



# CULTURAL TOURISM, THE STATE, AND DAY OF THE DEAD

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**Abstract:** Using Day of the Dead in the rural Mexican community of Huaquechula as an example, this paper analyzes how various levels of the state, in its roles as planner, marketer of cultural meanings, and arbiter of such practices, mediate between cultural tourism and local identity in a global context. It shows that the results have been met with opposition from some community groups. Although such opposition has caused the state to rethink its strategy, it remains intent on using its new program of cultural tourism as an alternative form of development in rural Mexico. **Keywords:** cultural tourism, thanatourism, day of the dead, the state, rural development. © 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** Tourisme culturel, l'État et le Jour des Morts. En utilisant comme exemple le Jour des Morts à la communauté de Huaquechula, cet article analyse comment les divers niveaux de l'État, dans ses rôles de planificateur, d'agent de marketing des significations culturelles et d'arbitre de telles pratiques, servent d'intermédiaires entre le tourisme culturel et l'identité locale dans un contexte global. L'article montre que les résultats ont suscité de l'opposition de quelques groupes communautaires. Il soutient, quoique cette opposition a fait que l'État repense sa stratégie, le gouvernement reste résolu à utiliser son nouveau programme de tourisme culturel comme une forme alternative de développement au Mexique rural. **Mots-clés:** tourisme culturel, thanatourisme, Jour des Morts, l'État, développement rural. © 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the ongoing debate in the social science literature over the nature of globalization and its effects at the local level (Kearney 1995; Teo and Li 2003), two facts remain clear. First, the state continues to play a key role in the process (Panitch 1994). Far from being bypassed by globalization, individual states are the joint (although unequal) authors of international trade agreements that define and guarantee the rights and obligations of global capital *vis-a-vis* national

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capital. The role of the state is thus one of mediator between external economic demands and internal social forces to which it remains accountable. Second, while responses at the local level may be constrained by globalization, rarely have people remained passive to or powerless in the process (Silver 1993:310; Wood 1997:15). An oft-cited example in the tourism literature is that of Fuenterrabia, Spain (Greenwood 1989), where the Ministry of Tourism incorporated the town's historical celebration of *Alarde* into Spain's national festival calendar. In order to accommodate the increase in tourism that the publicity created, the municipal government decided that the *Alarde* should be performed not once, but twice, a day. The result was that the *Alarde*—no longer a performance for its participants but a public show for tourists—lost all meaning for the townspeople; so few of whom continued to participate that the municipal government considered paying them to become involved.

Wood (1984,1997) captures these two facts when he argues that the relationship between tourism and cultural identity is an ongoing process mediated by the state within the wider context of globalization. At the outset, the state may act as the unilateral planner of tourism, often with minimal community consultation. At the same time, the state may assume the role of marketer of cultural meanings, in which it attempts to make a statement about national identity by promoting selected aspects of a country's cultural patrimony. In its subsequent role as arbiter of cultural practices, the state may become involved further by intervening in, and even certifying, the authenticity of such practices. Sometimes, it will place the economic responsibility of catering to tourists onto a local community. As the process unfolds, however, certain contradictions may arise as the goals of the state come into conflict with the goals of the community or groups within it. The state then may become a potential arena for inter-group competition over how the community's cultural identity and practices are presented to tourists. The outcome of this process is complex and often contradictory.

The intersection of tourism, the state, and cultural identity within a global context is evident during the celebration of Day of the Dead in Huaquechula, a rural Mexican community of pre-Hispanic origin. Day of the Dead is an example of "spontaneous syncretism" between the pre-Hispanic cult of the dead and the Spanish-Catholic cult of the saints (Good Eshelman 2001:261–262; Nutini 1988a:18) and is directly related to the community's agricultural cycle. Until the 80s, Huaquechula's past had been of interest to only a few archaeologists and historians and to even fewer tourists. Since then, various levels of the Mexican government have been rediscovering, even reinventing, the town's "authentic" pre-Hispanic past in an attempt to promote Day of the Dead as a form of cultural tourism that could be referred to as thanatourism. According to Seaton, thanatourism involves "travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death" (1999:2). In the case of this event, it manifests itself in the thanatourist's desire to view memorials (altars) to, and internment sites (graveyards) of, the deceased. Over

