, technology, and monetary resources among other subsidized services, and has a profound influence on the way farming is carried out. Sometimes each *ejidatario* receives an amount of money from PROCAMPO to buy fertilizers individually, although the ejido frequently decides to buy the fertilizer collectively. For instance Raramuri people in Aboreachi are periodically concerned with the delivery of fertilizers to improve the chances of producing a good harvest of predominantly maize and beans. The fertilizers are distributed as part of the PROCAMPO program through the ejido, and have become nowadays a crucial agricultural asset in the Tarahumara region. This intimate connection of the ejido with farming matters consolidates its influence as a structure that manages small scale farming production and administration of natural resources.

Ethnographic studies from the first half of the twentieth century (Lumholtz: 1902; Bennett and Zingg: 1935) failed to mention fertilizers and agrochemicals as incorporated within Raramuri farming practices as well as overall inter-ethnic relations as posing a threat to maintaining cultural identities. The traditional method of fertilization was by rotation of livestock manure. After keeping a herd of goats or other animals in a stockyard for several days, farmers would move them until the whole of the farming plot had been covered.

This technique would fertilize the land for two or three years. Loaning animals among families and friends was part of social common social interaction and the basis of mutual reciprocity networks. However, today this technique is no longer a viable option as the number of goats, sheep and other livestock has decreased in many indigenous localities due to epidemics or to over-demand of *mestizo* middle man buyers.

Over the years the Raramuri people have adapted to the functional implications of land management inherent in the ejido system. This process of adaptation entails an institutional link with the Mexican state and benefits from social programmes. However, the adaptation has implied both benefits and negative externalities. For instance, through PROCAMPO, chemical fertilizers are now available to a vast majority of *ejidos* in the Sierra. These subsidized fertilizers have served to boost agricultural productivity in the short term, but in the long term they have made the plots dependent on the use of fertilizers. Now, Raramuri people recognize that without fertilizers crops will not grow adequately and the harvest will be seriously compromised.

> 'Apart from not having certainty when the rainy season is going to start and if we will be able to have a good harvest, we now need seeds and fertilizers and other help from PROCAMPO managed by the *ejido* (…) two years ago the budget to buy fertilizers arrived very late and some of us had to plant maize twice that year to compensate for the low harvest. Another year it rained so much that complete crops were lost and through the ejido we had to ask to the government to deliver aid and free maize to all.' (Interview with Alberto Castillo. Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. October 2010)

Constraints reflected in these commentaries provide evidence of the wide range of ways in which farming is vulnerable in terms of food security. Hence, there is a double dependency effect: plots need fertilizers to be productive and farmers depend even more

on the resources available through programmes such as PROCAMPO. At the same time, the rural poor and indigenous population of Mexico become ever more vulnerable to the risk of subsidies disappearing as budget pressure at the national level increases.

Additionally, PROCAMPO provides direct cash payments at planting time on a per hectare basis to growers of several crops, including maize and beans which are the main crops in the Tarahumara region.[116] The amount of the payment depends on the size of each household plot as registered in the ejido. Although the main objective of this payment was to raise local competitiveness of the agricultural sector under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed between Mexico, the United States and Canada in 1994, research presented by the Research and Economic Training Centre [*Centro de Investigacion y Docencia Economica*] (CIDE) report by Mauricio Merino have challenged this by showing a lack of positive impact on competitiveness among the beneficiaries.[117] The report shows instead, that economic resources delivered by PROCAMPO came to be seen as a means of covering basic necessities. During fieldwork in Aboreachi and Laguna de Aboreachi, Raramuri and mestizo interviewees also mentioned that the money received from PROCAMPO is firstly spent buying food or paying debts, and some may be kept as small savings, and is only secondly reinvested in the next agricultural season, namely to buy fertilizer and seeds. These economic transactions imply extra costs as they sometimes involve intermediaries. Therefore, there is little or no qualitative evidence to suggest that increased competitiveness has resulted from the implementation of the

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[116] Interviewers reported an amount of 1,300 Mexican pesos per hectare each planting season (twice a year) in 2010, varying slightly over the years.

[117] This report of the CIDE research questions how many producers at the national level have been receiving money without using the funds to actually cultivate plots. The report shows that much of the money has been diverted to politicians and government bureaucrats, including individuals linked with drug dealing and trafficking. Multiple duplicates of names appear in the lists of beneficiaries, in some cases up to hundreds of times, ultimately benefitting one sole person multiple times. For instance, among the targeted individuals 80 percent of the money went to large agricultural producers, even though there is no evidence they have been able to use that money to strengthen their businesses. The investigation notes that part of the problem is a lack of mechanisms to measure how well the money is being used.

programme and accordingly, the beneficiaries perceive the programme's cash transfer just as an economic support for their farming activities.

There are two points to note here. Firstly, at least in the case of the Raramuri beneficiaries, this may be an indication of how the right to maintain a livelihood based on subsistence agriculture is expressed and at the same time reinforced by the implementation of agricultural programmes. It is expressed as the Raramuri people adapting and making use of the federal program in their own way by enhancing a life of subsistence (living well) and disregarding the need of competitiveness (live better) even if funds are received for that purpose. At the same time subsistence agriculture is inadvertently reinforced by the lack of proper implementation of PROCAMPO, which fails to ensure that monetary resources are invested as intended so as to lead to increased competitiveness in the region. Secondly, and with this in mind, arguably PROCAMPO has become a further source of unequal distribution of resources.[118] Evidence provided by nationwide reports cited suggest the program is subjected to corruption and manipulation by influential individuals affecting disadvantaged people by hoarding resources oriented to other rural sectors[119]. However, at the same time by incentivising agricultural production, the implementation of PROCAMPO has inadvertently promoted the continuation of a livelihood and way of living based on subsistence agriculture amongst the Raramuri and other indigenous people in Mexico.

Let me now make the point that the ejido of Aboreachi can be understood as a space where power relations predominantly affect the indigenous people. The following

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[118] It could be argued for instance that by providing direct payment for the amount of hectares the program is benefiting those households that have more land. In the case of the Tarahumara and the Aboreachi region, this might result in benefitting over-proportionally a minority of non-indigenous *ejidatarios* in comparison with the *Raramuri ejidatarios* in Aboreachi that average two hectares per household. However, as the list of beneficiaries published by PROCAMPO do not distinguish by ethnicity is not possible to suggest this. Moreover, there are reports of irregularities of repeated benefactors with exact names in the ejido of Aboreachi in the years 1995, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 from a time frame extending from 1994 to 2009. (http://www.subsidiosalcampo.org.mx/mexico/personas/000000200318650/)
[119] http://www.subsidiosalcampo.org.mx/

empirical evidence collected from fieldwork demonstrates power disparities based on inter-ethnic relations within the ejido system as a factor hindering Raramuri living well:

> 'Some *mestizos* from Laguna are members of two *ejidos*, a few do not even live within the limits of the Aboreachi ejido and in some cases they don't farm their land or they rent it to third parties. Despite that, they keep receiving cash transfers (…) and benefits to buy fertilizers from PROCAMPO, and their share of the collective revenues from forestry exploitation in compliance with the authorities. They (some *mestizos*) just come to the meetings in Laguna de Aboreachi when they have to sign to receive the economic support and no one tells them anything' (Anonymous interview. Laguna de Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. October 2010).

As the ejido is a land tenure scheme, permanent monitoring, technical advice and follow-up management must be essential for its success; however in remote areas such as the Tarahumara, the common lack of whistleblowers and the absence of institutional mechanisms to ensure democratic and transparent internal procedures, training and assistance on forestry issues, environmental practices, and legal framework lead to ineffective management (Azarcoya, 2003). On the face of it, internal democratic and transparency processes are commonly neglected, facilitating the concentrating of power decisions in a small number of individuals. Where schemes are managed with low transparency and where the decision-making process is concentrated in few hands, individuals have both opportunities and incentives to hoard resources. No empirical evidence of Raramuri people equally taking illegal advantage of the ejido scheme was found in the fieldwork. However, mestizo *ejidatarios* tend to be in close contact with these opportunities, arguably due to their skills and abilities in social and political relations and their knowledge of how to benefit from those systems at the local level.

These empirical findings are important as they corroborate studies carried out in the Tarahumara region. For instance, Azarcoya (2003) explores the relationship between land tenure schemes and poverty reduction, concluding that a crucial aspect is the internal operation of each scheme, regardless of which land tenure scheme is in place. She establishes three factors that explain the uneven distribution of revenues from forestry and that ultimately obstruct eradication of poverty affecting the indigenous population: first, due to unequal education levels and language barriers the Raramuri population in general terms are more susceptible to fraudulent management and internal irregularities within the ejido. Second, *mestizos* benefit from their ability to relate to local and national authorities: middle men buyers of forestry resources and technical service providers can access the financial support provided by the government with greater ease. Additionally, *mestizos* are aware of the written and unwritten institutional arrangements that build up political and economic relations (Azarcoya, 2003: 5).

Furthermore, these empirical findings provide qualitative support to the hypothesis presented by Perez–Cirera and Lovett (2006) that where groups hold property in common greater power inequality is linked with the capacity of agents to impose higher costs on a majority which enjoys less power over production factors such as skills, knowledge and control of resources. This econometric research carried over to the Tarahumara region presents a model that links unbalanced power distribution from individuals (authorities) on one side and allocation of the collective benefits and costs of local common forest management on the other. The study engages with the lasting theoretical relationship of power heterogeneity and the incentives for some individuals of collective benefits or the incentives for those agents that have greater access to assets and positions of power to hoard resources. The authors conclude that 'power imbalances are greatly influential in shaping the costs and benefits related to timber extraction. With increasing power inequality within the group, the power of the authorities is transformed into higher rates of both illegal logging and forest degradation as well as into more inequitable distributions of income' (Perez–Cirera and Lovett, 2006: 351).

Therefore, apart from the double dependency effect mentioned earlier, i.e. dependency of people on social protection programs and of soil on agrochemicals, the *ejido* system can potentially create an institutionalized social space where power asymmetry between *Raramuri* and mestizos is reinforced. In this sense, through an actor-oriented approach the *ejido* can be understood as a 'force field'. As mentioned, a force field is defined 'as a field of power and struggle between different social actors around certain resources or problems […] which certain forms of dominance, contention, and resistance may develop, as well as certain regularities and forms of ordering' (Nuijten, 1998: 396). As the *ejido* structures internal practices different individuals are distinguished by different roles and differentiated access to and enjoyment of resources. Therefore, not only is it a structure for enforcement of national government policy at grass roots level but a field of contestation, negotiation, adaptation and resistance practised within a social space by *ejidatarios*, *ejido* authorities, local government officials and timber intermediaries. Raramuri responses to power concentration in the *ejido* reveal a distinctive ethnic form of social ordering. However, even if a mestizo ejido commissioner acts responsibly in respect to the assembly by calling regular meetings to give information on the operation, is active in supporting traditional festivities and gatherings, and distributing regularly the revenues of forest exploitation, the Raramuri will still refer to him or her firstly by his or her ethnicity. If the commissioner of the ejido is subject to public criticism or gossip amongst Raramuri people he/she is often labelled in conversations as mestizo.[120] A discourse based on ethnicity markers is used then to express disagreement with particular decisions such as supporting a particular political party or politician, not being accountable for collective revenues, etc. This is evidence of how forms of contention to concentration of power shown by the intuitional structure of the ejido have a distinctive ethnic orientation, differentiating mestizo and Raramuri. This way of articulating ethnicities as means of resistance will be further explored in the following chapter.

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[120] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi 2010.

c. Ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities

A third factor hindering the raramuri living well oriented livelihood and way of living identified during fieldwork in Aboreachi refers to vulnerability to crises and the distinctive ways of facing them. This section argues that *Raramuri* and *mestizos* engage in distinctive livelihood strategies associated with ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities and ultimately contributing to the persistence of inequality.

As mentioned, the majority of *mestizos* are far more deeply involved in economic projects such as tourism investments, mining, forestry and commerce than the majority of the Raramuri. A majority sector of the Raramuri population on the other hand is relegated to only minimum participation in these economic activities, often through low paid jobs and self-employment; for instance handicraft production is an important Raramuri income source in general although not in Aboreachi. However, this economic exclusion of the indigenous population also affects the Raramuri livelihood options as they need to engage with exchange of products.

This relates to the empirical argument based on the evidence explored in the previous chapter that for Raramuri there are two routes to living well: the **need** to participate in the market economy to ensure a livelihood, and the **right** to engage in subsistence agriculture to maintain their economic identity. For instance, when Raramuri people do engage with *mestizos* in monetary exchange activities, they do so in unregulated economic sectors that represent minimum revenues and benefits to the indigenous people and where discrimination can easily appear, such as commerce at the individual level, informal handicrafts trading and seasonal agricultural labour. In this sense, Wyndham (2010) exposes how globalized economic flows from the Tarahumara region, namely the exchange of goods, services and commerce, have benefited the Raramuri population only peripherally. This is due not only to the fact that *mestizos* engage more intensely with the market economy, but also because their economic participation is embedded in power relations allowing opportunity hoarding and unequal allocation of

resources. In other words, it is not market participation in itself that can potentially determine Raramuri wellbeing, but the implied – quite often inter-ethnic – power relations and vulnerabilities linked is their position of living in the margins of the state and global markets.

Differentiated vulnerabilities are evident if one analyses, for instance, coping strategies and livelihoods comparatively between the Raramuri and *mestizo*. Even though both groups experience covariant risks, their capacity to confront them is sharply differentiated as they engage in diverse coping strategies.

As both ethnic groups engage – in general terms – with distinct livelihoods, vulnerability factors and the risk associated with them would also tend to be different. These differences are described next. Firstly, let me explore the vulnerabilities of the economic activities predominantly performed by the Raramuri people, followed by the vulnerabilities of the economic activities predominantly performed by *mestizo*. As mentioned before, farming is crucial for the Raramuri people and I have described factors associated with *mestizo* practices that hinder the Raramuri culturally embedded forms of subsistence agriculture and engagement with solidarity and cooperation networks that build a sense of community. In this sense, farming is hugely dependent on climatic conditions suitable for cultivation and good harvest such as regular rainfall, conditions which are increasingly very difficult to predict for the population. Dependency on fertilizers, land conflicts, limited availability of good quality fertile plots, etc build up the risk and vulnerabilities associated with a livelihood based solely on subsistence agriculture. This is the reason for the need to engage with the exchange market through diversification of economic activities and income generating activities. These economic activities also represent vulnerabilities and risk for the Raramuri that are different from the *mestizos* and dominant national society.

For this reason, Raramuri sometimes engage in an array of economic activities as part of their coping strategies to complement subsistence. For instance, Wyndham (2010) has calculated that one third of the male population under 35 years had to leave their home localities in the Sierra Tarahumara in search of additional income from seasonal jobs in larger *mestizo* towns. The need to search for income earning opportunities in urban settings has its implications. For instance, a common economic strategy involves seasonal migration to larger towns and cities where contact with *mestizos* and dominant society is in general subject to unequal power relations. For instance, Raramuri seasonal migration towards cities and market-based activities in the Tarahumara region are largely dependent on the *mestizo*-dominated market structure. Significantly, most seasonal migration involves hard physical labour. Often agricultural fields are located in the vicinity of larger towns and cities within the State of Chihuahua where agro-industry is an important economic sector. The fields are owned by national and international agricultural corporations offering poor working conditions to their cheap labour force. In this way, cheap Raramuri labour is in demand in the regional agriculture industry due in large part to the acknowledgement of their practical knowledge of farming methods and techniques. Therefore, *mestizo* middlemen seek out demand Raramuri workers with past experience working in commercial agriculture.

Although both ethnic populations engage in temporary migration they have greatly differentiated outcomes, expectations and vulnerabilities. For the Raramuri population, permanent migration implies a major cultural shift as their livelihood is linked to farming activities and community ties. When Raramuri population migrate temporarily to agricultural fields or to neighbouring cities, a large proportion of them will do so on a seasonal basis, limiting their absence from the Sierra to specific months when there is more chance of finding work and therefore less risk of wasting the implied transaction and transportation cost. Then, after the period of work, they return to their localities with perhaps some small savings and the cultural experience that might be useful when seeking a job in the future.

Those Raramuri who migrate to agricultural fields highly value the fact that the work is temporary[121]. One of the reasons they engaged with it in the first place is that the temporariness permits them to enjoy the income opportunity whilst maintaining their land, farming activities and social ties back in their localities. As described earlier, this suggests an additional supporting evidence for the dual tension of living well; the **right** to engage in subsistence economy and the **need** to participate in market economy. By praising the temporariness of agricultural migration those Raramuri take the deliberate action of engaging completely with a form of livelihood that departs from market economy and the logic of material accumulation. Instead they remain embedded in a form of livelihood largely based in subsistence agriculture and social networks.

Next, I will present a case collected during fieldwork in Aboreachi in 2010 that describes how Raramuri engage in temporary jobs in farming as one of their coping strategies. This case describes how Raramuri are more vulnerable in comparison to non-indigenous people and how structural constraints affect ethnic groups unequally. Additionally, this case relates to differentiated vulnerability hindering factors described earlier. Raramuri people also engage in diverse coping strategies that entail different challenges and restraints.

Francisco[122] is one of many young Raramuri who, after reaching a certain age, embark on temporary agricultural work in the fields in semi-urban areas of Chihuahua State. Francisco lives in Aboreachi with both his parents and a younger sister. In June 2010, Francisco and his family decided that he would go and work in the fields in order to compensate for the most recent family harvest, which was scant in comparison to other years. Francisco knew from a cousin's earlier experiences that working opportunities could be found in the Juarez valley during the months of June through August. During these

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[121] Interview with *Francisco*, conducted in Aboreachi, Chihuahua, June 2010
[122] Francisco is a fictitious name to protect anonymity.

months the harvest of cotton, melon and other vegetables attract seasonal migrants of the Sierra and other semi-urban regions of the state.

Francisco travelled to the Juarez valley, which is located more than 700 kilometres north from his home town of Aboreachi. There he performed physically exhausting agricultural work, involving shifts of up to 10 hours a day in temperatures over 40 degrees centigrade. Despite these harsh conditions, Francisco and others are attracted by the salary: approximately 100-120[123] pesos a day if they eat and sleep in the installations provided by the corporation for agricultural workers. After a few weeks working in the field, his family back in Aboreachi received news on the community radio station that Francisco had been killed and that they were requested to claim the body at the judicial offices in Juarez city. After recovering from the news, Francisco's father had to request economic assistance to cover the expenses of the journey, a sum of approximately 1,000 pesos[124]. However, he was unable to obtain enough money even with contributions from his extended family. The *ejido* authorities – *mestizos* – who are often looked to by Raramuri to provide small grants did not offer him any assistance. Francisco's father had to ask for assistance in the government office Tarahumara State Coordination [*Coordinacion Estatal de la Tarahumara*] in Chihuahua City. After filling in a formal request as part of the bureaucratic paperwork, he was able to receive economic help to continue his journey to Juarez city. Upon arrival in this city which he had never visited before, he struggled to orient himself in search of the morgue.