the course of less than 20 years, the number of tourists who visit Huaquechula during Day of the Dead has increased to the point where any consensus that may have existed among townspeople as to the perceived costs and benefits of tourism has broken down. While the results have been mixed, the outcome is still far from clear.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze this process. It begins by locating Mexico's tourism plans and programs within their wider historical and socioeconomic contexts. It then describes Day of the Dead in Huaquechula and identifies how the state, in its various roles and over a number of years, has attempted to promote the celebration as an attraction. It examines the responses by certain groups within Huaquechula—specifically, the Franciscan Brotherhood and those households that construct new altars for the deceased—to these attempts. It also explores the extent to which such responses have caused the state to rethink its tourism strategies. The paper concludes by considering whether Mexico's new National Program of Tourism (2001–06) has the potential to deliver on its promise to use cultural tourism as an alternative development strategy in rural communities, such as Huaquechula.

## TOURISM AND THE STATE

Since the end of Mexico's economic growth in the 60s, and especially since its debt crisis in 1982 and near economic collapse in 1995 (Clancy 1999:11–12; Cothran and Cothran 1998:478), the government has played a leading role in domestic and international tourism development through the implementation of a series of plans and programs (Secretaría de Turismo 2001:25). The National Plan of Tourist Development (1963) ushered in more than a decade of resort development projects under FONATUR (National Trust for the Development of Tourism in Mexico). Despite mixed results (Chant 1992; Lee 1978; Long 1989; Reynosa y Valle and De Regt 1979), the state's interest in such projects continues. The National Plan of Tourism (1978) gave priority to social tourism for the masses and shifted federal responsibility for tourism onto state governments (1984–88) in order to bring them on side for the National Program of Modernization of Tourism (1991–94). The goal was to use tourism as a strategy for rural economic development under the NAFTA, which critics predicted would permanently displace 1.6 million *campesinos* (Green 1995:152). The program was followed immediately by the Program of Development of the Tourism Sector (1995–00). Inspired by UNESCO, the goal of the program was to expand rural economic development to include "tourist circuits", which included *La Ruta Maya* (The Maya Route, now *El Mundo Maya*, The Maya World) that reconstructs the historical and geographical ties among the states of Yucatán, Campeche, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, and Chiapas, and the republics of Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras (UNESCO 1996:14; Van den Berghe 1994,1995).

Today, international tourism is Mexico's third largest export after oil and manufactured goods (*Secretaría de Turismo* 2001:37). For two years in a row, Mexico ranked eighth among the world's most popular destinations, with 19 million arrivals in 1999 and 20.6 million in 2000. In 1999, international tourism generated \$ 7.2 million in revenues and \$ 8.3 million in 2000. In that year, it contributed 8.9% to the country's GDP and, over the last few years, has created an estimated 1.9 million jobs.

Encouraged by these figures, the government recently initiated its new National Program of Tourism (2001–06). Its main objective is to promote a profitable but "clean" tourism, respectful not only of the environment, but of local communities, which will share in the benefits it generates (*Secretaría de Turismo* 2001:15). The program alludes to an equal partnership between both public and private sectors and local communities. However, nowhere does it explain what "opportunities and options" (*Secretaría de Turismo* 2001:67) for tourism development will be granted to those communities or whether they may opt out of the program. Instead, the program sets out a series of sectoral objectives and corresponding policies (*Secretaría de Turismo* 2001:83–84), three of which are particularly relevant to this study: an infrastructure policy, a cultural tourism policy, and a sustainable development policy.