After identifying the body, he asked the police for a formal explanation of what had happened but none was offered, only that the body was discovered with severe head traumas near a railway one morning and no possessions were found on him. According to the employer, Francisco was paid the day before his body was discovered and at night he was planning to go to a fiesta nearby, but no conclusive explanation was given. Francisco's father mentioned that he felt that his indigenous and poor appearance, in addition to his

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[123] The equivalent of 100 Mexican pesos is 5.25 British pounds in May 2011.
[124] The equivalent of 52.42 British pounds in May 2011.

not speaking fluent Spanish, contributed to the fact that he was not treated with respect and had to constantly ask for clarification on the process to claim his son's remains. 10 days after receiving the news, Francisco's father was on his way back to home in Aboreachi in the Tarahumara region with his son's body, where family members were waiting to begin the formal burial practices.

Months before, when asked about past experiences in Juarez city, Francisco had referred to the dangers for indigenous people in the city. He had mentioned that he had to stay together with other indigenous people from the Sierra as city gangs immediately identify individuals who are not from the surroundings. Indigenous people in particular are more susceptible to violence and robbery, he had continued, as gangs knew where and when they would likely work and be in possession of money.[125] This targeted vulnerability towards marginalized and excluded individuals is exacerbated by high levels of impunity, resulting from an inefficient judicial system that systematically fails to arrest and prosecute offenders.

Francisco's case can be analysed from different perspectives. Firstly, it serves to support the thesis that unequal inter-ethnic economic interactions are sustained under unequal power relations. Unequal power relations apply because indigenous people tend to be disadvantaged when dealing with unfamiliar institutional arrangements; they are economically disadvantaged when they need to engage in hard physical activities in faraway places and in dealing with shocks such as the death of a family member; and politically disadvantaged when demanding justice as they remain marginalized and excluded from the official judicial system. And finally they tend to be socially disadvantaged due to discriminatory practices in wider society. Shocks such as the death of a family member not only imply an economic impact on a poor family in the short run, but also represent deeper scarcity when the household depends on each member's agricultural labour. In the case of Francisco, he was the only male child, thus the capacity

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[125] Interview with *Francisco*, conducted in Aboreachi, Chihuahua, June 2010.

of the household to perform hard physical agricultural work was seriously compromised. Additionally, this case shows how economic inter-ethnic interactions under unequal power relations create vulnerability at an individual level, increasing the risk of being a victim of violence and, at a collective level, diminishing the family's capacity for work and access to income generating opportunities. In both levels, vulnerability is associated with ethnic ascription. Finally, this case shows how the current level of violence and impunity in Mexico affects marginalized and poor people, such as the Raramuri, to a greater degree.

As mentioned, unequal power relations are visible as Raramuri people tend to be economically disadvantaged. An additional case from my own fieldwork findings in Aboreachi, shows how some Raramuri obtain loans from wealthy mestizo households to cope with a particular sudden shock. This is the case of Cesar Gonzalez, owner of a small government-subsidized grocery shop, who, in order to keep his small business afloat, has asked for merchandise credit at three different large grocery shops owned by *mestizos* in larger towns.[126] Cesar often uses one loan to obtain enough money to pay the instalments of the other loans. Similar examples are often found among those few Raramuri closely engaged in similar commercial activity; from their descriptions they clearly have no saving capacity, and are entangled in a vicious circle of continued debt.

Up to now I have explored the vulnerabilities tied to the predominant economic activities and way of life of *Raramuri* people. In the remaining paragraphs I shall explore the vulnerabilities associated with mestizo economic activities as part of their livelihoods and coping strategies. Most mestizo households from Laguna de Aboreachi, when entering an economic crisis, tend to diversify their income generating activities. In this way, if a *mestizo* family manage a small business such as a vehicle garage in a profitable manner they will usually tend to start selling other related products in hope of increasing the income from the business (e.g. oil and spare parts). In the case of a grocery store, they would normally begin selling prepared food. On occasion, an emergent complementary

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[126] Fieldwork notes, Aboreachi, Mexico, March, 2010

commercial activity begins as a series of small investments responding to the need to face an economic shock and those that are successful are likely to be maintained if the strategy represents potential revenues.

An example of this is the Armendariz family living in Laguna de Aboreachi, composed of both parents, an older son and a young daughter. This family engaged in a range of small-scale economic activities, many of which started as coping strategies, and now, once the crises were past, have become incorporated into their permanent income sources. For instance, taking advantage of their home location by the main road, the Armendariz started to sell gasoline in containers as it is a service in great demand due to the lack of proper gas stations over considerable distances in the area. In time they began to sell other vehicle-related products such as engine oil and car parts. When the young daughter of the family began to attend secondary school her parents decided that it would be best to register her in the neighbouring town of Guachochi, located 50 km away, even though Laguna de Aboreachi had a secondary school. The reason for this decision was that Guachochi city has a bigger school with perhaps better quality education than the nearer one. This meant that the family began to pay the cost of their daughter's daily commute. To offset this new outgoing, the mother took advantage of the existing gasoline customers and began to sell prepared meals in an improvised open kitchen that later on took the form of a successful small restaurant. Over time they have consolidated their emerging business and added a semi-detached double room at the back of the property where passing visitors can spend the night. Apart from these activities, the family benefits from social protection programs such as *Oportunidades* and PROCAMPO and receives their share from the *ejido* profit.

This case describes how *mestizos* tend to connect intensively to market-based activities in the region. From these economic activities they benefit and their livelihood and wellbeing opportunities are enhanced. When the flow of tourists and visitors increases, the Armendariz family, among other *mestizo* families, improve their economic prospects.

However, this participation in the regional and national markets can potentially backfire and amplify the *mestizo*'s vulnerability. In recent years narcotics smuggling, crimes and violence related to drug dealers in the Tarahumara region have caused a sharp decrease in tourists in the region and consequently have had a negative impacted on local businesses and services. In this sense, this empirical observation supports findings in Mexico and other Latin American countries that indigenous people tend to be less affected by macroeconomic fluctuations, whether positive or negative, because they are less integrated with the market (Hall and Patrinos, 2006). So poverty rates amongst indigenous people climbed less rapidly during crises, but also recovered more slowly, in comparison to non-indigenous people.

Diversification of economic options closely linked to market economy is quite visible among *mestizos* and constitutes a crucial difference in economic behaviour between the two ethnic groups. It is a crucial difference in two ways; firstly because *mestizos* would generally tend to have greater economic capacity to invest in small commercial endeavours even in times of shortage than the *Raramuri* population. Secondly, the *mestizos'* adaptation have the rather ambitious aspiration to increase monetary and material wealth, while their indigenous counterparts' coping strategies are oriented to dealing with a particular crisis that complements their subsistence and allows the safeguarding of their livelihood largely based on subsistence agriculture.

So far I have presented three hindering factors that affect the *Raramuri* 'path to living well'; land conflicts, institutional arrangements of the ejido; and ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities. These factors make *Raramuri* people aware of the limitations to their living well and the discourse associated with them evidences the unequal social, economic and political stratified relations between the *Raramuri* and the mestizo. Additionally, since land and farming are crucial for *Raramuri* living well, and being a dimension so interlinked with others such as work related networks and territoriality, land related conflicts have clear hindering effects. Land conflicts, as in the case of the mestizo cacique in the

Aboreachi, confirm how corruption and absence of rule of law create an environment in the Tarahumara region that promotes abuse and hoarding largely affecting the majority Raramuri population. Closely related to it, the institutional functioning of the ejido also shows how farming activity has been transformed, boosting agricultural production in certain cases but also increasing dependency on rarely reliable subsidies and climatic seasons. And most importantly, it shows how the ejido can also be understood as an inter-ethnic space where power relations are ever present. Differentiated vulnerabilities add to this series of hindering factors focusing on specific ethnically differentiated constraints in the Tarahumara region. Francisco's case demonstrates the vulnerabilities attached to common coping strategies adopted by the Raramuri people of Aboreachi, while the economic behaviour of the Armendariz family of Laguna de Aboreachi gives an example of how mestizo families develop entrepreneurial undertakings as a livelihood strategy. In this sense, I have argued that the difference between how indigenous and non-indigenous people face and respond to vulnerabilities shows how the understanding of living well differentiated for the two groups.

In the next section I will explore inter-ethnic economic and political interactions from the wider economic, social and ethno-political context surrounding the Tarahumara region. The justification for focusing on the surrounding context is based on the fact that land conflicts, the ejido system and ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities are embedded in power structures and institutional arrangements. I argue that power structures must be considered in order to coherently understand the economic exploitation and ethno-political oppression faced by *Raramuri* people, which thus contribute to the causes of asymmetrical power relations.

The inter-ethnic economic and political interactions described contribute further by establishing a social, economic and political environment that permits unequal power relations to develop. Three cases are presented providing evidence of the existence of interethnic power relations and institutional arrangements in the region. The first

empirical case stresses how cattle trading and other economic interactions take place under unequal circumstances in the Aboreachi area. The second provides an example of the implementation of a collective apple orchard project oriented to benefit the Raramuri locality of Aboreachi, and how some *mestizos* from other localities exploit an advantageous position in order to steal the apple harvest for their own benefit. The last case examines the mestizo economic and political elites in the Tarahumara and how their articulate to institutional arrangements with the wider society permit the status quo of power relations in the region to endure.

5.2 Power relations and institutional arrangements

This section will describe inter-group economic and political interactions between the *Raramuri* and the *mestizos*, stressing the power relations embedded in these interactions. Firstly, I will show how cattle trade between mestizo and Raramuri is a recurrent economic activity take place under asymmetrical power relations. Secondly, I will describe a micro-intervention project led by the government in the Raramuri locality of Aboreachi and the subsequent mestizo involvement to take advantage of it. Thirdly, I will explore the collective mestizo strategy of manoeuvring economic national and international investments in such a way as to perpetuate local political elites.

Arguably, the *Raramuri* and mestizo people engage in the same economic system in the Tarahumara region, although with different niches and intensities of participation. One group has greater links with the market economy, being based mostly on commoditization and monetary exchange. Seemingly, this has resulted in a better development of skills and knowledge on how to maximize profits and gains in the economic interactions than their Raramuri counterpart who are interested in income sources as a complement to their livelihood. Additionally, through the different niches and intensities of participation in the economic system of the region, asymmetrical power relations between both ethnic groups are expressed.

A common inter-ethnic transaction in the Tarahumara region involves livestock trading. Farm animals such as mules and horses are highly valued in the local context for their usefulness in agriculture. As mentioned in the previous chapter, animals are clearly assets as the overall farming capacity of a household is greatly enhanced by accessing them through social networks of collaboration. Taking advantage of the need for these animals, mestizo livestock dealers engage in this economic exchange.

Accordingly, there are recurrent accounts acknowledging how *mestizo* dealers would arrive in trucks to remote Raramuri localities looking to buy farm animals known for their adaptability and capacity for physical work. The number of mestizo dealers looking for business increases in the dry season (November-March), months of food shortages and where fewer opportunities of temporary work and cash are accessible for Raramuri people in the Tarahumara region. These professional dealers obtain favourable prices and profit, taking advantage of the possible need and urgency of indigenous sellers in these periods of scarcity. In view of that, some commercial interactions are not made under equal negotiation circumstances, as cheap alcohol plays a crucial role, being given as a 'gift' by *mestizos* in order to obtain a lower price from their Raramuri counterparts. Authors such as Levi (2003:265) also have registered this apparently common practice of tricks and deceptions in commercial transactions among mestizo and Raramuri. He analyzes how Raramuri victims choose not to complain to the appropriate government officers, saying that it was better for the time being to remain silent. Levi uses these accounts to argue that silence is associated with emotional comfort or action; and other times it was used as a political technique to absent themselves from channels of power. These everyday forms of resistance will be further explored in chapter VI. Accordingly, several interviews and observations carried out by the author in the Aboreachi region also provide accounts of how Raramuri people warn of the presence of abusive *mestizos* traders in their remote localities:

'Laguneros[127] *often come seeking to do business (...) quick money. They would try to buy some animals from us and they would use alcohol to get a better price'* (Interview with Manuel Holguin, conducted in Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. June 2010).

Raramuri people talk about the power of language and the persuasion techniques *mestizos* use to influence personal decisions, such as to buying an animal. Empirical accounts registered these skills as *mestizos* try to sell animals such as horses, for instance, by failing to declare that the animals offered are ill, suffer a long-term problem or required a special diet with which Raramuri are rarely able to comply.

'Sometimes a mestizo would take us for a fool and try to sell a horse that its sick or that will soon loose weight (...) because here (in Aboreachi) horses are used to eat only grass' (Interview with Manuel Holguin, conducted in Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. June 2010).

And as described earlier, these economic activities set incentives that allow unequal power relations to develop at the mirco and mediate level of interethnic interactions. However, cattle trading is not the only interaction that is charged with asymmetrical power relations.

Let me exemplify how political relations and institutional arrangements contribute to asymmetric power relations by citing two specific cases. Arguably, these cases promote an environment where opportunities are hoarded and resources are administered and allocated according to commercial interest. The first case describes a micro-intervention project led by the government in the *Raramuri* locality of Aboreachi and the subsequent mestizo involvement to take advantage of it. The second case deals with the collective mestizo strategy of driving economic national and international investments in such a way

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[127] *Raramuri* people call "Laguneros" to people from the predominantly mestizo town of Laguna de Aboreachi.

as to perpetuate local political elites. Both cases involve hoarding strategies on the part of the mestizo population, described by Tilly (1998) as factors that contribute to durable inequality.

The first empirical case represents the implementation of a collective apple orchard project in the *Raramuri* locality of Aboreachi. Since 1954**,** the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs [*Instituto Nacional Indigenista*] has implemented a number of micro interventions designed to benefit the *Raramuri* people in terms of securing food availability. Many of these efforts involved infrastructure creation and communal economic ventures in indigenous localities such as planting fruit trees, installing greenhouses to grow vegetables, poultry rearing and trout farming. Many of these micro interventions were unsuccessful for a number of reasons; many of them were imposed by the government agency with no incentive for community involvement; while others lacked adequate technical advice and monitoring schemes.

However, the history of the apple orchard in Aboreachi had an additional component leading to its abandonment. *Raramuri* families from the locality took care of the 623 trees as they grew. They even fenced the orchard to prevent cattle and horses from damaging it. After some years, people from the locality began enjoying their cultivated apples. However, one season a few years ago, *Raramuri* families from the locality began to cut the apples from the trees much earlier in the year than expected[128]. When asked why they were picking small apples not yet fully ripe, they replied that in the previous harvest mestizos from the locality of the Laguna de Aboreachi had systematically collected massive amounts of apples for themselves, even though they knew that the project was designed to benefit the *Raramuri* of Aboreachi. Using their pickup trucks, mestizo families began to harvest and then sell the apples in stores in their home towns. In response, Raramuri families in Aboreachi began to collect ever smaller and less ripe apples before the *mestizos* came and took the lot. With each passing year the increasingly neglected

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[128] Personal information from Anthropologist Jannelli Miller in reference of her fieldwork research in the Tarahumara region between the years 1999-2003.

orchard became abandoned as Raramuri households questioned the point of caring for the trees when only the *mestizos* were benefiting from their effort. So because Raramuri families were not enjoying the apples at their best the orchard is now abandoned, and as the trees begin to die out for lack of proper care, no apples are harvested.

This case is a classic example of hoarding benefits and resources, in this case from a collective project of apples put in place to benefit the Raramuri. It sheds light not only on possible reasons why small-scale interventions and economic projects in the region fail to achieve their goals, but also on power dynamics enforced by asymmetric power interactions between the mestizo and the Raramuri groups. It is also a concrete reflection of how Raramuri respond to the low intensity political oppression they face. Raramuri usually avoid direct confrontation and retreat collectively to prevent a potential conflict, while on the other side, mestizo people take advantage of hoarding benefits aimed at the indigenous population.

The second example of inter-ethnic political relations leading to opportunity hoarding by the mestizo is based on the fact that mestizo are overrepresented in the local and regional political spheres and the decision-making process. Local municipal governments in the Tarahumara are controlled in vast majority by mestizo political and economic elites promoting patron/client relations that lead to opportunity hoarding. In a sense, in the national political domain, the Raramuri have become a political banner for national politicians. The Tarahumara region has become a customary stopover for political campaigns where national and local politicians dressed in traditional Raramuri clothes are photographed alongside a group of Raramuri, a political gesture intended to represent an apparent sensitivity to indigenous people's lives and demands.

However, political control is expressed in various ways. For instance, from time to time the local and national media draw public attention to the level of poverty conditions the indigenous population face in the Sierra (Darling 1994; DePalma 1994; Marks 1994). There

are compelling reports stressing the need to address levels of child malnutrition, the difficulties that Raramuri families face in obtaining clean water or how harsh climatic conditions are affecting agricultural production. Taking advantage of the wide perception of conditions of scarcity and high poverty levels faced by the inhabitants of the Sierra Tarahumara, local mestizo leaders, municipal authorities and local business owners publically demand greater economic investment and economic projects to promote tourism, mines, service delivery and other existing economic endeavours. Discussing the solution to poverty tends, therefore, to be centred around the issue of increasing economic investment in pre-existing economic sectors managed and implemented by existing political elites.

In the case of the Tarahumara region, political and economic elites are defined by ethnic ascription. Because the political, economic and social that take advantage of their social position are privileged *mestizos*, the existing political system and institutional arrangements promote a lack of sensitivity to cultural difference in development policies, and this constrains the relationship between the Raramuri and the State.

Local elites in the Sierra Tarahumara claim that in order to alleviate the unacceptable living conditions, monetary flows from the federal and state government must be directed through current formal institutions, especially the municipal government. This argument is based on the claim that official institutions act free from political and group power dynamics. However, as acknowledge, local government and political actors in the Sierra are subject to patronage relations whereby the *mestizos* make the most of their advantageous position. The deprived conditions faced by the indigenous population are clearly exploited by the *mestizo* local government, which calls and presses for larger economic flows, which they control completely, and for which there is little accountability. The elite's narratives and the mainstream media do not discuss the role structural transformative measures play in causing poverty levels in the region to persist. Prevailing attitudes can be seen more clearly in the use of the locative term "Sierra" as a

homogeneous, ethno-political neutral space by local municipal governments from the region: "promoting economic investment in the Sierra as the Sierra inhabitants are facing poverty conditions". And even if levels of deprivation faced by the Raramuri group are included in the narratives, the narratives prescribe that it is the local government that needs to address their demands, which of course gives them increased control over resources.

Institutional arrangements promoted by patron client relations and political corruption produce negative effects for both ethnic groups. Political elites control and hoard resources and opportunities, competing with other political groups, whilst indigenous people and politically marginalized *mestizos*, such as those that do not benefit from effective family networks, remain excluded from the allocation of benefits (Gacitua and Sojo 2000).

These mestizo political elites – most of them based on kinship relationships - deploy power strategies during election times involving alliances with local economic actors where promises are made of political favours once in government. This dynamic also involves large sums of money being distributed to influence individual preferences in voting. In this system, the participation of the Raramuri people is sought only for their votes, gained either by promises to solve deep felt demands or by coercive measures. The capacity to mobilize is not only identifiable in creating preferences, but also to physically mobilize individuals to vote. In the Tarahumara region, during Election Day it is still very common to see political intermediaries and leaders organizing and transporting voters. Even large trucks, some of them belonging to the *ejidos* and usually used for the extraction of timber, travel through Raramuri localities moving people to polling stations, which are usually located in a larger mestizo town.[129]

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[129] Fieldwork notes. Aboreachi June-July 2010

The discourse promoted by the mestizo elites is part of a collective strategy showing how privileged sectors of the mestizo use their political capital effectively to benefit from government policies that tend to perpetuate their dominant social position. The poverty levels affecting the region itself are strategically exploited for this purpose. Limited policy options conceived by politicians and economical actors at the local and national level tend to focus the benefits on small elite groups, amongst which the *mestizo* group takes greater advantage. Consequently, existing power dynamics based on patronage relations among the local actors are maintained in favour of the *mestizo* group producing persistent inequality. This concrete example is consistent with literature concerning patron-client and regressive political institutions (Gacitua and Sojo 2000).

There are a number of ethnographic studies of how political interactions in the region are being controlled by *mestizo* groups that compete with each other in order to maintain or regain political control at the municipality level (Ortega 2010), which show how local land management schemes are found to have a significant role in the perpetuation of the status quo, hence unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and accessibilities (Perez-Cirera and Lovett 2006). Other studies emphasise the historical influence of patronage relations on official institutions, which constrains opportunities for indigenous people to become involved effectively in exercising control over their livelihoods (Engerman and Sokoloff 2006).

The importance of these political dynamics in the region is not minor, as municipalities in Mexico enjoy an increasing overall budget due to decentralization of social and economical policies. Therefore, even if economic investments are conceived without a distinct or explicit sense of discrimination on ethnic grounds, benefits which establish or maintain infrastructure and promote local businesses and industries are clearly allocated unequally and distributes benefit differentially amongst the population. Mestizo elites utilize leverage with economic and political actors at the national and global level to extract benefits directly, while the indigenous population remain largely excluded from

most positive effects. This is not to say that the Raramuri population does not benefit from business, tourism or forestry; as mentioned above, indigenous individuals consider regular participation in off-farm economic activities to be desirable. As already argued, Raramuri lifestyle also implies the need to participate in the market and exchange economy. However this participation is limited by power relations with dominant groups, along with unequal structural terms that meant the Raramuri people are encapsulated within highly restricted economic and cultural niches (Day, Papataxiarchis and Stewart, 1999). At the end of the day power dynamics at the local and micro level are yet another contributor to increased vulnerability.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter was dedicated to exploring how the 'path to living well' '*Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich*' of the Raramuri is affected and limited by diverse factors. In exploring these limitations in the case of the Raramuri I had described a wide range of social, economic and political factors contributing to the consolidation of power asymmetries in the region. Firstly, we described how land conflict can impair the communal and collective capacity of farming in the Tarahumara region. Secondly, the institutional structure of the ejido is also explored as a conflict factor that promotes the control of decision making spaces by *mestizos*. However, the ejido can also be understood as a space that the Raramuri have adopted in order to access social protection programmes considered crucial for subsistence agriculture, such as fertilizer supply. However, these fertilizers in turn also represent a further challenge for farming. Finally, ethnically differentiated vulnerability is evident when exploring the implied risk to economic activities that predominantly constitute mestizo and Raramuri livelihoods.

These factors refer directly to the living well dimensions of the Raramuri explored in the previous chapter; the importance of land and subsistence farming and the strong sense of community are sustained by solidarity networks and cooperation. We have also seen empirical cases that demonstrate that power disparities in the Tarahumara region are

multi-factorial. Overall, all the empirical cases presented here underline the arguments presented in this chapter:

(i) Differentiated sets of vulnerabilities disproportionately affect Raramuri people in contrast to the wider non-indigenous population. Francisco's case, described above, is one example. It is a case where coping strategies – in this case temporary migration to agricultural fields - as part of the Raramuri livelihood are subjected to a wide range of vulnerabilities, which are different from the mestizo poor or other social categories. Being a coping strategy necessitated by the subsistence household's low harvest that year; temporary migration of a member of the household unleashed a series of consequences that evidence the vulnerabilities faced. Firstly, the need to migrate regularly to participate in the unskilful labour market as part of traditional livelihood highlights fragile and limited resources available for subsistence agriculture. There are choices that a household or group makes; migrating as an option has a different nature than migrating as a necessity, and in some cases migrating is indeed a necessity for the Raramuri. In this case, the need to migrate is evidence of being vulnerable to food shortages. Secondly, the need to migrate into urban setting leads to the migrants being vulnerable to discrimination. The feelings Francisco's father had in the city of Chihuahua - of insecurity, fear, of being judged by his appearance and not being able to communicate properly in Spanish - are an indication of socially embedded lack of respect for multi-cultural diversity. Thirdly, in the current context of high levels of crime, drug related violence and impunity; in Mexico marginalized individuals such as migrant workers are particularly at risk of becoming victims of crime. Being a migrant without a close network of friends and family increases the chances of being targeted by city gangs for robbery, assault or murder.

(ii) Persistent unequal distribution of power has permitted elites to consolidate their privileged social and economic position through hoarding local opportunities. The relationship of paternalism and political relations between the three levels of government; national, state and local has a strong influence on consolidating political and

economic elites. As we have seen, the Tarahumara region is not free of this historic baggage. Municipalities are spaces where economic, social and political resources can be easily hoarded and manipulated by small privileged groups. Hoarding can be seen in the case of the apple orchard in Aboreachi, showing how these groups - commonly mestizo - operate and are maintained through networks of compliance with local investors, middle-men traders, local cattle dealers and local leaders who negotiate with the local government, obtaining favours and deals, and who treat collective public goods as private ones.

(iii) Faulty social policies that fail to address the structured power distributions that affect more acutely the indigenous population. Broad social policies – in the form of social protection programs such as PROCAMPO and *Oportunidades* and the implementation of the *ejido* land tenure scheme - lack the capacity to address structural constraints by themselves. As seen, in the case of PROCAMPO, due to lack of proper monitoring and accountability measures its implementation has itself caused further unequal allocation of resources, showing a clear case of hoarding by elites and those in privileged positions with decision making power. Social protection programs are oriented to fulfilling specific needs at the individual or household level rather than at a community level, and are therefore insensitive to the collective and communal sense of the Raramuri right path to living well. Despite the vital role it plays, in order to be truly progressive existing social policy requires transformative measures based on the recognition and proper implementation of the cultural and social rights of ethnic minorities. A rights-based approach must have a distinctive promotion element oriented to – among other things - consolidating endogenous mechanisms of decision making. This will involve the Raramuri having greater control and influence over natural and social resources (Lartigue, 1983; Azarcoya, 2003).

Arguably, the institutional arrangements provided by the ejido have not been able to do this. Although communities adapt to and use its internal organization to participate in decision making concerning resources, the concentration of power still resides in the *ejido*

commission evidencing, in many cases, positions of subordination for the Raramuri within the inter-ethnic setting of the Tarahumara region. It is clear that unequal distribution of power impacts the poor population across ethnic boundaries - *mestizos* and indigenous alike. However, in terms of their role as *ejidatarios* Raramuri people face additional vulnerabilities that help shape a distinctive unequal pattern of opportunities and resources.

Finally, there is a need for inclusive and intercultural dialogue, and for broader notions of an approach to living well to be acknowledged in public policy and social spaces and practices. Cultural difference and political oppression must be addresses in this, as the debate about need and rights in the context of indigenous issues must be based on complementarily, instead of prioritizing one over the other.

The next chapter will explore how the Raramuri population dealt with these limitations. In Jackson words: 'in a world that that is always one of want, lack and struggle, wellbeing is not a matter of what one gets but how one carries ones's load' (Jackson, 2001). In this sense, empirical evidence presented will show how Raramuri people use different group and individual dynamics 'to carry their loads'. I will argue that resistance and agency also throw light on how living well is perceived in terms of persistent ethnic identity.

CHAPTER VI. RARAMURI RESISTANCE TO ASYMMETRICAL POWER RELATIONS: TWO EMPIRICAL CASES.

An old lady lived with her two grandsons in a hamlet.
She had no relatives but the children, and the children
had no other living relatives but their grandmother.
Time passed until the oldest grandson could go to work
for a *chabochi* who employed him to graze his goats.
Time passed until, on one occasion,
the boy left the goats unattended, losing four of them.
The *chabochi* master became very angry because of this,
and as punishment, gave the boy four lashes.
When the boy got home, he told his grandmother what had happened.
Grandma became very angry because her grandson
had been beaten and immediately thought of taking
revenge for the cruelty with which the *chabochi* had treated her grandson.
Grandma's displeasure was such that she told her grandchildren:
"When I die, I'll take that *chabochi* so he will no longer hurt my small grandchildren.
No, I will do something even better.
I will become a coyote, and I'll eat all his goats".
"But grandma," said the youngest grandson, who was listening
to the conversation between his brother and grandmother,
"how is that you'll take the *chabochi* if you die?
After death, you cannot be on earth and you cannot do anything".

"Son," Grandma said, "you must know that the Raramuri have spirits.
When a Raramuri dies, the body ends, but the spirit lives on.
You'll see how I will fulfill what I say".

'The Goatherd'
Tarahumara Legends. Instituto Nacional Indigenista. 1965

Thus far we have established the idea that unequal social interactions between the Raramuri and the mestizo limit the indigenous people's ability to secure their means of making a livelihood and their way of living. These limitations are reflected among the

Raramuri people in the living well discourse of 'the correct path', or '*Gara wachi Inaropo nai gawich'*.

The central argument of this chapter shows how the Raramuri of Aboreachi engage in a variety of resistance techniques, and strategies as a reaction to and in contestation of inequalities understood as power asymmetries between them and the dominant mestizo population. These diverse forms of resistance imply processes of a) heightening and making visible the differences between mestizo and Raramuri ethnic practices and livelihoods, and b) homogenizing the cultural practices of the Raramuri livelihoods in order to defend them. These two processes deal with ethnicity, and are linked with the living well discourse discussed earlier. Specifically, I would argue that ethnicity plays a major role in resistance as a strategic mechanism to create opportunities for agency, appropriation and adaptation processes at the micro level. However, at the same time, these mechanisms may also undermine the Raramuri's capacity to articulate their demands to the State, as they have the potential inadvertently to perpetuate the status quo of ethnic relations in the Tarahumara region.

Definition of terms

This chapter will look at how the Raramuri apply socio-political resistance strategies in contestation against the ethno-political oppression and asymmetric power relations acknowledged earlier in the study. The main question the chapter seeks to answer is: how and through what political and cultural mechanisms do Raramuri people respond to the ethno-political oppression they face? In order to do this, I shall define specific terms which will be used throughout the chapter, namely: resistance, agency, "autonomous" and "contested spaces".

This research understands resistance in terms of resilience based on ethnic identity as a way to face ethno-political oppression, that is, as the social, political and cultural processes the Raramuri population follows to confront power asymmetries with the

mestizo living in the sierra and with wider global forces. There are a number of actions that can be understood as resistance on the part of the Raramuri people which are not limited to a single uniform strategy but rather consist of a number of different practices and discourses at the collective and individual levels. These imply dimensions of both discourse and practice and are, therefore, shaped and articulated as a response to asymmetrical relations of power (Varese 1996).

In this chapter I analyse how the Raramuri take advantage of certain spaces of agency to confront unequal power relations, which represents one important component of their practices of resistance. Therefore, political agency is defined in this study as a group's socially and culturally embedded capacity to organize and articulate demands to confront asymmetrical power relations. This political freedom to exercise control over certain social spaces and resources can be analysed as an important manifestation of their resistance practices. Agency, therefore, as a resistance strategy, can be considered as the capacity to engage in political practices, whilst resistance is the broader and larger articulation between ethnic and living well discourses and political practices that combine to deal with power asymmetries.

There are two cases of resistance among the Raramuri of Aboreachi that will be explored in this chapter: two social spaces where processes of agency and resistance are visible, namely "contested spaces" and "autonomous spaces". These spaces are shaped by power relations and are related to what Scott (1990) has described as private and public scenarios and Gaventa (2006) three spaces for participation as dimensions of power: closed, invited and claimed or created spaces[130]. For this research, I define "contested spaces" as those social spaces where the interests of Raramuri and mestizo groups clash. One such space explored previously is the ejido, as land access is crucially important for both groups' livelihoods and ways of life, and consequently for their wellbeing. In Chapter

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[130] Gaventa (2006) proposes a framework that focus on participation and opportunities in order to explain the emergence of participation by citizens in policy process in local and global arenas. This framework is based on three dimensions: spaces (that can be closed, invited, and claimed or created); levels (global, national, local); and forms (visible, hidden, invisible).

V we analysed the ejido as a "force field" (Nuijten 1998). It is a space where the interest of both groups in controlling management of natural resources is clearly expressed. As explored further in the chapter, another "contested space" is apparent in the political dynamics of selecting the traditional leaders of the Raramuri political structure. These contested spaces to be explored share similarities to Gaventa´s (2006) closed spaces as they hold decision-making process that remain behind closed doors exluding a set of actors from participating in them.

"Autonomous spaces", on the other hand, are those social spaces where the Raramuri and the mestizos each go about their everyday lives without much apparent interference from the other. It is in these spaces that ethnic discourses are reproduced in order to give meaning to oppressive forces and unequal relations. In a way, they are spaces of reproduction of cultural practices: where narratives of ethnic differences are enhanced and made visible in subsequent interethnic interactions. They are considered autonomous in contrast to the contested spaces as one particular group has exclusive command over them in terms of expressing and defining the identity of the oppressed (Scott 1990). These autonomous spaces shared characteristics with the claimed/created spaces of Gaventa (2006) framework. He defines claimed or created spaces as those spaces that are created organically by less powerfull actors around particular joint claims such as identity.

Therefore, these spaces are crucial for reproducing cultural practices and enhancing ethnicity among the Raramuri. Examples of these are religious and *teswuino* gatherings that are exclusive to the Raramuri people. Mestizos cannot interfere in them in any way. Likewise, the mestizos have their social spaces where the Raramuri do not participate and have no influence: for instance, local political spheres of the municipal government. Both categories serve to explore ethnic power relations in social spaces. However they are subject to dynamism and historical influence, and therefore they are not fixed but overlap, evolve and create hybrid spaces. Gaventa (2006) also acknowledge invited spaces where participants are included in a participatory space or process and where power relations

are idealy regulated and neutral. In the dynamism of interactions, the category of space help us to understand the resistance strategies of the Raramuri people.

Arguments

I will argue throughout this chapter that the Raramuri engage in a variety of means of resisting asymmetric power relations, depending on the intensity and the level (micro or macro) of the power relations. These resistance strategies may in practice involve visible or subtle, hidden ways of negotiation, appropriation, evasion, or hoarding depending on how the interethnic relations stand (Scott 1985, 1990). For instance, because localities, ejidos and sub-regions within the vast Tarahumara region are subject to different socio-political forces, such as land conflicts, the types of resistance employed by the Raramuri will vary accordingly. Specifically, as Aboreachi shows greater social and political integration with the mestizo Laguna locality, the mechanisms of resisting mestizo power tend to be more subtle and less visible than in other localities where land conflicts have created an environment of ethno-political tension. This is in part due to the fact that resistance mechanisms depend on decisions about risk and calculations of possible negative effects.

I argue that although there have been active and violent revolts and forms of protest during past centuries, the Raramuri's mechanisms for coping with oppression and unequal power relations have now evolved into more sophisticated and subtle mechanisms (Scott 1972; Levi 1992; 1998; 1999; 2003). These actions include diverse political resistance strategies that range from subtle evasion of economic transactions and non-participation or silence in political spaces to actively engaging in visible protests. Some of the resistance reactions occur at the very basic community level and others at regional, municipal or intra-*pobora* level.

Raramuri resistance mechanisms are expressed in diverse forms and manifestations. However, one overriding principle is that they stress ethnic distinction between the

Raramuri and the mestizo, which tends to homogenise Raramuri cultural practices. In this sense, this research echoes the current principle of widening the gulf between studies linking ethnicity and inequality that was seen in chapter II, which discuss the theoretical background of the thesis (Peterson; 1978a, 1978b; Gluckman 1958; Grinker 1994; Okamura 2008). Through this ethnic differentiation, in discursive and practical terms, oppressive forces are made visible and unbalanced power relations demonstrated. Moreover, I argue that differentiating themselves allows the Raramuri to control their own autonomous spaces (as described above), which is an essential part of their resistance strategy.

Accordingly, an important dimension of Raramuri political resistance involves maintaining control of key practices and cultural features of their ethnic identity. Key practices and features defined by and contained within their way of living (such as the *teswuino*, solidarity networks and the ability to engage in subsistence agriculture, among others) are culturally reproduced in the autonomous spaces. Moreover, in the competitive environment that exists in the region due to limited natural resources and economic opportunities, the mestizo also promote ethnic distinction. They also enjoy autonomous spaces and practices which justify and institutionalise the political and economic exclusion of the rest of the population of the Tarahumara. This competition for resources and economic opportunities creates contested spaces between the two groups. Therefore, Raramuri resistance implies maintaining definite control over their autonomous spaces and resisting negative intervention and power asymmetries in contested spaces.

This argument will be explored through the example of two cases. Firstly, I will present the process of selecting the main Raramuri political leader (*Waru Seriame*) in the community of Aboreachi. This can be understood as a contested space where mestizo and Raramuri political interests clash. The case will show how Raramuri (especially traditional leaders) enact ethnic discourses that stress ethnic distinction between the Raramuri and mestizo in order to protect Raramuri autonomous spaces. I would argue that traditional authorities

employ a strategy of resistance to the asymmetric power relations which implies not only specific agency opportunities but also limitations and structural constraints at different levels. It is through the interplay between the contested and autonomous spaces that constraints and opportunities for agency can be observed and explored. This case will also show how traditional leaders participate in and organise small-scale government-led projects to do with practices or productive activities which may be related to Raramuri culture or even folklore, such as small-scale cattle farming. This enables them to enhance their standing in public opinion as effective negotiators and leaders. Participation in this way can be understood as an adaptation of official interventions to make them meaningful in their own cultural terms, and even more importantly, as a political tool of the otherwise powerless. It is important to note that resistance mechanisms such as evasion and silence, discussed earlier, support evidence recorded in existing literature and this thesis aims to contribute with new empirical evidence on forms of resistance (Bauman 1983; Gal 1991; Weiner 1997, 1999; Herzfeld 1991; Levi 2003)

Secondly, I will present the case of the celebration of Raramuri Easter or the *Noririwachi.* I will discuss how ceremonies and culturally embedded gatherings are spaces where Raramuri society expresses ethno-political oppression, and where resistance is produced and reproduced. The *Noririwachi* is understood as an autonomous festivity that reinforces ethnic differences and allows the Raramuri - in symbolic and representational terms - to struggle against and defeat their mestizo oppressors. This case will show how the Raramuri employ a typical Raramuri strategy of resisting power asymmetries by seeking control of social autonomous spaces and practices, stressing the cultural difference between themselves and the non-indigenous population. The celebration of the *Noririwachi* can be seen as an expression of resistance, where, symbolically, mestizo elements can personify evil, and where they are publically challenged, mocked and defeated at a collective gathering.