The goal of the infrastructure policy is to meet the basic needs (for transportation and services), first, of local communities and, second, of tourists. The goal of the cultural tourism policy is to generate a profit from various forms of cultural expression to further the social and economic development of targeted regions. To this end, the Secretary of Tourism will collaborate with various cultural organizations, including the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), to protect, restore, and promote the country's cultural patrimony (*Secretaría de Turismo* 2001:161). Unlike many social scientists (Hamilton-Smith 1987; Seaton 1999; Smith 1977; Wood 1984, 1997), the Mexican Government makes few analytical distinctions among types of tourism. Instead, it broadly defines cultural tourism as "the entirety of those activities realized in direct contact with the tangible and intangible patrimony of a nation," including "archaeological and colonial sites, manifestations of art and traditions, historical monuments and buildings, as well as other cultural expressions" (*Secretaría de Turismo* 2001:84, 160). Closely related to the cultural tourism policy is the sustainable development policy, the goal of which is to generate profits to preserve and protect the country's natural patrimony. One of several proposed sustainable development projects, *La Ruta de los Dioses* (The Route of the Gods), is intended to transform the states of Puebla, Oaxaca, and Veracruz into "an integrated and differentiated tourist destination, with novel products based on market research and marketing techniques that guarantee an increase in tourist arrivals, foreign exchange and investment, and employment equal to or greater than the national average" (*Secretaría de Turismo* 2001:131).

It is here that the global picture of the National Program of Tourism (2001–06) comes into sharp relief. Both *El Mundo Maya* and its extension, *La Ruta de los Dioses*, are part of the Plan Puebla–Panamá (Secretaría de Turismo 2001:99) which will spearhead the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), in the neo-liberal agenda, the next logical step after the NAFTA. According to Call (2002:24), one of the main objectives of the Plan Puebla–Panamá is to “catalyze a shift of the region’s economy from agriculture to assembly plant maquiladoras and manufacturing” and, one could add, to the provision of tourism services (Evans 1994:839). The results are foreshadowed by the claim made by officials of the Inter-American Development Bank, one of the main financial backers of the Plan Puebla–Panamá, that planners cannot concern themselves “with agricultural issues or land tenure for peasants” (Call 2003:10).

### THE CASE OF HUAQUECHULA

Huaquechula, a rural Mexican community of some 3,100 people, is located approximately 45 kilometres southwest of the state capital of Puebla. Its origins date back to at least 1150 AD, long before the arrival of the Spaniards. Vestiges of its pre-Hispanic past include the remains of an Aztec garrison located on the outskirts of the town, three stone sculptures adorning its main square, and several stone carvings embedded in the walls of the ex-Franciscan Convent built in 1560 AD. Because only six individuals still speak the indigenous language of Nahuatl, the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI 2001) classifies Huaquechula as *mestizo* (mixed-blood) and predominantly Catholic (74.8% of the population).

Today, Huaquechula is *cabecera* (the head town) of the same-named municipality and is governed by a duly elected council consisting of a president, a trustee, and six councillors. As *cabecera*, the town offers certain services and amenities (including two schools, a postal outlet, a money-exchange office, a state-run health center, telephones, and electricity) that surrounding towns may not. Despite these advantages, Huaquechula’s water supply and sewage system are, at best, rudimentary due to enduring political conflicts with other jurisdictions over water rights. In addition, the most recent data (INEGI 2001) indicate that only 34.8% of its adults are economically active. Of these, 49.3% (and, of the total population, only 11.7%) are directly or indirectly involved in agriculture that, before the NAFTA, formed the backbone of the town’s economy. Huaquechula thus loosely conforms to what Bonfil Batalla (1990:77) refers to as a de-indianized *campesino* community: it is de-indianized in that it has all but lost its corresponding indigenous identity and *campesino* in that it is geared toward a combination of subsistence and surplus agricultural production, although it is losing this identity as well.

The fact that Huaquechula has little else to offer in the way of employment may explain its high rate of recurrent labor migration to the United States. It also may explain why the state is now promoting

the town's rich cultural patrimony as an alternative strategy for rural development. Seaton suggests that the identification and social construction of a tourism attraction is not "an obvious or innocent matter" (1999:9). Huaquechula's economic need, its pre-Hispanic origins, its celebration of the dead, and even its location were ideal for the promotion of tourism.