In both cases ethnicity is used discursively as a political label that expresses a political position within the context of unequal interethnic relations (Albro 2008). The chapter finishes with the consideration that exploring how this discourse is performed and articulated will provide insights into the capacity of both individual and collective agency to confront asymmetrical power relations and obtain control of certain festive practices. However, at the same time this prerogative might also encourage the perpetuation of unequal power relations. I argue that for the Raramuri, assuming an ethnic identity implies both risks and opportunities. By stressing the differences between the mestizo and themselves as a group through the production and reproduction of wellbeing and ethnic discourses, the Raramuri make their social organization and festive practices visible and strong, thus reinforcing a collective identity. Therefore, a trade-off occurs: by having relative control over "autonomous spaces" they lose influence over "contested" political, economic and social spaces, thus permitting the perpetuation on unequal terms of relations between the mestizo and the Raramuri. Consequently, ethnic and wellbeing discourses are useful for the Raramuri in Aboreachi to articulate demands to the nation state through collective positions of recognition of rights, to organise social and interethnic interactions and to address indigenous needs. Even so, such discourses have the capacity to reinforce crucial cultural, social and political differentiation and therefore help consolidate the power disparities which are the product of social hierarchies. In other words, by exploring how this dual element of resistance mechanisms contributes to understanding how inter-ethnic power inequality is perpetuated, the chapter engages in the long debated discussion of structure and agency in relation to social exclusion[131]. Hence, it can be seen that the structural context of mestizo power constrains Raramuri agency to a certain extent. The implication of this is that the persistence of power asymmetries is endorsed and institutionalized by the current social and political relations in that context, and at the same time resistance actions have an influence only at the micro level with little impact in the broader context.

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[131] See Colley and Hodkinson (2001)

This argument supports the point that Raramuri and mestizo identities are constructed alongside one another. One cannot be understood without the other. Raramuri and mestizo together create one social, economical and political system which is characterized by the continued construction of asymmetric power relations on one side and the continued construction of ethnic identities on the other.

6.1. Elements of Raramuri Resistance.

There are a number of collective strategies Raramuri people employ in reaction to the asymmetric power relations between them and the wider society. As we have seen in previous chapters, one economic coping strategy is temporary migration leading to un skilled job opportunities in mestizo urban centres. Other strategies are more subtle and relate to processes of identity construction and their interplay with hegemonic discourses. These latter strategies are the ones I want to explore in this subsection.

An interesting issue to consider regarding ethnicity and asymmetric power relations in the Tarahumara region is why power asymmetries and unequal access to economic and political opportunities are strongly determined by ethnicity, differentiating between the predominantly privileged mestizo and the predominantly disadvantaged Raramuri people. Why do the Raramuri keep reinforcing their identity and stressing the ritual and social traits that differentiate them from the mestizo? One could think, for instance, that in order to avoid ethnic discrimination and to be able to take more advantage of urban work opportunities, it would be more effective to deny their ethnic identity and assimilate into the nation state and the larger society. If this were the case, large-scale permanent migration to urban settings would be a general practice among the Raramuri people. And even if this permanent migration does occur to a certain extent at the moment, a considerable sector of the Raramuri population continues to defy the unequal circumstances they face by maintaining autonomous practices that separate them from the forces of the market and the logic of material accumulation (Herrera 2010).

I argue that these forms of defying and resisting dominant structures are based on the principle of reinforcing ethnic differentiation from the non-indigenous society. The consequences of the power asymmetries faced by large parts of the Raramuri population - namely political and economic marginalization - are reinforced by defending and persevering in what they consider important for their way of living and 'the correct path in life'. The subsequent reaction is to essentialise and homogenise aspects of their culture which lie outside the influence of the mestizo world, and over which they still have command and control, and to obtain leverage over the more visible aspects of their culture. One example of this is the distinctive homogenized discourse of the levels of poverty and forms of livelihood that Raramuri people employ when in the presence of political candidates who promise to answer their demands. Another is that when Raramuri people attend meetings with the government concerning delivery of services or presenting programmes they wear traditional dress so as to enhance their ethnic difference[132].

This is not to say that identities are not negotiable and fluid - as the empirical evidence presented earlier suggests - nor that Raramuri identity is constructed according to a fixed set of primordial values. Rather, their regarding certain aspects as an essential reaction to the asymmetrical relations of power can be seen as a political strategy to strengthen their cultural identity, which is reflected in the mobilization of a dominant discourse. Asad (1979) identifies the latter as a reflection of how dominant ideologies and discourses are being produced and performed by a particular ethnic group.

There is no simple answer to the question of why ethnic identities such as that of the Raramuri persist against all odds. I agree that the causes of this counterintuitive phenomenon are diverse. Among them an important consideration is that hegemonic ethnic discourses are strongly embedded in the social and cultural reproduction of

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[132] *Ibid*

practices and group memberships. Essentialised and homogenised Raramuri and mestizo discourses are constructed and reproduced constantly by everyday interethnic interactions.

Yet all hegemonic discourses are contested in one way or another. In this sense, the dominant wellbeing and ethnic discourses associated with the *mestizos* is challenged by the Raramuri in symbolic, political and everyday forms of contestation. In order to understand the inter-ethnic discursive clash between *mestizos* and the Raramuri I will look at those contested spaces and practices where inter-ethnic relations produce a conflict. Both groups alike try to influence those social spaces and practices that could be of interest to the other side, creating contestation or "contested spaces". For instance, economic opportunities such as access to permanent or temporary income activities are obviously contested issues, due to a general sense of wanting to obtain benefits in an environment of scarcity affecting the Tarahumara region, which leads to competition and hoarding (See chapter III and V). However, there are other social spaces and practices that do not imply access to commodities and therefore competition and hoarding do not occur at all, or at least not as intensely, so "autonomous spaces" are created. These are spaces and practices that each group identifies with and socially reproduces on its own without much interference, and it is within these that each group has control over symbolic resources and implicit potential agency to influence the other group.

Examples of such "autonomous" spaces and practices among the Raramuri are the festive practice of socio-religious *fiestas* and gatherings, the reproduction of social collaborative and solidarity networks and the enjoyment of sharing *teswuino*. These social practices represent crucial parts of their group identity and, at the same time, because they are normally performed within the indigenous group they do not influence mestizo livelihoods directly so the mestizos have no strategic interest in influencing them. In other words, there are social spaces and practices that tend to overlap inter-ethnically and others that do not.

Specifically, the overlapping "contested" spaces and practices relate to control over natural resources such as land, to the influence of the ejido in terms of distribution, the dynamics of power in its core and its shifting agricultural practices, and to the fact that differentiated vulnerabilities impact differently on livelihoods. The case of the apple orchard explored in the previous chapter is one example of a contested space in the Tarahumara region. In that case, the mestizos took advantage of their position by hoarding a contested resource. Arguably, the control and effects of these resources and social factors represent some areas that are highly contested by both groups. Therefore the political arena becomes the scene of dominant and subaltern relations and/or the clash of different particular views of the world: a clash between a discourse based in part on the need to accumulate material and income resources driven by a competitive context, and a discourse based on subsistence agriculture, limited market participation and a tendency to discourage accumulation.

6.2 Examples of political resistance among the Raramuri

In the Tarahumara region, resistance strategies are performed in many ways, depending, among other factors, on the historical context, social, economic and political dynamics present in each of the different sub-regions. The Tarahumara region, its people and the ethno-politics surrounding them are not homogeneous. I am arguing that some regions engage in a visible and outward type of resistance, based on the fact that Raramuri people have been common subjects of land displacement for a long period in Mexico's history, whereas other communities and *ejidos* engage in a more subtle and inward type of resistance.

On the one hand, some Raramuri *ejidos* and communities have stronger historical links with mestizo localities and have greater economic and political engagement than other Raramuri communities. Some face direct confrontation in land disputes between mestizo

localities, as is the case of Choreachi and Pino Gordo. In these particular cases there have been judicial processes around land disputes, involving NGOs, communities, independent lawyers, private, national and international investors, etc. For instance, in Choreachi and Pino Gordo, where the Raramuri population have been subjected to intense land grabbing and illegal logging on communal property, there is a form of political resistance that has been identified by Almanza (per comms.): intense engagement with a number of advocacy organizations. These include COSYDDHAC, the Chihuahua based Advisory Council of the Sierra Madre (*Consejo Asesor de la Sierra Madre* or CASMAC), government institutes such as the Chihuahua Office of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) (*Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia*) and the Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) (*Comision para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indigenas*), and a number of independent lawyers. It is only relatively recently that Raramuri *ejidos* and communities have been interested in seeking coalitions and allies outside the immediate region to provide legal orientation in national and international courts in cases of land conflict. In some cases, this engagement has been successful for the Raramuri side, leading to the replication of this strategy in other cases.

On the other hand, other regions such as Aboreachi, where this research was conducted, have no record of prolonged conflict based on ethnicity. As mentioned in previous chapters, the Raramuri people of Aboreachi maintain a settlement pattern which is separate from the mestizo people; they have a strong sense of community cohesion and willingness to preserve traditions that stress differentiation along group boundaries. However, dynamics of economic and political integration exist between both groups and sets of localities. Nonetheless, this integration is based on a clear pattern of power asymmetries and unequal control of decision making spaces, which work to the disadvantage of the Raramuri. The fact that economic integration is strong signifies that political resistance strategies implemented by the Raramuri in regions such as Aboreachi differ from those of other communities in other contexts, and that their interethnic relations are shaped by different historical processes.

It is not only the apparent absence of land conflicts that leads to different forms of resistance in Raramuri regions like Aboreachi. The subtle and hidden forms of resistance which can be detected there, rather than visible and open confrontation such as can be seen in Choreachi and Pino Gordo, result from the fact that Raramuri people have more at stake and are at greater risk of retribution. As economic opportunities and interethnic social links do indeed occur – again, not on equal terms - Raramuri people have an interest in avoiding open confrontation and conflict, which might endanger those aspects that maintain their correct path in life. Consequently forms of resistance are expressed more subtly and by reinforcing internal cohesion within the Raramuri locality. Ultimately, the resistance of Raramuri people through the perpetuation of their ethnic identity and cultural practices – namely those that are associated with concepts living well - implies the existence of tensions in inter-ethnic relationships between indigenous and mestizo people. In this sense, resistance is understood as a consequence of oppressive forces that threaten the existence and reproduction of cultural practices, "autonomous spaces" and ethnic identities.

Aboreachi, in common with many Raramuri areas within the Tarahumara region, has no strong – if any - political representation at either national or regional level to negotiate and influence policy effectively. Drawing on ancient cultural traditions and in response to continued oppression, they become cohesive units and rely on survival strategies based on preserving their cultural distinctiveness. In order to do this, the Raramuri people of Aboreachi engage in diverse forms of resistance to unequal power asymmetries, such as silence and evasion.

For instance, silence and non-participation in certain spheres can be understood as a discourse strategy of cultural resistance in the face of injustice (Levi 2003). Silence is seen in the Raramuri culture as the ability to show respect, calmness and self-control in difficult situations. When describing non-verbal forms of communication Levi states: "These

instances represent Raramuri use of silence and minimal interaction as conventions for the management of deference, emotion, conflict, or uncertainty" (2003:266). These insights are helpful in understanding culturally embedded mechanisms concerning social relations and reactions to them. Silence as cultural resistance in indigenous populations is not a new topic in anthropological research, although it is often under observed (Weiner 1997, 1999). In some literature silence is conceived as a sign of powerlessness and passivity, although elsewhere can also be considered an active form of defence and reaction to oppression (Gal 1991; Bauman 1983; Herzfeld 1991). As well as silence, other subtle mechanisms of resistance used by the Raramuri must be respected and understood in their cultural context.

Additionally, Levi (1999) identifies evasion as a form of everyday resistance among the Raramuri. However, he states that evasions are not restricted to inter-ethnic relations, but also appear in interactions between individuals of the same ethnic group. This is not to say that inter-ethnic friction does not occur frequently. For instance, within the "contested spaces", such as in economic transactions, Raramuri and *mestizos* engage in intense interaction in order to exchange goods or for Raramuri to be hired as cheap labour for mestizo farms.

Another example of inter-ethnic friction occurs when political intermediation takes place - for instance, at the *ejido* meetings where they respond with their own ways even if the terms of the trade or economic negotiation are not particularly good for them. For example, in the presence of the *mestizos* they might say they are happy with the deal, but later they may be dismissive if the agreement went against their own needs; they had simply said what the mestizo traders want to hear. The Raramuri do not consider this a breach of ethics since the agreement was based on injustice and immoral grounds.

Elsewhere, Levi (1992:300) suggests that material culture represents an active strategy of "an oppositional discourse expressing local identity and tactical resistance to the

homogenizing consequences of commoditization". Supported by intensive fieldwork, he argues that certain specific types of bows (ribbons tied ornamentally) and blankets used by the conservative Raramuri sub-group of *gentiles* (known as the "unbaptized" ones) are not inert relics from the past, but active strategies that allow them to use silence as a means to differentiate themselves, reinforcing their ethnic identity.

Levi (1992) argues that the *gentiles* people prefer to wear a certain skirt rather than other similar blankets that the *mestizos* sell, not only because they can produce them themselves and they last longer, but also because the fabrics have cosmological significance. Therefore, not only are there utilitarian benefits to using the traditional blanket, but also it represents a conscious choice to retain control over the means of production, expressing their independence of wider society. This shows how practices and social spaces, such as the use of this traditional blanket, effectively constitute "autonomous spaces" where cultural difference is enhanced and identities are maintained and promoted[133].

These findings echo those of existing literature about the region. For instance, Levi (1999) seeks an ethnographic application of Scott (1985)'s notion of discerning everyday resistance through what he calls "hidden transcripts" in Raramuri-mestizo relations and suggests that resistance can take the form of linguistic and behavioural codes. Levi understands resistance in terms of ethnic identity resilience. In common with many anthropologists studying the Tarahumara region, he focuses on the factors leading to cultural change due to the increasing influence of non-indigenous forces on the native cultures in the region. In this sense, resistance is associated not only with the negative impacts of cultural change but also, from a more political angle, with resistance to the

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[133] Is important to clarify, however, that by exploring the preservation of identities I am not arguing that Raramuri identities are fixed, unchanged or homogenous. On the contrary, I assume that identities are flexible, mobile and dynamic not only in the case of the Raramuri but also in all other ethnic groups. I am, nonetheless, arguing that there is a mainstream discourse that is based on the idea of resisting power asymmetries through the persistence of certain factors that lie within the control of the group. The factors that are linked with the reproduction of this discourse are the focus of my attention.

implicit power and subordinate relations embedded in growing non-indigenous economic and political domination.

Accordingly, evasion strategies in political spheres among the *mestizos* can be identified from ethnographic findings of my fieldwork. The *Comisariado Ejidal* plays an opportunistic role as political operator. For instance, when dealing with antagonistic sides he easily changes his discourse in support of one or the other, depending on which side he is dealing with. Specifically, during the general elections in June 2010 he was quite involved supporting the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidates. "Puro PRI" [Only PRI] he used to say publically to the voters. However, during the visit of the president and secretary of the Supreme Indigenous Council, which at that time was linked with the National Action Party (PAN) and the federal government, he publicly bragged of being a PAN supporter: "all of us here in Aboreachi are PAN supporters", and "*Puro PAN*", he used to say. This behaviour can be understood if we consider the Tarahumara region in the context of contested resources and opportunities in a patron-client environment. Within this context and among *mestizos*, evasion is another mechanism of agency to deal with the political uncertainties of election time.

Evasion is one form of resistance; however the Raramuri, along with other indigenous groups in northern Mexico, have enacted wider collective strategies in order to adapt to a shifting historical context. Such strategies are explored by Deeds (2003) and Radding (1997). Using an historical approach to explain how ethnic identities persist under conditions of conquest and unequal power relations, these authors explore how the Raramuri cultivate processes that permit them constantly to reinvent their differentiation references, in order to maintain the distinctiveness of the group and their membership of it. The authors describe this as referring "(...) both to the social structures through which different ethnic communities re-create their cultures and to the political implications of resource allocation in the region" (Deeds 2003:7) These studies support the theory that in

order to understand how local interethnic tensions are constructed over time, identity is considered as a tool to reinforce spaces of agency that permit enduring survival.

Raramuri people engage in episodic resistance (Clegg 1989), when *ejidos* that are mainly Raramuri (or a Raramuri group that is part of an *ejido)* engage in demonstrations and visible protest on the streets of Chihuahua. The objective of these demonstrations is to create pressure and call attention to a particular situation of an *ejido*, such as the unlawful buying of land by private individuals to the detriment of communal land. The demands are generally targeted at local and regional authorities in order to put pressure on them for a favourable decision. As each *ejido* and *pobora* constitutes a defined unit on its own, these demonstrations do not receive much active grass-roots support from other Raramuri ejidos or localities. The main outside actors advocating indigenous and collective rights are a few local non-governmental organizations concerned with indigenous demands and welfare. These specialise in legal advice about land tenure and invasions from tourism projects, and in offering education and health guidance, among other subjects. However, any organised resistance or participation in civil spheres trying to counteract interethnic relations remain very isolated and have little influence either on public policy or at the micro level where the Raramuri agency capability occurs. Generally, public demonstrations will be sporadic and tend to fade away once they have achieved some level of pressure on government and in the media.

The difference between episodic resistance and the broad strategy of promoting control of 'autonomous spaces' is that episodic resistance is not necessarily as visible as the latter. Seeking control over autonomous spaces is, in a way, social and culturally embedded in everyday life. Arguably, sporadic forms of resistance to power relations could never be very effective as they are not sustained by social spaces and the practices that institutionalise them. On the other hand, ways to control 'autonomous spaces' through the reproduction of cultural practices (e.g. drinking festivities, co-operation and solidarity relations) are socially embedded in the Tarahumara livelihood and way of living, involving

in themselves the consolidation of resistance and ethnic discourses. In a way I am arguing that, as the case of the Raramuri people shows, resistance can also be institutionalized, not just the systems of oppression (Scott 1985).

As mentioned earlier, the political arena acts as the scenario where distinct cosmologies and ways of living clash. This clash takes place in discursive terms and in everyday forms. Within the contested political arena the selection of political leaders is important as they represent intercultural intermediaries between the groups. For the Raramuri people, selecting a leader is important because the person in that post is responsible for representing them with the government and mestizo leaders, and as well being active in 'organizing the people' for festivities, leading discussion of a particular project or government intervention, and embodying a public figure of leadership in the locality (Urteaga 1996). On the other hand, for the mestizos the Raramuri leader is the figure that because of his position could be an ally in negotiating processes and legitimizing government decisions and actions involving the Raramuri. It is in this context that individual and collective Raramuri agency will be analysed.

The next subsection will explore empirical evidence to support this argument. Specifically, I shall explore how political relations between both ethnic groups are constructed during the process of selecting a traditional political leader, which is conceived as a "contested space". Raramuri political leaders, namely *Seriame* and *Waru Seriame* - the highest positions of authority - deal with responsibilities and collective decisions made by localities and *poboras* in terms of internal social organization and also in terms of relations with the mestizo population and official institutions, such as municipalities, and *Consejo Supremo Tarahumara*. *Seriames* and *Waru Seriames* exercise leadership over people and have representation within official institutions. In other words, they possess political capital in both the Raramuri localities and the non-indigenous institutions. Therefore, through the analysis of the process of selecting the new *Waru Seriame* for the locality of Aboreachi that I experienced during fieldwork, I will exemplify how Raramuri leaders

enact agency in the process of selecting their traditional leaders (seen as a contested space) as part of their resistance to power asymmetries.

6.3. The case of the selection of the Waru Seriame as resistance in a contested space.

In order to illustrate how interethnic discourses are constructed, articulated and mobilized to enact political agency I will describe a process observed during fieldwork, concerning the selection by the public of Raramuri leaders. The discourses put forward by community leaders who aspire to be selected for a political post makes use of ethnic differentiation criteria to gain support. This particular case involves two Raramuri aspirants: Maria (the same informant mention earlier) and Eugenio. The process involved the selection of one of them to be the next *Waru Seriame*, the highest authority in the Raramuri socio-political organizational structure. The selection process took place in the locality of Aboreachi during fieldwork in the month of December, 2010. We will focus on Maria's account of events because evidence of ethnic differentiation is much more marked in her case.

Among the Raramuri, specific religious festive days from the Catholic calendar are used for renewing their indigenous political structure. Every third year, during the celebratory gathering of the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (12th December), Raramuri people from all over the *pobora* of Aboreachi call an assembly and get together after the religious celebrations are over to discuss possible candidates for each post.[134]

Days before the gathering[135], small groups began to talk about the possibilities of individuals who 'wanted to play' (wanted to be considered for the post of *Waru Seriame*). However, it was mainly during the fiesta that people who had gathered for the celebration

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[134] In other places in the Tarahumara region this occasion is celebrated during the '*Semana Santa*' or Holy Week (*Noririwachi)*

[135] Some authors (Villanueva 2008; Urteaga 1996) also called this collective decision-making space a Raramuri Assembly (*asamblea*).

really engaged in the selection process. The fiesta and gathering organized to celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe is the ideal scenario for this, as it provides the opportunity for people from all over the *pobora* to meet and exchange information about each possible candidate; it is then that alliances are created, individual intentions are publicly proclaimed and even new candidates might appear. After the various festivities and religious ceremonies, including performances on the church patio by musicians and dancers, and food and *teswuino* sharing, people gather especially for the purpose of discussing the election of authorities. All this is accompanied by the consumption of *teswuino*, which is a fundamental part of festive Raramuri gatherings.

The process of selecting the political authorities is held on the church patio, which is considered the symbolic and political centre of the Raramuri *pobora* of Aboreachi. It is there that discussion and decision-making take place through open participation of those present. The incumbent authorities act as facilitators, ensuring that all those who want to speak can do so. Women usually sit in groups with their children at the walls surrounding the atrium of the church, while men gather in the space physically closest to the temple, where the authorities are located with their '*bastones de mando*' (symbols of authority).

On this particular occasion during fieldwork it was observed that a group of mestizos arrived on their trucks from the mestizo-dominated neighbouring community and made themselves visible among the crowd, not far from where the Raramuri authorities were. Although their presence aroused whispers and wary comments from some Raramuri, no one dared to express their unease openly. As mentioned earlier, silence does not always denote compliance. It became apparent later in the subsequent developments that the silence towards the mestizos who were present concealed some positions that were later expressed differently.

The proceedings began with a speech by Roberto Castillo, the outgoing *Waru Seriame* of Aboreachi, indicating that he had finished his responsibilities and that it was time for the

people to decide together and choose who the new authority in charge would be. Then he asked if anyone wishing to support a candidate wanted to speak. Here it is important to note that authorities are selected not through votes, but through collective discussion, trying - if possible – to reach a consensus as to whose profile better fits the requirements of the position. The characteristics traditionally sought in leaders in the Raramuri political structure are mainly based on the people's perception of them as being responsible and trustworthy (Urteaga 1996). In terms of selecting a political leader such as the *Waru Seriame*, a candidate must enjoy a good reputation based on being a hard worker, behaving responsibly with his or her family, being skilled in speaking and giving advice, and knowledgeable about how to drink *teswuino* correctly.[136] Additionally, the candidate must be seen as actively participating in collective fiestas and gatherings, have a certain amount of experience in holding other festive-political positions within the Raramuri community and have a record of performing his/her duties honestly (Basauri 1929; Bennet and Zingg 1935; Kennedy 1963). Other individual traits include having command over social spaces and practices that I call 'autonomous' spaces in terms of interethnic relationships, in contrast to 'contested', overlapping social spaces and practices. Taking this into consideration, the selection of the *Waru Seriame* is a crucial collective decision, as there is an implicit understanding that a *Waru Seriame* has to be a 'guardian' of Raramuri traditions and practices.

After the collective discussion began, two candidates emerged clearly from the discussion: Eugenio and Maria. Eugenio was a recognized leader living in the locality of Yepo, which is located at the distant limits of the Aboreachi *pobora,* among the canyons where the unbaptized Raramuri live. Maria was one of a handful of women authorities in the Tarahumara region, and at that time she was the Police Commissioner of the ejido. I had the opportunity to get to know both figures beforehand and interviewed them before and after this process. However, I will focus mainly on exploring in detail Maria's account of

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[136] Interview with Manolo Castillo and Manuel Holguin, Aboreachi, Mexico. June 2010

the case as her position in the selection process serves better to explore the articulation of ethnic discourses as resistance.

These two figures enjoyed good reputations within Aboreachi and accordingly seemed to comply with the requirements for becoming *Waru Seriame* stated earlier. However, they showed important differences in a variety of ways. For instance, Eugenio was perceived by many as a hard-working person with close contacts with the ejido Commissioner, but mainly as someone that was oriented towards farming and living a private life[137]. Maria, on the other hand, had a more public profile, in part because of her role as Police Commissioner within the ejido, but also because she had acquired an image of leadership from managing and implementing productive programmees that enhanced the public image of the community as a leader among the wider Raramuri population.

For instance, months earlier, Maria had managed to take advantage of a contact that she had with a State level Government Office (*Oficina de Culturas Populares*) in order to receive funding and start a women's traditional dresses project.[138] She engaged in this project knowing that it was a long-felt demand amongst a group of women who were seeking support to buy fabric to sew new, traditional, ceremonial dresses, as their current ones were too old. At the same time, it was known that she had negotiated the start of a small-scale sheep breeding project intended to benefit a number of households in Aboreachi.[139] Additionally, she advocated with funding from the ejido and the Municipal government undertaking small-scale masonry works to repair the local church, a site of great significance for the Aboreachi people. This shows how indigenous leaders use their contacts and negotiating capacity as an agency opportunity with people and spaces that lie outside their ethnic boundaries. This capacity to relate successfully and effectively is based on the assumption that Raramuri leaders improve their chances of participating in

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[137] Interviews with Maria Gonzalez, Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. June-July 2010

[138] This project was selected under the *Programa de Apoyos a las Culturas Municipales y Comunitarias* scheme funded by the local and federal government. This government scheme gives economic funding for initiatives that promote the expression of culture and identity.
http://www.culturaspopulareseindigenas.gob.mx

[139] Funded by the *Comision para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indigenas,* CDI.

their political system if they are able to extract collective benefits for the locality from government institutions at the regional and local level.

Although some of these small-scale projects are proposed and carried out as a collective effort by a number of Raramuri within the locality, they can easily be publicised as an individual effort to enhance the public perception of someone being an effective negotiator and leader. Therefore, official interventions and implementation of policies can be reinterpreted, adapted and used essentially as opportunities to give a particular individual a position of authority and leadership within the group. In this sense, indigenous people as the target population of official interventions cannot be seen in a limited way as passive actors because local processes of adaptation and mobilisation occur and play a role in the complex webs of intra- and inter-ethnic relations (de Vries 1992; Nuijten:1998).

At this level the use of small-scale projects at the community level can be analysed as an appropriation strategy, whereby local leaders negotiate with official institutions opportunities for extracting resources and commodities to benefit potential supporters. Traditional leaders such as the *Waru Seriame* receive no economic or material benefit from the community in recompense for their expected responsibilities; on the contrary, their role has been seen by some as a burden which impacts on their usual livelihood activities.

Arguably, the motivations for this are twofold. Firstly there is a straightforward, individual incentive to obtain material and intangible benefits for one's own private or semi-private use. Secondly, there is a motivation related to the collective distribution of benefits in the community through the leader's participation in and management of official projects. This participation brings a perception of leadership and authority that increases the leader's social status. I believe both individualistic and collectively oriented motivations combine in a way that explains the participation of leaders in these small-scale projects. Let me

explore more deeply the second motivation, concerning public perception and social status as leader, in terms of it being a practice embedded in a context of power inequality. As we saw in Chapter III, Raramuri society is very much driven by social status and public perception. Specifically, in this case, Maria made use of the increased public standing that she acquired by negotiating these projects for the benefit of the community to further her political ambition to be selected *Waru Seriame*.

The logic and discourse behind official small-scale investment projects - such as the sewing of women's traditional dresses and the breeding of cattle - show expressions of official state provision of a) productive options and alternative economic livelihoods targeted at indigenous people (e.g. projects such as cattle breeding), and b) promotion of cultural practices perceived as central expressions of their way of living (e.g. support for live music and dancing traditions). These provisions are commonly understood as a top-down approach from the State and the targeted population as passive actors (de Vries 1992). However, at the micro level of the locality, implementing these small-scale projects implies different effects. Arguably, the political role of small-scale government-led projects that were originally designed as a State effort to promote folkloric expressions of their way of living is signify and articulate agency processes within the context of inter- and intra-ethnic relations. In other words, although participating in these policies promoted by the national state, local people appropriate them in ways that make sense in relation to their way of living, their social and political context and, as explored later, the inter-ethnic relations (Nuijten:1998)

Interestingly, Maria was involved in several small-scale projects which were oriented towards benefiting different segments of the Aboreachi population. For instance, sewing traditional dresses benefits a group of women, the sheep breeding project benefits another (exclusively male) group of households, and the church masonry work has a quite visible and culturally important positive public impact. It is not clear whether covering different sections of the population was indeed a strategic decision intended to widen

possible support for her candidacy. However, what is truly evident is how Maria, by exercising her role as a leader among the women in the dress project, took advantage of the opportunities created by these micro-investments to support specific political desires and therefore influence power dynamics within Raramuri communities.

In doing this, Raramuri political agents such as Maria have the incentive actively to make use of and appropriate such official interventions in the Tarahumara as vehicles for individual and collective agency. In a context where scarcity of resources and opportunities drives agency and resilience, negotiation skills and being able to extract resources from official institutions or other actors such as NGOs to benefit a locality are evidently considered a prerequisite for being a leader and representing the locality. These skills and abilities also have an important collective dimension, not limited to the individual level. After all, a reputation for being a good authority and leader is earned through collective public support. If the *Waru Seriame,* being the representative of a locality, does not deliver to those to whom they are accountable, their position and support will be compromised, assuming the localities are internally strong enough to make their leaders accountable.

During fieldwork the researcher could see that, before the gathering where the new authority would be selected, Maria was considered one of the strongest candidates to be the next *Waru Seriame.* She had made an effort to negotiate successfully the implementation of such projects, and hence she enjoyed a perception among the Aboreachi people of a being a good leader.

However, after a lively discussion with many speeches and questions during the gathering at the church, the selection process favoured Eugenio, leaving Maria on the losing side. Those Raramuri proposing Eugenio for the new *Waru Seriame* stressed his personal qualities and attributes without making any reference to Maria´s experience. Interestingly, the mestizos that had arrived at the last moment to participate in the selection process

were actively asserting that Eugenio might be a better leader as he did not have any enemies, whereas Maria did. After the process, Eugenio was selected as the new leader despite Maria's claims that the election was influence by mestizo intervention in Raramuri matters.

So, why was Maria not elected, despite her high profile and having apparently negotiated resources that would benefit the population, which had given her high status and therefore greater possibilities to be elected? I am not making a judgement as to whose argument has greater validity here: indeed the accuracy of her claims and the arguments put forward are not necessarily important factors. The crucial argument I want to emphasise at this point is how Maria played the ethnic card to delegitimise the selection of the newly elected authorities by relating them to the mestizos. In other words, she used an ethnic oriented discourse to claim that the *mestizos* had manipulated public opinion amongst the Raramuri people who participated in the selection. Although, importantly, the ethnic discourse is quite evident in the case of the Raramuri, there are other discursive positions that deal with the question of why Maria's ethnic position in the selection process was not effective. Two arguments are considered next.

a) The ethnic discourse of mestizo intervention.

This argument considers how an ethnic discourse can be mobilized in a particular context, stressing the categorical difference between the mestizo and Raramuri groups. Even before the gathering to select the new *Waru Seriame*, both Maria and Eugenio expressed, in their speeches and in how they lived their lives, essentially Raramuri imagery and hence stressed their ethnic differentiation from the mestizos. In other words, both expressed in discourse the need to maintain certain traditions and practices, such as the collective use of *teswuino* and the importance of having the ability to organize festivities of the ritual calendar involved with farming and co-operative practices. Again, these traditions and

practices accentuate the differences between Raramuri and mestizo ways of living, and are essential for the perpetuation of dominant ethnic and wellbeing discourses.

After Eugenio was selected over Maria to be *Waru Seriame*, she publically claimed that the mestizos were intervening in Raramuri matters. She mentioned that mestizos living in larger mestizo neighbouring localities, which did not form part of the Raramuri *pobora* of Aboreachi, were present at the public gathering on the church patio, where the new leader was going to be selected. Specifically, she claimed that the election process was 'taken over' by mestizos orienting the collective decision to favour Eugenio over her.

'Those mestizos from Laguna want to take over the posts that are intended for the indigenous. They want to take control of our authorities; we indigenous people should be considered for these responsibilities [Waru Seriame and Police Commissioner] as mestizos have their spaces to participate and control and have no need to interfere'.[140]

Arguably, in Maria's view, Eugenio enjoyed the support of the mestizo side in part because he had close relations with the *Comisariado Ejidal* of Aboreachi. Although the *Comisariado Ejidal* is an ejido authority outside the decision making space of the Raramuri *pobora* and the authority of the *Waru Seriame*, he has far wider political and economic influence, beyond solely the management of natural resources. In this case, as the *Comisariado Ejidal*, the municipal government and other official institutions need the collaboration of the *Waru Seriame* to gain political legitimacy and electoral support, the mestizo authorities and intermediaries have a political incentive to influence the selection of Raramuri leaders by supporting those candidates who are most likely to collaborate with them.

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[140] Interview with Maria Gonzalez, Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. October 2010

The presence of mestizos and their participation in the selection process is supported by my own observations. Some of these 'political operators' act to support specific individual candidates in exchange for certain benefits and access to resources. They exercise support by actively participating in the meetings, speaking in favour of one particular candidate, voting in his or her favour, etc. These 'political operators' come from the long legacy of patron-client relations and clientelism that still persists today, especially in the rural areas of Mexico.

In additional, there were other types of motivations to influence the decision-making spaces of the Raramuri, outside the scope of political interest. Another type of motivation for groups of mestizo individuals is related to the fact that Maria was a recognized authority not only for the Raramuri people, but also for the mestizos. She argues that as part of her responsibilities as Police Commissioner, she had to deal with a lot of conflict involving accusations of stealing, property damage and cattle rustling. Some of these conflicts involved a number of mestizo families who were affected by the decisions she took as Commissioner. Arguably, some resentment against her remained and impacted negatively on her prospects of becoming *Waru Seriame*.

> *'Chabochitos' (meaning small non-Raramuri) are trying to interfere in Raramuri matters, in Raramuri selections, because they had been accused of vandalism in Laguna de Aboreachi, and they do not want an indigenous to give them orders and have authority over them'*[141]

Mestizos from Laguna recognized Maria as Raramuri and also as an authority. This led Maria to assume that some mestizo families supported Eugenio just to oppose her. She stated that those 'political operators' that opposed her candidacy not only had political motivations but also were pressured by a number of mestizo families from Laguna de Aboreachi into voting against her. She argued that mestizo people who constantly

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[141] Interview with Maria Gonzalez, Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. October 2010

challenged her authority objected to her because she was a Raramuri, and would prefer to have a mestizo they knew in authority over them. The police commissioner, being in a contentious position, is in turn always susceptible to being socially pressured or 'punished', but in this case the element of ethnicity was added. The police commissioner is a post that is very rarely held by a Raramuri (or a woman) in the Tarahumara Region. In Aboreachi, after the Major of Guachochi offered her the position she was the first Raramuri to occupy this post.

In the Tarahumara region non-indigenous policy institutions and practices routinely exercise command over contested spaces such as natural resource management and the implementation of universal targeting in public policy programmes. As discussed in the previous chapter, among the non-indigenous institutions, the ejido can be understood as a 'force field' of contestation, where individual and collective interests and group discourses are defined and articulated in respect of resource management and its inherently overlapping of function with the Raramuri *pobora.*

There are similar empirical accounts that confirm the ethnic division of public spaces and practices, specifically in relation to the ejido of Aboreachi. The Secretary of the ejido, identified by himself and by others as Raramuri, is constantly reaffirming his ethnicity and capacity, saying that his abilities are as good as any mestizo's. "*I have knowledge of how to carry out all the administrative issues and office tasks concerning the operation of the* ejido*. I could be Comisariado ejidal and be the head of the* ejido*, but because I am not mestizo they won't let me play.*"[142] These complaints are not expressed in public when a mestizo is present, but only at an individual one-to-one level among Raramuri. This is an example of what Scott (1990) calls *hidden* and *public* discourses, which display the structures of power relations in terms of time and place, where a subordinate side maintains a discourse behind the back of the privileged side. In the Raramuri case considered here, autonomous spaces such as *teswuino* gatherings and fiestas are

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[142] Anonymous interview with mestizo of Laguna de Aboreachi, Chihuahua, Mexico. October 2010.

understood as the ideal places for the Raramuri to express resistance and articulate the discourse of power in relation to the mestizos.

It could, then, be interpreted that if an individual is socially recognized as Raramuri, it is socially acceptable among mestizos to for him or her exercise authority within his or her own group political structure and organization. However, if the Raramuri crosses the implicit threshold dividing the realms of influence of each ethnic group with the intension of exercising control, the opposing group will exercise resistance to prevent this, as was illustrated in the case of Maria.

Accordingly, there are empirical accounts that suggest that this ethnic division of political structures is embedded in social relations in the Tarahumara region. For instance, it is common to hear in conversations between mestizos in the region that '*they [the Raramuri people] have their own political post and positions*'[143]. This account reflects the level of embeddedness of the ethnic divides in social and political relations which occur in spaces and practices that are autonomous and separate among both ethnicities. As will be seen later, this notion is also reflected in ceremonies and religious spheres. The difference between the groups is that the mestizos have the capacity to exert pressure in localized and specifically contested spaces, such in the case of Maria's aspirations to be *Waru Seriame.* These spaces of contestation are even more crucial in situations where Raramuri authorities might obtain a position where they would be able to influence mestizo social spaces and practices.

b) The argument of Maria´s links to mestizo entities.

This argument is based on the fact that Maria was associated with mestizo political local elites, namely the Mayor of Guachochi and the PRI political structure, as in previous local elections she had participated in the campaign as a political operator. Although Maria's

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[143] Interview with "el Tukis" mestizo leader. Laguna de Aboreachi, Chihuahua, México. October 2010

reputation as a community leader, based in part on her effective negotiation abilities in extracting benefits from official institutions, might have helped her build support (especially among the direct beneficiaries from the projects she helped to set up), other sectors from the *pobora* might have had reservations because of her links with mestizo power spheres. This close relationship with these spaces of power may demonstrate that Maria was interested in her own political ends and lacked moral concern for community interests.

These reservations were based on the fact that she was perceived to have a close relationship with the current Mayor during the previous elections, when she was an active supporter of the PRI candidates. This affiliation turned to be counter-productive for Maria because the Mayor of Guachochi had a very low reputation among indigenous and mestizo people as he had been involved in corruption scandals.