Although no one in Huaquechula is certain when Day of the Dead became the attraction that it is today, two relatively recent events stand out in people's minds as being associated with it. One occurred in 1988, when Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–94) visited Huaquechula to expound upon the potential benefits of the NAFTA and to announce that the one road leading into the town finally would be paved. Another occurred during the *trienio* (1996–99) of the municipality's first female president, María Isabel Merlo Talavera, which corresponded with the Program of Development of the Tourism Sector (1995–00) to create tourism circuits. The two events seem to support the suggestion that the transformation of Day of the Dead into an attraction, which began in the 80s and has proceeded at an accelerated rate since then, is related to wider global processes.

The fieldwork for this study began in 1985, when the second author conducted research into handicraft production for Day of the Dead in Huaquechula (Mysyk 1986). As she watched or assisted in production, she was able to inquire informally into the beliefs and activities surrounding the celebration that she then had the opportunity to observe and participate in. Subsequent fieldwork by the first author formed part of a wider project conducted by INAH to document the impact of tourism on rural Mexican communities such as Huaquechula. She administered questionnaires to and conducted semi-structured interviews with a number of townspeople, including representatives of a total of 30 families that had constructed altars for the newly deceased in 1998 and 1999. The topics included whether or not the families appreciated the presence of tourists and how they behaved, whether or not the families allowed the altars to be photographed or videotaped, the number of people who came to view the altars, the number who were invited to partake in the ritual meal, the cost of constructing new altars and of providing food to all who came to view them, and whether or not Huaquechula had benefited from tourism. While not the focus of this study, a total of 157 tourists also were randomly surveyed in 1998 and 1999 for their opinions of the celebration. Since 1999, the authors have returned yearly to Huaquechula to make further, informal observations. The interviews have been analyzed qualitatively.

### *The Celebration of Day of the Dead*

In pre-Hispanic times, a variety of categories of the dead were honored during the 18 months of the ceremonial calendar. Arriving in Mexico on the heels of conqueror Hernán Cortés, mendicant friars used "guided syncretism" (Nutini 1988a:18) to directly shape the public cult of the saints—from whence derive the Franciscan Brother-



hood and the Masses for All Saints and All Souls—in Indian communities such as Huaquechula. Pre-Hispanic beliefs were all but expunged, the number of categories of the dead was truncated, and the timing of celebrations in their honor was altered to conform to the liturgical calendar. The friars were less concerned with the private or household cult of the dead that developed outside of their direct influence (Nutini 1988a:18). By the mid-17th century, the mendicant friars had been replaced by the secular clergy who were more interested in economic gain than in the salvation of souls (Nutini 1988a:99–100) and Indian communities were left largely on their own to shape and reshape their celebrations as they saw fit.

Today, Day of the Dead is celebrated throughout Mexico and refers generally to the period from October 28 to November 8 and specifically to the combined liturgical feasts of All Saints Day (November 1) and All Souls Day (November 2) which form the heart of the celebration. In the Valleys of Mexico and Puebla–Tlaxcala, Day of the Dead has come to center around the construction of home altars (the private cult of the dead) and the adornment of the tombs of the dead (the public cult of the saints) (Nutini 1988a:4). In their role as intermediaries between humans and the supernatural, the souls of the dead are believed to return at this crucial time in the yearly agricultural cycle when family and friends gather in or return to Huaquechula to pay their respects to the deceased. For these individuals, Day of the Dead is a highly symbolic event in which they have a “personal stake” (Seaton 1999:3). According to Nutini, it represents “a time of homecoming, remembering and propitiating the dead, cementing and intensifying one’s kinship and *compadrazgo* (ritual kinship) relationships, and sacralizing, albeit temporarily, interpersonal relationships on a community wide basis” (1988b:57).

Others, too, have a personal stake in this symbolic encounter with death but for different reasons. Both the media and government officials, for example, attend the event for purely promotional purposes. Still others are drawn to the event for recreational reasons only (Seaton 1999:3).