Maria's participation in the elections and her close linkages with the mestizo political actors has to be placed within a specific context, which is essential for understanding its implications. The political system in rural areas in Mexico is still marked profoundly by embedded clientelistic relations, lack of accountability and vote buying. In this political context, the candidate that invests more in the campaign usually wins. Hence mestizo political elites maintain control of local government, leaving only marginal spaces and channels of participation to indigenous people.

During the election period of 2010, municipal authorities, the local congress and state governor were re-elected. The candidates from the major political parties[144] were campaigning fiercely, as for the first time in electoral history the PRI party was facing the possibility of losing the local election in the municipality of Guachochi, one of the largest and most populated municipalities in the Tarahumara region. Political actors including mestizo leaders and ejido authorities were involved in promoting the PRI candidates in

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[144] National Action Party (*Partido Accion Nacional PAN*) and National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional PRI*)

Raramuri localities. However, Raramuri people in some localities had previously agreed collectively at meetings and *teswuino* gatherings not to offer their political support for "the same people and the same words, as they have proven in many previous occasions that promises and comitments made during the campaign were not kept nor followed through on"[145]. They decided that if they were to participate in the elections, they would proceed collectively against the PRI party, voting instead for the PAN party. This determination, however, was neither publically expressed nor defended when confronted by the candidates of either side, so as to evade individual pressures. When confronted by coercive pressures from ejido authorities (leaders, and officials from the local government that openly promoted the PRI candidates), the common Raramuri response was to agree with their arguments and then quickly leave the scene or change the topic of conversation. Various practices were willingly evaded and declined, including illegal practices, such as bribing community leaders with substantial quantities of money to promote the PRI candidate.

The result of the election was a narrow victory for the PAN party. The results for each voting station show that voting behaviour in Raramuri localities was crucial to the final outcome. I am not implying, however, that this or other collective strategies of the Raramuri demonstrate by themselves the capacity to influence political forces and institutional arrangements, as external factors affected the PRI's chances of winning the election, such as weak corporate unity inside the PRI party at the local level. Furthermore, the PAN Party has no clear position – if any at all - on the long-felt demands of indigenous people. The effects of this shift of political support in the region are still to be accounted for and analysed, but this case exemplifies the generally negative perception amongst the Raramuri of certain political actors in the PRI. In this case, Maria's public perception of being associated with *mestizo* (PRI) institutions through her leadership role in the implementation of small-scale projects, her perceived close relationship with the badly tarnished municipal Mayor who appointed her to the position of police commissioner, and

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[145] Fieldwork notes. October, Aboreachi, 2010.

effectively the fact that she was also a strong public supporter of the PRI political party in the 2010 municipal elections might have damaged her ambitions among certain sectors of Aboreachi.

This show how being associated with specific *mestizo* spaces and actors – especially those hindered by a negative perception among the Raramuri - would ultimately affect the way Raramuri leaders are perceived and ultimately limit their capacity for agency. This appropriation of *mestizo* political actors does also not always lead to the same result in terms of perception and further agency capacity. In this setting, to find a balance point is crucial. The balance depends on how *mestizo*-Raramuri associations are perceived; on the ability to negotiate effectively towards collective interest instead of individual gain, whilst at the same time not risking interference in the "autonomous space" of the other group. This balance of interethnic relations holds true for both the *mestizo* and the Raramuri.

In the case of the mestizos*,* brokers are required to negotiate effectively in development projects in the broad field of the Tarahumara and ejido related management of resources. Additionally, as seen previously, some mestizo families had the perception that Maria, being indigenous, could not have had authority over mestizo actions and behaviours. Thus there is an incentive for ethnic boundaries to remain. In the case of the Raramuri shown in the previous example, brokers are required to be able to negotiate effectively to drive community investments to generate collective benefits; however, for this association to be effective as a mechanism of political gain, the individuals must not acquire individual material gains undue influence on the Raramuri political system.

For the Raramuri, this crucial balance rests on the consideration of when it is best to engage boldly with mestizo political and economic structures and when and how it is best to express differentiation. This dual position and the balance it involves are essential to understanding agency and resistance for the Raramuri.

This case illustrates how Raramuri actors employ ethnic discourses to adapt to and resist mestizo positions of dominance. As argued, the use of the ethnic argument to highlight, define and classify certain differences between mestizo and Raramuri also includes the definition of wellbeing. In general terms and as explored later in the chapter, the fulfilment of wellbeing depends greatly on how effectively the "autonomous spaces" are kept free of the influence of interethnic relations of power.

These two arguments – or, rather, a combination of them - played a part in the bargaining, negotiation and decision-making process which resulted in selecting one candidate over the other. Indeed, other factors not considered in this analysis might also have played a role in the decision making. Additionally, the intensity of the arguments has to be considered. For instance, one could suppose that mestizo elites would have favoured Maria becoming the authority as she was considered a political operator for the PRI and therefore would have become a powerful ally in crucial state institutions and Raramuri community negotiations. However this did not happen, or at least it was not as much of a decisive factor as the local and strong opposition of certain mestizo families to her.

In other words, we can see in these arguments the interplay of factors at a micro and macro level. If the political context had been different, for example, if local government had had a better public image among the Raramuri people, Maria's perception as a mestizo operator might have been of less importance.

This also reflects how discourses are not fixed in time: they evolve and are constantly challenged and contested as the process of agency and constraints varies depending on the social, political and economic context. The following section will explore the links between the Raramuri's strategy of resisting power asymmetries by seeking control of their social spaces and reproduction of their practices within "autonomous spaces", enhancing the cultural difference between themselves and the non-indigenous

population. In order to do this, an empirical case of how Raramuri from Aboreachi enact resistance strategies will be presented.

6.4. The Noririwachi or Easter Celebration as Raramuri resistance in an autonomous space

Thus far we have analysed the selection of the *Waru Seriame* as a case of adaptation, appropriation and resistance in a contested space. This section will now present the example of the ceremonial fiesta of Easter, or *Noririwachi,* and how this contributes to maintaining an identity that enhances cultural difference and group memberships. I argue that the celebration of *Noririwachi* can be seen as an expression of resistance, where mestizo elements can symbolically personify evil, and are challenged and defeated. *Noririwachi* conforms to the Catholic calendar and is one example of how religious meanings, practices and epistemologies have been adapted over hundreds of years in a process of syncretism and re-signification with Raramuri religiosity and beliefs. This historical process is in itself a case of adaptation and appropriation of religious elements preached and imposed by the Catholic Church since the Spanish conquest (Deeds 2003).

The region of Aboreachi has a strong tradition of ceremonial dances and collective gatherings. As many of them have a religious meaning related to agriculture, the strong manifestation of fiestas and in community life speaks of social cohesion through the importance of agriculture as a livelihood and way of living. The start of the rainy season, collective farming activities, harvest tasks, and the 'cleansing' of bad spirits from maize and bean fields and farm animals from are all events and activities that entail Raramuri ceremonies.

One of the most important of these gatherings and fiestas is the *Noririwachi*. This celebration is important for the Raramuri because it marks the start of a new agricultural

cycle (in April or May), and is considered to mark the beginning of the new year among the Raramuri and other indigenous people in Mexico. Apart from being celebrated according to the Catholic calendar, the Raramuri way of celebrating Easter is different from how it is celebrated in non-indigenous locations. In Aboreachi, as in other Raramuri communities in the Tarahumara region, Easter embodies the result of a long process of religious syncretism between the Catholic tradition and indigenous religiosity. The Catholic significance of it being a time to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the struggle of good over evil is observed in the context of inter-ethnic political oppression. Specifically, evil is represented by mestizo symbols and good by Raramuri, with God on their side.

Let me firstly describe briefly the ceremony, as experienced during the field research. Raramuri families came from various communities that constitute the *Pobora* of Aboreachi. The occasion is used to visit and stay with relatives and perhaps exchange goods and information. The ceremony lasts three days and nights. The rituals and logistics of the ceremony are organized by a main organizer called '*abanderado mayor*' and a series of '*abandarados menores*' or *tenanches* that act as auxiliaries in the organization. There are other groups of *tenanches* that help by undertaking diverse tasks: the musicians, those that arrange food and *teswuino* preparation, and those that prevent fighting and conflicts especially while drinking *teswuino*, among other tasks. The preparations take place months in advance, setting specific activities and distributing responsibilities. It is important to take into account that, at least in the case of Aboreachi, the ejido is expected to help economically with food supplies; some money comes from the collective budget of the ejido. Additionally, an especially assigned *tenanche* contributes a cow or other farm animal for meat to be shared on the last day at a collective feast prepared by a large group of women. This *tenanche* is selected according to his or her own economic capacity to share, so someone who has several cows is more likely to be selected in order to prevent affecting a poor family. Additionally, next year's *tenanche* receives a larger share of the meat in order to compensate somehow for his

contribution to the following year's fiesta. To be selected in any given year to be a *tenanche* and organizer represents a great responsibility and a great honour, especially being appointed "*abanderado mayor*". For this reason, as with other political leaders, the "*abanderado mayor*" is usually a person that enjoys an excellent reputation within the Raramuri society.

The *Noririwachi* ceremony lasts three days, during which men, women, and children participate actively in dances. Dancing and *teswuino* drinking are done simultaneously. Traditional drums and guitars, and more rarely flutes, are used to accompany the dancers. According to tradition, the ceremony involves using straw and branches to create a dummy that represents Judas Iscariot, from the Spanish *judeo* (Jew). Interestingly, the dummy, which is life-sized, is dressed with a shirt, sun-glasses, boots, hat and other mestizo symbols. During my fieldwork 2010 in Aboreachi, I observed that the Judas had electoral propaganda from the PRI political party. The Judas dummy also shows a disproportionately large penis, which is the subject of jokes and laughter. However, for the first part of the celebration the Judas is treated with great respect and solemnity: for instance, people salute him as they arrive, and he receives *teswuino* invitations just like everybody else. Levi (1999) analyses, as Scott's framework suggests, the euphemism, metaphor and joking to understand with diverse meanings subordinate voices through culturally embedded references. It can be argued that it is an expression of the powerless to transform injustice and manipulate or show control over the sociolinguistic scenarios so at least they have the satisfaction of having the last laugh.

The Judas dummy is central in the ceremony. It is around this figure that the localities from the *Pobora* of Aboreachi are organized in two groups: the *judas* or *pintos* are responsible for protecting the dummy, while the other group called the *fariseos* or *pascolas* have the role of destroying it after a mock battle on the last day. Dances represent this symbolic protection and destruction. Each side dances accompanied by a number of drummers and carries the dummy to different households within Aboreachi.

Then they all carry it in procession throughout the largest communities of the *pobora*. The *judas* lead the way, taking care of the dummy, followed closely by the *fariseos*. They call at some of households to dance nearby and receive *teswuino* from the host family in exchange. Then they rest for a few hours before continuing their journey. During the ceremony many, if not most, of the households prepare *teswuino* and invite people to *teswuino* gatherings as part of the *Noririwachi.* The atmosphere is of joyfulness as people talk in groups, dance or watch the dancing together. An informant told me that the purpose of getting together and organizing a fiesta is to be happy in community, to chat with friends and family, and in doing that to solve problems.[146] The Judas procession throughout the *pobora* takes two days of walking through the mountains and dancing in the households. The beating of the drums can be heard from quite a distance, echoing across the valley and announcing the proximity of the procession.

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[146] Interview with Catalino Castillo, Aboreachi, Chihuahua, October 2010.

Photo 3. The *Noririwachi* festivity in Aboreachi, 2010.

By the author.

On the third day, the groups return to Aboreachi, arriving at the church in the evening. They dance by firelight and mill around the church in the darkness. The climax of all this activity, the mock battle and destruction of Judas, takes place on *Sabado de Gloria* (Easter Sunday) morning. The *fariseos* or *pascolas* have to defeat and destroy evil and the *judas* or *pintados* pretend to defend them, but at the end everybody engages in destroying the dummy with spears or by kicking him, humiliating him and burning him. The ceremony then ends with people dispersing to nearby *teswuino* gatherings where *teswuino* sharing might continue for a day or two more.

So how can the *Noririwachi* ceremony be considered as a resistance strategy? As mentioned earlier, this festivity plays an important part in the reproduction of an ethnic identity, but its performance reaches further than that. By dancing and continuously engaging with traditions and culture, Raramuri people enhance the group differences between themselves and the non-Raramuri and at the same time consolidate an autonomous space where they can control their own actions and their own symbolic and ritualistic resources without interference from the non-indigenous.

Although rituals mean responsibility and sacrifices for people (participants have to sacrifice food, time, and energy time after time), discourses of persistent rituals and practices that unify a Raramuri identity are preserved in hope of having an effect: a benevolent rainy season, a good harvest, an absence of conflictive relationships within the Raramuri as well as between them and mestizo people, etc. For the Raramuri, drinking *teswuino* and gathering at fiestas is what makes *Onoruame* (God) happy, and then he will protect and defend the people from sickness and deprivation.[147] Additionally, by participating in the ceremony and the destruction of the dummy, ethnic membership is reinforced, and symbolizes the decision to align with *Onoruame* and leave behind the evil part that exist within each individual. It is also a way to express rejection of the *chabochi* world. Therefore, the *Noririwachi* is one example of how the Raramuri exercise cultural auto-determination. Resistance, then, is associated with the idea of reproducing and keeping control of rituals and forms of organising themselves with positions, roles and responsibilities during the celebration.

However, I argue that is not only the mere reproduction of practices and maintaining control of social spaces: Raramuri Easter has a religious-symbolic meaning as well. In the Christian tradition this celebration expresses the symbolic struggle between good and evil, which in the context of the Raramuri people incorporates ethnic and political connotations along with the religious meaning. Ethnographers such as Kennedy (1963;

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[147] Interview with Alberto Castillo, Aboreachi, Chihuahua, June 2010

1978), De Velazco (2006) and Pintado (2004) take into account that the purpose of the festivity has different socio-religious meanings. For instance, the act of dancing symbolically represents the physical act of pushing evil down under the ground in order to keep it outside the world the Raramuri actually live. It is then the duty of all Raramuri to dance, as by dancing together evil can be defeated.

Likewise, political meaning also permeates the rituals. For instance, it is important to highlight the physical representation of evil in the form of the dummy symbolises mestizo elements. People in Aboreachi openly recognise and refer to the dummy as 'chabochi' (mestizos that oppress the Raramuri and treat them badly).[148] The relationship of chabochi and evil can also be traced in oral history in the form of legends and myths. Among the Raramuri, myths of origin have shown this relationship since the representation of the beginning of the world. The following is one example of the legends identified in ethnographic studies in the region: "*When the earth began, boiling waters erupted from the beneath the earth like flowers. Soil was still unsteady and that's why the footprints of animals were preserved in stone. It was then that Onoruame (God) talked to the Raramuri, and the devil talked to the Chabochi"[149]* (Tello 1994). As a result, by destroying and humiliating the Judas dummy engraved with mestizo symbols the *Noririwachi* becomes the space and time where frustration and anger at interethnic oppression are released without any direct confrontation. Furthermore, other regions within the Tarahumara, not only Aboreachi, who celebrate *Noririwachi* also depict the Judas with mestizo elements (De Velazco, 2006). Consequently, in the context of interethnic power asymmetries, dancing, getting together in fiestas and drinking *teswuino* become a political statement of ethnic endurance, cultural continuation and moral defiance.

In this respect, Levi (1999) cites two examples of how differences between the Raramuri and mestizo are represented. For instance, he states that in the Raramuri mythology the

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[148] Interview with Pablo Castillo, Aboreachi, Chihuahua, April 2010
[149] Translation by the author.

chabochis are created by the devil from ashes (clay-white) and the Raramuri by god (the devil's younger brother) from clay (earth colour). He explores also a folk story that accounts for the differences between the Tarahumara and the mestizo people in the mining town of Batopilas. The story attributes Raramuri poverty to a race between God and the Devil. God lost; the Devil found the mines first and took all the silver without leaving anything to his younger brother, God. So the mestizos are rich but morally corrupt. Then, the author goes on to analyse the arts of political disguise that the Tarahumara seem to have been very good at since the times of the conquest. Many of the historical descriptions of when the Spanish encounter the Tarahumara recall a passive - almost stubborn - opposition rather than an act of active rebellion.

I argue that these ceremonies, and in this case *Noririwachi*, constitute a Raramuri autonomous space for several reasons. Firstly, only those that identify with the Raramuri group participate in these ceremonies. Indeed De Velazco (2006) establishes how by participating actively, whether by dancing or by fulfilling the responsibilities of the organizer of the fiesta, can be seen as a public acceptance of being part of the Raramuri people. Fiestas and ceremonies preserve and express Raramuri ethnic identity. Indeed, De Velazco (2006) argues that these are also seen as the expression of all the Raramuri are today, and constitute perhaps one of the few linkages to those ancient cultural roots that they recognize as their ancestors. To continue the practice of dancing, the traditional music, the fiestas, and *teswuino* gatherings is to sustain the link with the way of life of the *anayawari,* "the ancient ones". In this sense, fiestas and ceremonies are seen as repositories of religious meanings, rituals and ways of living that constitute the 'correct path in life". Behind these ideas, a clear link with the ethnic discourse of persistence of Raramuri ethnicity is visible. Secondly, the physical and symbolic expression of destroying the Judas is openly visible only for the Raramuri within the local Aboreachi social space. It is not expressed outside, nor is it intended that way. Resistance is in this case articulated

in an autonomous space, as only very few mestizos act as spectators throught the ceremony in Aboreachi.[150]

As mentioned earlier, I argue that the historical and present economic and political integration of the Raramuri people and the mestizos in the region of Aboreachi are important factors that determine the way resistance is expressed. The Raramuri people of Aboreachi are subject to different types and intensities of oppression and inequality than other Raramuri regions. As seen in previous chapters, Raramuri from Aboreachi have suffered from land grabbing, discrimination in cities and less access to or quality of public services. However, the current economic integration with the mestizos of Laguna de Aboreachi means that resistance has to be expressed mainly in subtle, hidden and symbolic ways. The cost of a face-to-face confrontation would be to put at risk the few economic opportunities that the Raramuri engage with and benefit from in the market economy, and to lose control of the self-determination spaces that the Raramuri still enjoy. Should this happen, livelihoods and way of living, and ultimately living well will be compromised for the Raramuri of Aboreachi. The collective decision of how to manifest resistance, and show and express frustration, takes into account the very nature of those elements associated with living well. Hostility, social and economic exclusion and greater ethno-political oppression will not promote their correct path of living. This links with what was stated in Chapter III, in the sense that the Raramuri understanding of living well is the result of a balance between engagement with certain economic opportunities with the mestizos, and maintaining subsistence agriculture and social networks as part of their livelihood and way of living.

In this context, resistance as direct and visible confrontation is too risky for another reason: it might tend to be individualized, focusing attention on a small group of people, whereas in a collective ceremony, actions and expressions are diluted by numbers. Therefore, ceremonies performed in autonomous spaces such as the *Noririwachi* are the

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[150] However, in other localities like Norogachi, the Noririwchi draws huge audiences and has become over the years a major turist attraction.

ideal forms of expressing and performing resistance because they are subtle, yet effective in expressing emotions; hidden, yet useful in creating a sense of unity and identity.

In this sense, I argue that it is not only historical and current economic and political integration to determine the way resistance is expressed by the Raramuri. The same forms of resistance are also culturally determined. For instance, the Judas mestizo is treated with open respect in the first part of the ceremony, with people saluting and treating him as one more mestizo. However, at the end it is destroyed in the surrounding protection of the night, the private space in terms of Scott (1990). A symbolic parallel can be drawn between the way the Judas is treated publicly in the ceremony and the way Raramuri people treat mestizo-chabochis such as the cattle sellers who deceive Raramuri, or when they feel discriminated against and threatened in the cities. The public inter-ethnic relations comply with social norms, expectations and requirements; however the *Noririwachi* opens a culturally embedded opportunity for oppression to be channelled, expressed and resisted.[151]

The following section will discuss the link between hegemonic discourses of Raramuri identity and persistent power asymmetries. This last section of the chapter will be followed by the concluding section, which considers how the larger strategy employed by the Raramuri has little influence on the factors associated with power asymmetries.

6.5 Discussion and conclusion: Persistence of Raramuri identity and the persistence of power asymmetries: a double-edged sword.

An underlying question of this thesis is to analyse the formation and persistence of power asymmetries in unequal inter-ethnic relations. In this section I aim to continue exploring

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[151] Mestizo people from Laguna de Aboreachi do have certain knowledge of how the *Noririwachi* takes place, however the broad opinion I gathered from them is that they do not participate because it's a Raramuri fiesta, "amongst themselves". This adds to the idea that some spaces and practices in the Tarahumara region are ethnically divided.

this, by analysing how cultural identities and ethnicity are articulated in terms of the lack of power when facing crucial decisions. Specifically, this chapter aims to address the following: how and through what political and cultural mechanisms do Raramuri people respond to the ethno-political oppression they face? I argue that the Raramuri of Aboreachi have followed a path based on consolidating their cultural identity through strengthening internal cohesion, discursively essentialising and homogenising elements instead of taking other routes such as building external ties with the wider society. Therefore, it can be considered that the resistance strategy of consolidating their cultural identity is a double-edged sword.

I support the argument presented by Sariego (2008a) that social and economic relationships among the Raramuri and wider society on the Tarahumara are held on unequal grounds, where command over territory and natural resources are at the epicentre of ethnic tension. Additionally, I argue that these unequal relationships have produced resistances and cultural processes that can be defined in two ways: strengthening the process of discourse that deals with cultural cohesion within their ethnic boundaries, and suffering limited capacity to influence external sectors in search for a political counterbalance in negotiations with the wider society. The Raramuri as a group have strong internal cohesion and are quite effective in reproducing an ethnic discourse through "autonomous spaces" at a micro level. These strategies however also signify that the Raramuri have little influence and agency capacity through "contested spaces" over macro factors from the outset. Their effectiveness is witnessed by the years of contact since the colony and their current identity practices. Their historical strategy of resistance to ensure the survival of their ethnicity has been based precisely on their adaptability in the face of continued change over the last four hundred years, maintaining and adapting autonomous spaces and practices that have proved crucial for preserving their identity (Deeds:2003). In this sense, the articulations of these "autonomous" and "contested" spaces are key insights into how power asymmetries are perpetuated.

This path of resistance employed by the Raramuri is in itself a consequence of the political system implemented by the national government in respect of the indigenous population. The political system, driven by strong clientelistic relations and sustained by political and electoral corruption, promotes the exclusion within social and political spaces of certain groups, leading to overrepresentation of dominant groups leading to consolidating elite power (Gacitua and Sojo 2000). In the case of the Tarahumara region, elites are socially articulated by ethnic ascription leaving the mestizos being the political, economical and social beneficiaries. Consequently, existing political systems and institutional arrangements fail to promote sensitivity to cultural difference in development policies and place a strain on the relationship between the Raramuri and the State. The lack strong Raramuri political representation or influence in policy decision-making spaces of the State enables the mestizo institutions to take strategic advantage of scarce resources and of the socio-political policies implemented in the region so that opportunities are unequally distributed.[152] Moreover, as explored previously, some crucial legal entities such as the ejido and local government are found to have a significant role in the perpetuation of the status quo, and hence in unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and access (Perez-Cirera and Lovett 2006). In this sense, macro-structural factors at the local level constrain agency and resistance in such a way that power relations are maintained and reproduced, affecting the Raramuri way of life and efforts to live well.

There is no doubt that the Raramuri people are at a disadvantage with respect to benefiting from economic policies in comparison to their non-indigenous counterparts. However, there are certain reactions to this inequality from which the Raramuri group actually benefit. If the Raramuri are weak in their relations with the State and markets, they are remarkably strong in their internal relationships insofar as the permanence of their cultural values is concerned. Raramuri people react, perhaps not in a politically organized manner, but by trying to take control over aspects of their way of life, namely

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[152] See Colley and Hodkinson (2001)

ceremonial customs and culturally meaningful practices that I call their "autonomous spaces and practices". Practices - in the broader sense of the term - are fundamental in maintaining a dominant Raramuri discourse of identity. This process of permanent identity construction is mutually reinforced in everyday interactions by cultural differences from the mestizo group. Additionally, symbolic and ritualistic practices from the Raramuri, such as the *Noririwachi,* reproduce their aspirations, livelihoods, beliefs and values in accordance with their own cultural conceptions. Indeed, as explored in chapter III, Raramuri aspects of living well are socially constructed and assimilated in terms of cultural and political representations with the help of constant comparison with the "other", non-indigenous side.

In this sense, the Raramuri group follows the same strategy as other indigenous and ethnic groups that strive to maintain their self-determination through controlled relations with the wider society.[153] The search for autonomy in relevant aspects of their livelihoods is connected with the adaptation of livelihood strategies such as subsistence agriculture, communal rather than individual ownership of the means of production, social systems based heavily on kin relations, and the practice of culturally embedded forms of sharing and reciprocal exchange (such as the practice of *korima* and the *teswuino* gatherings in the case of the Raramuri), which promote collective association rather than focusing on individual accumulation. In doing so, they reinforce their identity and self-definition (Green 2006). However the struggle for limited or at least mitigated power relations with the State and other dominant groups is subjected of unequal structural terms so that such groups become encapsulated within highly restricted economic and cultural niches (Day et al., 1999).

At the same time, I argue that this absence of political influence at the local and national level can be explained because Raramuri, and indeed other indigenous groups in the north of Mexico, do not push themselves into economic, social and political spheres even at the

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[153] See Wilmsen (1989) and Tsing (1993) for examples of relevant ethnographies on this matter.

municipal level. Agency then comes through the capacity of brokers at the very micro level to adapt, appropriate and mobilise official programmes and institutional interventions to try to counteract the power unbalances within "contested" spaces. This was argued through the example of the selection of the *Waru Seriame*, explored earlier, and by considering how throughout this process of enacting agency ethnic discourses are also mobilized and perpetuated.

The cases presented here of the ethno-politics involved in the process of selecting the *Waru Seriame* and the celebration of the *Noririwachi* are cases of resistance which reflect the literature concerning dimensions of power. For instance, Gaventa (1982) considers three dimensions of power: a) bargaining power understood as who has more control of crucial resources and more influence over decisions; b) discrimination in terms of values, beliefs and practices that operate systematically to benefit one group over another; and c) perpetuation of powerlessness as a socially embedded process within the subordinated group or demographic sectors.

If we use this framework to analyse the case of the Tarahumara, and specifically to observe how agency is used as a resistance strategy against unequal distribution of power, we can see that Raramuri leaders exercise the position of brokers in intra-ethnic relations. For the Raramuri people, they can exercise some level of bargaining power in their relations with official institutions when dealing with issues of infrastructure projects and access to social protection interventions. Although the participation of the Raramuri leaders or any representative in official local government spaces is rather minimal - often limited to being mere channels of information - having access to them can actually lead to other, more active, collective actions. Additionally, it can be an asset to be in an arrangement where access to and possession of information gives you support from and legitimacy in the eyes of the people you are accountable to. For the mestizo group, the *Waru Seriame* also represents a political agent, someone who can legitimize policy decisions with minimal participation on their part, and influence Raramuri collective

decisions in the locality in terms of electoral promotion. In a way, *Waru Seriames* represent mechanisms of control of economic, political and symbolic resources and influence, and having control over them does indeed represent an explicit dimension of power.

Consequently, having control over the "contested spaces" allows mestizo power distribution to prevail in bargaining over the resolution of key issues: land conflicts, political representation and official interventions at the local level. However, on the other hand, Raramuri control "autonomous spaces" where they are in command of the continuation of subsistence agriculture and the perpetuation of ritual life. It is argued that this trade-off is key to understanding the perpetuation of persistent power asymmetries.

Local and national NGOs and advocacy organizations and networks play a role in local policy debates, albeit minimal, in representing Raramuri individuals and ejidos in land disputes with private mestizo landowners or the State, and in communicating long-felt demands. This lack of effective influence is very much determined by the historical patronage roles of official institutions, which limit opportunities for indigenous people's effective involvement in controllingtheir livelihoods (Engerman and Sokoloff: 2006). In addition, it is common for Raramuri leaders - and the wider mestizo population equally - to accept that the role of the State is to deliver public services, sort out land conflicts and regulate their relations with the mestizos living on the region, an evident legacy of the patron-client political system strongly embedded in Mexican society.

Nuijten (1998) explores the idea of the State among *ejidatarios* in Mexico and describes how ideas from the State are formulated in part by the role brokers play in official and bureaucratic interventions. She mentions how the State, through programmes and bureaucracy, can engender the idea of being a "hope-generating machine". "'The hope-generating machine' gives the message that everything is possible, that cases are never closed, and that things will be different from now on" (Nuijten: 1998; 397). Through the

operation of State interventions fears, frustrations, and expectations are created, and hence the importance of selecting good leaders and brokers. Authority vested in brokers rests precisely on this importance, while larger macro social factors remain largely unchallenged.

This links with one of Gaventa's (1982) power dimensions concerned with the feeling of hopelessness and the influence of the political and economic context. Internalised ideas about unchangeable circumstances or indeed the narrative that macro social factors and power asymmetries should be maintained also provide insights into how the status quo is perpetuated.

Following on from the relationship between the broader State and indigenous resistance strategies, Mattiace (2007) explores the evolution of State-indigenous relations in the case of Mexico and Ecuador. He acknowledges that the strong presence of the Mexican State throughout the twentieth century in a wide proportion of rural and indigenous areas contributed to the co-optation of a number of emerging independent indigenous movements. The state presence was based on the *indigenismo* approach consisting of official programmes and policies specifically oriented for indigenous people. This co-optation capacity does not exist in other Latin-American countries such as Ecuador. On this matter, there is a vast literature focusing on political systems, describing how patron-client political regimes and institutions behave and their implications on the agency of groups (Leonard and Marshall 1982; Scott 1972).

In this sense, the Raramuri are not an indigenous group known to enjoy much political representation at national policy level. There is no Raramuri organization, social movement or institution with enough agency capacity to represent effectively their long term demands against land invasions, or to campaign on resource management and unequal socioeconomic conditions. The few grass-roots organizations that exist with this aim rapidly become electorally corrupted by the political system as their leverage

potential increases. The same nationally dominant political system influenced the creation of Raramuri organizations, in an attempt to represent the indigenous population and their demands. An example of the latter is the *Consejo Supremo Tarahumara* or Supreme Council of the Tarahumara, which has its origins in the late 1930's and was promoted by the *PRI*, the historical official political party in Mexico, as a mechanism to assemble and control the vast majority of the indigenous leaders of different towns for electoral and political gains.[154] The top-down imposed structure of the *Supreme Council of the Tarahumara* is composed by a selection of *Seriames* and *Waru Seriames* from most regions of the Tarahumara. As this structure is supported by a discrete municipal budget for travelling to meetings with government officials, some *Seriames* and leaders vie for a place on the Council. Political structures exemplify how patron-client relations are created in the Tarahumara, to which Raramuri people assimilate and are subordinated at the same time (Villanueva 2006).

Lastly, this chapter contributes to literature that explores *hidden* forms of political resistance among Raramuri people (Levi 1999, 2003; De Velazco 2006; Quiroz; 2008). In relation to this, a note of caution should be expressed with reference to the misleading idea that the Raramuri expressly perform resistance by maintaining and enduring livelihoods and way of living on a daily basis. They do not resist by doing what they do every day, they resist by doing what they do *despite* unequal, harsh or oppressive circumstances, which is ultimately their motivation for maintaining their own way of life and livelihoods. Preserving a cultural identity is a political statement. Therefore, rituals, subsistence agriculture and social networks are maintained as part of a somewhat passive, but clear, resistance strategy.

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[154] At the national level two instances were regulating State-indigenous relations; the Confederacion Nacional Campesina (CNC, National Peasant Confederation), created in 1938 and the Instituto Nacional *Indigenista* (INI, National Institute of Indigenous Affairs) in 1948. These two entities managed the links between the rural and indigenous sectors of Mexico and the wider State, setting the current dynamics of client relations. Although these dominant political structures have the capacity to hoard and manipulate initiatives by articulate pervasive links among the local and national political spheres these two entities operate specifically on the macro level where Raramuri people have no influence to claim agency.

Additionally, the passive resistance 'position' implies actively maintaining control of 'autonomous spaces' where traditions and practices from the ritual sphere are reproduced, as seen in the case of the *Noririwachi* celebration. It also involves actively enhancing agency, and processes of adaptation and appropriation in 'contested spaces' at the micro level, as seen in the case of the *Waru Seriame*. It might involve evasion or use of silence to express resistance. Furthermore, another risk when analysing the ethno-political scenario in Aboreachi, or the Tarahumara in general, is the possible invisibility of ethno-political oppression and power asymmetries, due to the absence of visible techniques of resistance in mestizo public spheres. While in fact, as Gaventa (1982) shows, the apparent lack of conflict can be understood equally as a sign and as a consequence of power relations.

The Raramuri of Aboreachi resist by being actively, strategically engaged in deciding a number of historically determined pathways – at least to some degree – and by political and economic integration with the dominant mestizo society. Forms of resistance to ethno-political oppression are diverse and are socially institutionalised and culturally embedded. In this sense, resistance might sometimes take the form of using silence or evasion, adapting economic resources and enacting agency under unequal political structures in contested spaces. At other times the people dance to release interethnic tension, preserve strong social relations and maintain a political system of authorities, consolidating 'autonomous spaces'.

The final issue I would like to emphasise is that the Raramuri people in Aboreachi, either by their own choice or because of imposed circumstances, have found themselves in a specific situation that can be analysed in two somewhat opposing ways. One is that the Raramuri people of Aboreachi are resisting by adapting, preserving and appropriating elements of their ethnic identity quite successfully, despite centuries of inter-ethnic contact with and oppression from mestizos. They still link their identity to the distant past

of the *anayawari* ('the ancient ones'). The other is that the Raramuri people, by limiting their actions to fortifying those local spaces where their ethnic identity is produced and reproduced, have little or no means of influencing and motivating the radical economic, political and social change needed to achieve their own sense of living well; they continue with a livelihood based on subsistence agriculture, social networks and participation in a market economy with the dominant society. This duality has created an integrated, unified, economic and political system that operates on the bases of unequal power distribution, where decisions and opportunities benefit in greater proportion the non-indigenous people.

It is clear that in order to change the situation of political and economic inequalities affecting the Raramuri of Aboreachi and other regions, the answer lies not only in their own capacity to resist but in the capacity of the state and other dominant actors to bring equal opportunities to the population of the Tarahumara region, regardless of ethnicity.

CHAPTER VII. CONCLUSIONS: THE RARAMURI PEOPLE: AT THE CROSSROADS OF WELLBEING.

The objective of this thesis has been to look at the persistence of inequalities between ethnic groups in relation to wellbeing. In doing so I have focused on these particular aspects: local understandings of living well, inter-ethnic power relations, and forms of resistance. I have done so in order to answer the main research question of how inter-ethnic power relations shape the persistence of asymmetries between the Raramuri people and the mestizo population living in the Tarahumara region of Northern Mexico. I answer this question firstly by making a case that there are differences in the understandings of wellbeing among both groups. Secondly, that even considering *emic* and culturally differentiated understandings of wellbeing between the Raramuri and dominant western values societies, differences in wellbeing attainment remain through the interaction of institutional arrangements and structural factors; thirdly, that the Raramuri employ resistance strategies according to their notions of wellbeing and the need to fortify their ethnic identity through cultural practices of differentiation from the wider society, however, they have little to influence the wider political, economic and social environment that oppresses them.

This concluding chapter has the following structure. First I give a brief summary of the main arguments presented. This is followed by a discussion of three sub-questions that guided the empirical chapters of the thesis. Lastly, I will present some reflexions on how this research links with broader development debates such as the opportunities and barriers to development literature which indigenous people and ethnic minorities face while living on the margins of the state and markets; and the possible implications for the inequality agenda and the politics of difference.

7.1 Summary of main arguments.

The Tarahumara region is an arena of ethnic interactions suffused by inter-ethnic asymmetrical relations. I have argued that this region has, throughout history, been a contested region in terms of both the control of natural resources and the human-land relationship among the indigenous and non-indigenous population. A crucial influence on the region is the increasing effect that national and global economic neoliberal policies are having. These have led to the exploitation of natural resources such as forestry, land being used for commercial use, the development of tourism, the cultivation of narcotics and the growth of the mining industry which benefits a few. Among the political transformations and social changes explored are the ejido system and how its implementation modified land and natural resource management, and the introduction of a set of new authorities which conflict with the existing socio-political organization of the Raramuri based on the figure of the *Pobora*. Additionally, the study show how the Raramuri are living in a region of inter-ethnic disparities by considering, for example, common socio-economic indicators (i.e. Human Development Index, life expectancy rate, poverty head count) and by comparing the indigenous and non-indigenous population at the national level and in the Tarahumara region. These indicators were helpful in uncovering the power asymmetries that lay underneath the statistics. However, this region has also been characterised by a persistent indigenous way of life that has learnt to adapt in order to maintain ethnic identities.

By providing ethnographic evidence, this research has argued that understandings of wellbeing are not universal but, rather, they are subject to socio-cultural and political contexts. It argues that Raramuri people hold discursive struggles evoking differentiated ways of living from those described by mainstream development thinking and that which is followed by national society and mestizo people in Mexico. I conclude that some livelihoods and ways of living, namely those of the non-indigenous, fit better a mainstream discourse of development than others, such as those portrayed by the Raramuri people. Therefore, by stressing ethnic membership and differentiation through

the use of local notions of wellbeing, is possible to see that the Raramuri people of Aboreachi have followed a path based on consolidating their cultural identity through strengthening internal cohesion instead of taking other routes such as building external ties with the wider society.

The clash of different views of ways of living and achieving wellbeing which are implied in inter-ethnic relations provides a way to see that efforts to maintain autonomy and unique identity are, for the Raramuri, a form of cultural resistance that allow them to keep being Raramuri. This mechanism of resistance implies enhancing and making visible the ethnic differentiation of practices and livelihoods between mestizo and Raramuri, and homogenizing and reifying the cultural practices of the Raramuri livelihood in order to defend them. These two processes deal with ethnicity and link with wellbeing discourses discussed earlier. This research argues that the Raramuri through their actions enact a strategy that is perhaps neither consciously chosen, nor even verbally articulated, but constitutes a resistance strategy nonetheless.

7.2 Three discussions that guide the research.

Three discussions were offered in order to provide a novel framework to explore the formation and perpetuation of asymmetrical social, economic and political relations at the local level in the Tarahumara region. These discussions were explored through the following questions which framed the research:

(a) What are the *emic* understandings of wellbeing among the Raramuri; (b) How is the living well path as conceived by the Raramuri hindered by unequal power relations, and; (c) how, and through what political and cultural mechanisms, do *Raramuri* people respond to the ethno-political oppression they face?