Altars for the dead are of three types: new ones, old ones, and altars to the single soul. By far the most important are the new altars constructed on October 28, October 31, and November 1 in honor of those who died within the past year (Figures 1 and 2). Approximately 4 m high and 3 m wide, new altars consist of three to four tiers reminiscent of the catafalques or tiered frames that supported coffins during the colonial period (Carmichael and Sayer 1991:Plates 18, 19). Each tier is covered with white taffeta, plastic, or paper and trimmed with white and gold paper lace. Candles adorned with taffeta flowers or ribbons, vases of flowers, and copal censers are placed on the floor in front of the altar. A portrait of the deceased, often reflected in a mirror to represent the soul, is placed on the first tier. The portrait is surrounded by an abundance of flowers; breads made specifically for Day of the Dead; candles; small sugar figures in the shapes—unique to Huaquechula—of doves, sheep, and baskets of flowers; and some of the deceased’s favorite personal possessions, as well as food and



**Figure 1. New Altar (Photo: Erik Romero Blumenkron)**

drink of which he/she is thought to partake. The candles, flowers, and copal, while also part of Catholic tradition, are said to attract the souls' attention to the offerings made in recognition of their contribution to having ensured a successful harvest. The next tier or two is/are assigned to the various Hosts of God such as Christ, the Virgin, angels, and cherubs. The top tier is minimally adorned with either a crucifix or a glass of Communion wine covered by a Communion wafer.

On October 28, the souls of those who died accidentally are thought to return. On October 31, the souls of children are thought to return and, in their honor, Mass is held at 8:30 in the morning.





Figure 2. New Altar (Photo: Erik Romero Blumenkron)

Typically, this is poorly attended because the day is overshadowed by *la plaza grande* (the large market) where vendors from the whole of the region congregate to sell everything from ritual paraphernalia for the altars, to food and beverages, to fruit and vegetables, to shoes and clothing. By 11:00, trucks line the streets bumper-to-bumper, vendors of similar goods have established themselves in close proximity to one another, and the market is so crowded that one barely has room to walk. *La plaza grande* coincides with the climax of the agricultural cycle in Huaquechula. Crops have been harvested or at least are secure, and cash from their sale or from wage-labor is relatively plentiful. By 2:00 in the afternoon, the crowd, tired but content, begins to thin out and, by dusk, most market stalls have been dismantled. Food and alcohol are sold and mechanical rides, a new addition to the celebration, remain in operation until late in the evening. On November 1, the souls of adults who died of natural causes are thought to return.

When the parish bells toll to announce the arrival of the souls on each of these three days, families who have constructed new altars welcome them by marking paths of marigold petals, sprinkled with Holy water, from the street to the altar and censuring the air with copal. Hundreds of friends, family members and, now, tourists come to pay their respects to the dead on each of these days, and are invited into the homes of the bereaved to partake in a ceremonial meal. Over the next eight days, hundreds of others are received and offered hot chocolate and bread. From constructing a new altar to providing food to hundreds (if not thousands) of people, a household shoulders a great expense, yet all that is expected in return is the presentation of

either a votive candle adorned with artificial flowers or a token amount of money—no more than a relatively generous contribution to collection during Mass.

At 6:00 in the morning on November 2, the parish bells ring to announce the Mass for All Souls. Afterwards, families and their guests walk to one of the two cemeteries located on the outskirts of the town to clean and adorn the graves with flowers, candles, and censers of copal, and to offer prayers for the deceased. Visiting the homes in which new altars have been constructed continues until November 8. On that morning, a Mass is held to mark the end of Day of the Dead for another year.

### *The State as Arbiter of Cultural Practices and Marketer of Meanings*

It is clear that Day of the Dead is not authentically pre-Hispanic in the sense of being pristine, primitive, or natural (Cohen 1988:374). Rather, it is “predominantly pre-Hispanic in ideology and in specific beliefs, while in structure and in practice it is a more or less balanced amalgam of pre-Hispanic and Spanish Catholic elements” (Nutini 1988a:349). Nonetheless, the state is now portraying Day of the Dead as “authentically pre-Hispanic” to tourists.

In 1980, the government of the State of Puebla assumed the role of arbiter of cultural practices when it began to promote a state wide competition for the “authenticity” of altars for the dead. The competition provided the impetus for change from the smaller, less elaborate, and more sombre altars of less than a generation ago (Carmichael and Sayer 1991:93–94, 98) to the bright and highly ornate altars, or “monumental markers” (Seaton 1999:9), that attract recreational tourists today. In 1997, the state again intervened as arbiter of cultural practices when it officially declared the “Altar Offerings of Huaquechula” to be part of the cultural patrimony of Puebla (Dirección General de Asuntos Jurídicos 1997:4). The decree legally binds townspeople to conform to its very stringent rules of timing, location, and types of offerings, thus certifying the authenticity of Day of the Dead and entrenching it in *La Ruta de los Dioses*. By declaring Day of the Dead in Huaquechula to be a certified part of Puebla’s cultural patrimony, the state, in its role as marketer of cultural meanings, is attempting to capitalize on the national ideology of *indigenismo*. This notion simultaneously celebrates the grandeur of Mexico’s indigenous past while vilifying its “backward” indigenous and, one could add, *campesino* present (Van den Berghe 1995:571). With the stroke of a pen, the decree excised the influence of 500 years of Catholicism on pre-Hispanic ritual and glorified the mystique and exoticism of the Aztec worldview.

The print media further capitalize on the “authenticity” of Day of the Dead through “somewhat fictionalized, idealized, or exaggerated models” (Seaton 1999:11) of the celebration. Every year since 1997, the Secretary of Tourism and the Municipal Council of Huaquechula have jointly published a brochure for Day of the Dead that boasts, “In the Identity of Our Origins Lies the Road to Progress.” In advance of

the celebration, both state and national newspapers print eye-catching headlines, such as “Majestic Offerings During Day of the Dead Make Huaquechula Unique,” “Huaquechula Ready to Invite Living and Dead,” and “Day of the Dead, Living Tradition in Huaquechula.”

After the official decree declaring Day of the Dead part of the cultural patrimony of Puebla had been passed in 1997, the president of the municipality of Huaquechula and the director of its high-school decided that students should tend information booths in an attempt to organize the barrage of tourists who arrive during Day of the Dead. In its role as arbiter of cultural practices, the Secretary of Tourism now sends a representative to Huaquechula to explain to students that, on November 1, they will hand out maps prepared by the presidency showing the location of new altars, and also offer guided tours of the convent, the pre-Hispanic sculptures in the main square, and the House of Ethnic Culture, before the altars are opened to viewing at 2:00 in the afternoon. The students are motivated to participate because they earn a grade for their efforts and, as an added incentive, receive tips from the tourists.

In 1998, the national Foundation for the Promotion of Folk Art also acted as arbiter of cultural practices when it gave a modest grant to one of the town’s most prolific potters to experiment with creative innovations to the clay candle holders and censers that he and his mother have produced for Day of the Dead for decades. The results, which retain their basic forms and designs, are very appealing and seem to sell well. Because each piece is laboriously hand crafted, it is unlikely that production will be rationalized or the symbolic content reduced to the “ethno-kitsch” characteristic of mere souvenirs (Graburn 1976:6). If his efforts are successful, others might follow his lead in reviving Huaquechula’s pottery-making tradition that is being eclipsed by mass-produced candle holders and censers from the cities of Puebla and Oaxaca.

### *The State as Planner*

The role of the state as planner of tourism began in 1988, when the southern zone of the state of Puebla was incorporated into *La Ruta de los Dioses* by the widening of the federal highway between the cities of Atlixco and Izúcar de Matamoros, and the construction of a new highway, Vía Atlixcayotl, south from the city of Puebla. Conveniently located on this route, Huaquechula was made more accessible when the two roads that now lead to the town were paved. In addition, its main streets were covered with paving stones, attractive streetlights were installed in its main square, and the public buildings surrounding it were given fresh coats of paint. While certain parts of Huaquechula’s infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, might be able to withstand an influx of tourists, other parts may not, or at least not as they exist now. The most vulnerable of these is the town’s sewer and water system.