I will tackle these three sub-questions individually in order to address afterwards the main research question: how do inter-ethnic power relations shape the persistence of asymmetries between the Raramuri people and the mestizo population living in the Tarahumara region of Northern Mexico?

(a) What are the *emic* understandings of wellbeing by the Raramuri?

The first stage of the research aimed to document the local understandings of wellbeing among the Raramuri. Considerations related to a theoretical discussion on culture, wellbeing and the *Buen Vivir* approach were used to explore how the Raramuri people have their own shared and culturally embedded ideas of affluence that are different from the mestizo population living in the area. The ideas of the mestizo are more in tune with the discourse of mainstream development and economic models. In this sense, empirical evidence was presented of how the *Raramuri* group related to a discourse of living well. This living well discourse -associated with the idea of living in the right path or '*Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich'* in the Raramuri language - stresses differences between the *Raramuri* and the mestizos and in the sense that for the former the search for living well implies maintaining living conditions that allow them to live *well* but not necessarily to improve conditions through material accumulation and commodities in order to live *better* than before as the non-indigenous population. The dominant discourse is based on a desire of homogeneity in living conditions and an ability to endure and make do with what one faces in life through the control of one's own cultural practices and spaces. In this light two main dimensions of living well were explored that build up the culturally embedded understanding of wellbeing; the significance of farming; and the importance of having a strong sense of community rooted in solidarity and co-operative practices.

Living well is harnessed for the Raramuri by the right to maintain livelihood strategies such as subsistence agriculture; communal rather than individual ownership of the means of production; social systems based heavily on kin relations and the practice of culturally-

embedded forms of sharing and reciprocal exchange (such the *teswuino* gatherings in the case of the *Raramuri*) which entails collective returns rather than focusing on individual accumulation. In doing so, social and cultural mechanisms maintain a dominant living well discourse and keep these understandings alive through the articulation of social practices that create ethnic differentiation. Additionally, living well for the *Raramuri* implies a cosmological understanding that adds to the subjective and complex implications of an understanding of living well among indigenous people. Cosmological beliefs and normative cultural drivers shape behaviours and aspirations that help reinforce Raramuri identity and self-definition. This could be seen in the case of the interpretation of shooting stars or *oremas*; and earthquakes as the negative consequence from trespasses outside the normative path of living well described in their discourse.

However, I also explored how living well for the *Raramuri* does not limit itself to the right to maintain autochthonous practices of self-consumption and collective networks; it also implies the need to have same relations with the nation state and wider society. In this sense, the idea is articulated throughout the empirical evidence presented that wellbeing can be understood as the tension between the rights of having a distinctive ethnic identity based on subsistence agriculture, collective solidarity practices and culturally embedded cosmologies on the one hand; and the need to engage with income generating activities, with having access to the benefits from social protection, and to basic services on the other hand.

These findings explored in this first stage, are important because they provide evidence that there is no universal understanding of wellbeing, nor is there a single way to achieve it. An analysis of local dynamics and contextualization are needed in order to fully capture the complex colours of wellbeing understandings. Therefore, in order to answer the main research question of how persistent asymmetries are formed and perpetuated it is first necessary to explore these local conceptualizations. It can be seen through thes discourses, that the Raramuri are able to articulate a culturally embedded alternative of

living well that questions and departs from the supreme desire to live better; the need to accumulate material possesions; the dependence on participating in markets; and, the required change of lifestyle which the mainstream development agenda suggests and promotes. There are other ways of living that depart, to a certain extent, from the notion that social groups regardless of their historic and cultural uniqueness, must live under the same understanding of wellbeing. These local understandings of wellbeing among minority groups must inform the inequality agenda by providing evidence about what people conceptualize as their needs, wants and desires in terms of wellbeing. Their understandings must be taken account of in order to address the persistent asymmetries between groups.

(b) How is the living well path conceived by the Raramuri hindered by unequal power relations?

The second sub-question of the research deals with how Raramuri-mestizo relations constrain wellbeing understandings identified by the Raramuri through a series of structural factors. These structural factors are enacted through economic models and livelihoods promoted by the nation state and also global markets that are based on a specific idea of what development should be. In this sense, Chapter V was oriented towards exploring how the communal capacity of farming and the collective features of community building are affected by land conflicts as well as the institutional arrangements of the ejido system which both acted to promote the control of decision making spaces by mestizos. The exploration of these institutional arrangements showed how these arrangements permitted elites to consolidate their privileged social and economic position through hoarding local opportunities. Municipalities and ejidos are spaces where economic, social and political resources can be easily hoarded and manipulated by small privileged groups. This was the case of the apple orchard in Aboreachi, which showed how these groups -commonly mestizo- operate and are maintained through networks of compliance with local economic investors, middle-men traders, local cattle dealers and leaders that negotiate with and seek favours from the local government. These factors

combine to create business arrangements which treat collective public goods as private ones. At the same time, issues of adaptation were explored as the ejido can also be understood as a space which the Raramuri have adopted in order to access those social protection programs considered crucial for subsistence agriculture, such as fertilizers. Although communities adapt and use their internal organization to participate in decision-making concerning resources, the concentration of power still resides within the ejido commissioner. The hoarding of power through the ejido by mestizos evidence how Raramuri are subjected in many cases to positions of subordination.

It is clear that the unequal distribution of power impacts upon the poor population across ethnic boundaries - mestizos and indigenous alike - however *Raramuri* people face additional vulnerabilities in terms of their role as *ejidatarios* that help shape a distinctive unequal pattern of opportunities and resources. Therefore, differentiated sets of vulnerabilities - that affect Raramuri people disproportionately in contrast to the wider non-indigenous population - are evident when the Raramuri engage in economic activities because these predominantly build up mestizo and Raramuri livelihoods. The case of Francisco exemplified this.

Additionally, faulty social policies fail to address the structured power distributions affecting the indigenous population more acutely. Broad social policies – in the form of social protection programmes such as *Procampo* and *Oportunidades* and the implementation of land tenure scheme such as the *ejido* - lack a strategic articulation that can address the hindering and structural factors explored previously. I suggested that a rights-based approach must have a distinctive promotion element oriented to –among other things- consolidating endogenous mechanisms of decision making. Doing this would involve the *Raramuri* having greater control and influence over natural and social resources (Lartigue, 1983; Azarcoya, 2003). I also argue that the case of the Tarahumara region persistence of elites also speak to persisten power assymetires. Cases of specific hoarding were described.

With this in mind it can now be shown how the Raramuri resist the hindering factors explored earlier.

(c) How and through what political and cultural mechanisms do *Raramuri* people respond to the ethno-political oppression they face?

In this last stage of the research I explored how the Raramuri people react in symbolic ways through, for instance, the performance of rituals and festivities that express their ethnic position with regard to oppressive inter-ethnic relations. I have argued that the way Raramuri people resist also links with the understandings of wellbeing empirically collected from fieldwork. In particular, there was a sense in which the larger aim of both wellbeing and resistance aim to promote cultural institutions and practices that endorse communitarian cooperation over individual material accumulation in order to live well. This is because the mechanisms of resistance also demonstrated the clashing and contested understandings of wellbeing of the two discourses. One discourse was based on the idea that people should have a livelihood oriented to the maximization of resources, having secure income sources and a tendency to material accumulation in order to live better. The other discourse was based on the idea that people will secure a state of living well by securing their traditional livelihoods and ways of living.

I have argued that the *Raramuri* of Aboreachi have followed a path based on consolidating their cultural identity through practices such as the *Noririwachi* which act to reproduce their aspirations, livelihoods, beliefs and values in accordance with their own cultural conceptions. This process of permanent identity construction is mutually reinforced by contrasting cultural differences from the *mestizo* group in everyday interactions.

This cultural consolidation has strengthened internal cohesion, discursively essentializing and homogenising elements, instead of taking other routes such as building external ties

with the wider society. Therefore, it can be considered that the resistance strategy of consolidating their cultural identity is a double-edged sword. This is because, by stressing ethnic membership and differentiation from other groups, the Raramuri appeal to culturally deep-seated homogenising and idealised elements of ethnicity that also may limit their political leverage to influence the political system at the local and national level, from which they remain largely excluded. Additionally, it can also be argued that this path of resistance employed by the *Raramuri* in itself is a consequence of the political system implemented by the national government towards the indigenous population. The political system, driven by strong patron-client relations and corruption, promotes dynamics of exclusion within social and political spaces affecting the Raramuri and leads to overrepresentation of dominant groups that, in the long run, consolidate elites. In a way, the imposition of economic models makes evident how power at the macro and micro level operate coherently to fortify current asymmetrical systems. In these circumstances, the dominant mestizo elite set the stage and the rules of the game about how economic and political relations are going to be played.

At the same time, I argued that, as a result of this exclusion from official government spaces, agency then comes through the capacity of brokers at the very micro level to adapt, appropriate and mobilise official programs and institutional interventions to try to label the power unbalances within "contested" spaces. This was argued through the example of the selection of the *Waru Seriame*, explored earlier. This showed how throughout this process of enacting agency, ethnic discourses linked with ideas of wellbeing are also mobilized and perpetuated. In this sense, both macro structural factors and also endogenous collective choices constrain agency and resistance in such a way that power relations are maintained and reproduced creating the asymmetries in the Tarahumara region. At the same time, the Raramuri people from Aboreachi exercise agency at the very local level through the individual role of traditional leaders that act as brokers between the groups; and strive to control contested and autonomous spaces in

order to secure their livelihoods and ways of living on a daily basis so as to maintain their ethnic identity.

These three theoretical pillars provide a novel framework to explore the formation and perpetuation of asymmetrical social, economic and political relations at the local level in the Tarahumara region. With this in mind, the study argued that in order to understand the formation of asymmetries between the Raramuri and the mestizo, power relations must be taken into account. This is because the power relations are involved at the moment of defining the understandings and notions of concepts such as well being. We should ask who defines the crucial conceptions about a society's success and standard of living and the criteria by which they are measured and compared. Secondly, this framework will allow us to see that in Raramuri terms, wellbeing is constrained by a series of structural factors conveyed by economic models and livelihoods promoted from the nation state and global markets and that are based on a specific idea of what development should be. The tendency to universalize development and wellbeing speaks of the clash of discourses that at the local level have diverse implications. For instance, the study show how the Raramuri people, by stressing ethnic membership and differentiation from other groups, appeal to culturally deep-seated homogenising and idealised elements of ethnicity. Consequently, by preferring to consolidate their cultural identity and the internal cohesion of the group over the choice to politically influence the oppressive environment I make the case that the *Raramuri* people are complicit in their own ethno-political oppression in the terms of the wider society.

7.3 Linkages with broader debates

This thesis speaks to current debates in development. Here I will analyse how this research links and contributes mainly to two debates; firstly, there is the issue of indigenous people and ethnic minorities living 'in the margins of the State' and the intrinsic potential opportunities and disadvantages of that marginal position in relation to

the state; and, secondly, the debate between the inequality agenda and the politics of difference. Firstly, the Raramuri people have found themselves in a scenario of being located at the margins of the influence of the State and global markets. Within this position is possible to locate ethnic minorities from other latitudes and remote regions across the globe that have suffered exclusion from the benefits from development in the form of: effective legal frameworks to secure collective social, economic, environmental and political rights, spaces and opportunities to engage with public policy that directly affect their livelihoods, and, access to quality public services such as education and health. Instead of being the subject of progressive policies that consider their own development orientations, often these people are the least well-served when compared to dominant populations. However, they are not passive subjects of the negative effects of global neoliberal markets. Indigenous people and ethnic minorities react, contest and resist in diverse ways those interventions that they see as violent expressions of territorial dispossessions, cultural misrepresentations and structural violence. When this happens, I argue, the clash of wellbeing understandings is evident between the global and the local. As Scott (2009) argues, people living at the margins of the State and society are abnormal and pose a threat as their subjects are not under its controls, and they are depicted as being fugitive, violent or uncivilized.

As I interpret the data gathered, the Raramuri represent one more case of such indigenous peoples. They see themselves as being part of an intricate socio-political context. On one hand they are on the margins of a web of political relations dominated by the power of political elites and economic policies that orient themselves towards a free market and the commoditization of everyday life. And, on the other, they have certain self-defined spaces where cultural practices are produced fortifying their ethnic identify. Although they have a foot in both camps, they are neither completely inside nor outside of the other. This condition of being on the margins represents, however, being economic and socially vulnerable because of a lack of proper recognition of socio-cultural and economic rights by the national government. However, it also enables them to make

strategic decisions in order to – if not negotiate the overall terms of relations with the mestizo dominance in the region and the national state and society - at least to manage their role as ethnically differentiated group with the state and the national society in order to secure cultural survival.

Therefore, the empirical evidence described here suggests that the Raramuri people are required to adopt a strategic approach to deal with economic vulnerabilities as a result of processes of exclusion, but also to benefit from the opportunities that their position of living in the margins implies so as to reinforce their identity and self-definition. In that sense, ethnic minorities and indigenous people have the potential to adopt different cultural repertoires in order to serve their group interest. The Raramuri discourse of living well takes place and makes sense in the context of them fluctuating on the margins; this means fluctuating between the tension of having the right to live differently and the need to be part of the larger society.

The second broader debate this research links with lies in the apparent contradiction within the larger aims of the inequality agenda and the politics of difference associated with the local understandings of wellbeing. The contradiction lies in the general assumption that inequality is understood as representing negative consequences for economic growth and the larger aims of development. However, I have discussed here a case where an indigenous group willingly and openly perpetuate a culturally embedded discourse of wellbeing that is based on discouraging accumulation of material possessions and departs from a profit oriented livelihood. These elements go against the idea that an individual has to foster change – or improvement - of his or her way of living as the development agenda and mainstream discourse promotes. The wellbeing discourse that indigenous people such as the Raramuri promote is the end result of the need to engage with the non-indigenous spheres on one hand and the right to maintain their own cultural identity and ethnic distinction as a group on the other. Therefore indigenous people, require the balance between accessing income and job opportunities, state provided

services, and having the ability to engage with those economic and social policies that influence their livelihoods and way of living while, at the same time, they are required to have solid institutions and organizational capacity to reproduce collectively their cultural differences.

Additionally, there is another angle to address this contradiction. Firstly, I argue that it is important to question whether the same understanding of inequality is being held, or rather to have clarity of what type of inequality(ies) or equality are being talked about? Therefore, although inequality has been addressed in different ways in economics, political science, sociology, anthropology and other relevant social sciences, I argue that power relations must be at the centre of the discussion of how asymmetries are maintained. Power relations are also visible by who defines concepts and terms that ultimately build up policies and interventions to the poor. As the *Buen Vivir* approach shows us, public policies and interventions in indigenous areas must consider alternative definitions and understandings of crucial terms, even if they contradict those mainstream assumptions. Recognizing that universalisation of such crucial and broad concepts is challenged by documenting local and different understandings of wellbeing is a required step to build alternative epistemologies that contribute to a deeper sensitivity to local intercultural dynamics. In this sense, this research wishes to contribute to the need for documenting *emic* conceptions of wellbeing, and trying to give voice to the subjects themselves in the local context.

Linked to this last point are implications related to the political use of terminology. Frequently the use of terms - and how key concepts such as living well, inequality, and ethnicities are developed into discourses that avoid the questioning of existing structures of power relations. In particular what is not examined is how the same terminology is embedded in social, political and economic discourses and how this use of the term in itself makes visible the veiled power asymmetries. Therefore, a call for a new politicisation of the term and concepts on an equal footing is needed, which can denote an intercultural

dialogue. An inclusive and intercultural dialogue that includes local notions of wellbeing needs to be acknowledged in public policy recommendations. The politics of cultural difference and the need and rights debate on indigenous issues must have a say on this issues, just as they must complement each other instead of prioritizing one over the other. Specific policies must consider that a right based approach must integrate borader senses of rights; such as the collective social right of self determination through respecting everyday forms of livelihoods among indigenous minorities and the rights to benefit from interethnic interactions with market, government and wider society free from power asymmetries and discrimination. In this sense, this research argues that power relations are crucial to observed in the grounded construccion of rights and wellbeing.

Is important to recognize that indigenous people such as the Raramuri, express and perform their distinctive cultural traits and interests in diverse ways that are not immediately evident. Local understandings of wellbeing, their associated normative discourses, and the power relations affecting their livelihoods and the corresponding hidden and symbolic ways of resistance must be uncovered by thorough ethnographic fieldwork. If this, or an equally comprehensive research method, is not in place we might easily run the risk of overlooking the ethno-political oppression and power asymmetries, due to the absence of visible techniques of resistance in mestizo public spheres. Therefore, development policy must recognize the need to open the discussion to local sensitivities and unprivileged voices which are too often left behind unrecognized.

Universal social policies that advocate for social groups to enjoy the same socio-economic indicators implies that all groups, indigenous and non-indigenous, are expected to share similar living conditions. Such similarities are hard to find in an intercultural setting such as the Tarahumara where living conditions are oriented by ethnic normative values. Therefore policies must by drawn up having these cultural differences in mind in their design and implementation, and must have a strong component to address existing and

persisting power asymmetries. Living differently must not lead to perpetuating power asymmetries as this research has shown in the Tarahumara region.

Similarly, it seems that promoting ethnic identity, in terms of differences among Raramuri and mestizos is a strategy employed by the Raramuri to maintain distance from the dominant society and in some ways to hold on to their uniqueness in order to survive dominant, homogenizing forces. Could it be possible then that the conditions of living in the margins promote the best environment for perpetuating their cultural uniqueness and difference? Certainly the case presented here suggests this.

The Raramuri, through their efforts to maintain autonomy and unique identity are advocating the following of a path outside the complete control of market forces and the official apparatus of the State. With this in mind, there are ways of living that depart to a certain extent from the assumption of living better. And importantly, living differently must not represent living under unequal access to assets and resources, and certainly it must not connote living under oppression.

The overreaching question is whether, in an increasingly globalized order, there is still scope to find ethnic differences that are able to maintain themselves on the margins of neoliberal policies and global commoditization. I argue that it is possible; the Raramuri people are an example of this. The discourse of the *Raramuri* people stresses ethnic differentiation between groups in terms of achieving the survival of their ethnicity in a global environment. In this sense, the Raramuri are showing that there is another way of living. However, they have also shown us that there is a price to pay implicit in their ethnic survival. It is here where the inequality - or rather the equality agenda - must differentiate and define the nature of equality. The path the Raramuri are taking to their wellbeing, the endurance of their livelihoods and ways of living demand equality of treatment from the state benefiting from a rights-based approach and power distribution that enables community-based decisions regarding their wellbeing. For this, they demand

differentiated approaches that recognize their cultural specificities and counteract the asymmetrical power relations they face. The Raramuri people are walking a path that is defined by rights and needs, through which, in a profound way, they are showing how it is possible to live and associate differently with people, land and nature.

In this sense, I argue that the Raramuri are always confronted by crossroads in their path to living well. The crossroads represent diverse pathways leading to scenarios they can engage with and which they will have to face. The direction the path takes in the future depends on their own ability to enhance their ethnic identity, to adapt to new challenging scenarios in their engagement with political and economic structures with the mestizo and dominant society; but also on the ability of the institutions of the State and global economic models to bring about change in their development agendas to incorporate broader understandings.

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