In an economy that was and, to a certain extent still is, dependent on rain-fed agriculture, the town’s *campesinos* tap into its intermittent

water supply to irrigate their fields and increase what little surplus they produce. However, one of several reasons for the decline of agriculture in Huaquechula is that water is expensive. Some households have even stopped irrigating their orchards that were an important source of fruit and vegetables for home consumption and for sale in the market. Almost all families store part of this intermittent water supply in cement tanks or metal drums for washing, cooking, and drinking. To compound the problem, an increasing number of households are using remittances from labor migration to install toilets and showers in their homes, even though the town's sewer and water system is rudimentary. The inadequacy of this system may partially account for the municipality's shockingly high infant mortality rate (16.3% in 1999).

The state again acted in its role as planner in 1998, when the Ministry of Social Development began renovations on a building in the town's main square to convert it into a small hotel consisting of four rooms and a restaurant. In 1999, the Municipal Council of Huaquechula and the government of the State of Puebla inaugurated the hotel and turned it over to a local women's cooperative that was to run it with modest funds. Because large numbers of friends, family members, and tourists descend upon Huaquechula only four times a year (Easter, Day of the Holy Cross, Day of the Dead, and Christmas), the membership of the cooperative declined from 21 to 4 after only three years. By 2002, the hotel was no longer functioning.

### *The State as Arena for Inter-group Competition*

Various influential and/or affluent groups and individuals both inside and outside of Huaquechula—including the government of the State of Puebla, the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), several Mexican anthropologists, the Municipal Presidency, and the town's established merchants—actively promote cultural tourism as an economic development strategy with little apparent planning or concern for its consequences. These however, have elicited some negative responses from two community groups: the Franciscan Brotherhood that caretakes the chapel in the ex-convent and those households that construct new altars for the dead. Because both groups are essential to the success of Day of the Dead, the state has had to make several concessions to ensure their continuing participation in the celebrations.

In the 60s, INAH—which is responsible for research into and the protection and promotion of Mexico's cultural patrimony—became the custodian of Huaquechula's ex-Franciscan Convent and converted it into a site of cultural and historical interest to both domestic and international tourists. In 1989, INAH began to charge admission to the convent on other than Holy days. This angered many townspeople because they believe that profits from the sale of their cultural heritage should remain in Huaquechula, not be appropriated by INAH. It also created the perception that the institute, not the state proper, was the actual promoter and economic beneficiary of tourism.

In 1990, INAH began to publish factual and inexpensive mini-guides to the country's cultural patrimony, including two mini-guides to Huaquechula: *Pre-Hispanic Sculptures* and *Celebration of Death in Huaquechula, Puebla*. Because the mini-guides are not always available, employees of the institute give public lectures in the ex-convent about the town, its pre-Hispanic past, and its celebration of the dead. Every year for six years, the lectures have provided an average of 8,035 national and 141 international tourists who visit the ex-convent with an alternative to viewing altars before or after they are open.

The intrusion marked the beginning of the conflict between the Franciscan Brotherhood and INAH over public access to the ex-convent. In 2000, the brotherhood barred public entry to the ex-convent's tower without informing the institute. In 2001, it installed public washrooms in the convent proper, a controversial move (based on tourist demand) to which the brotherhood was and still is adamantly opposed, because it defiles one of the most sacred spaces in Huaquechula. The ex-convent silently encapsulates two very important events in the town's history. First, it represents the origins of the name of the town's patron saint, San Martín. In 1534 AD, the first mendicant friar, Toribio de Benevente (Motolinía), arrived, hungry and half-naked, in Huaquechula. The town's *cacique* (Indian ruler) received him and offered him new sackcloth with which to clothe himself. Overwhelmed by this kindness, Motolinía assigned to Huaquechula the name of San Martín, after Saint Martin of Tours, a fourth century knight who had given his only cloak to a beggar. Second, the ex-convent houses the tomb of its architect, Fray Juan de Alameda, who died in 1570 AD. Although this information is available to the diligent ethno-historian, it is not something that townspeople readily share with outsiders.

In the late summer of 2001, 14 paintings and five sculptures disappeared from the ex-convent as mysteriously as did the effigies of the dead from the limestone cliffs of Tana Toraja, Indonesia (Volkman 1990:98–99). Although no one has been charged to date, the theft further exacerbated the tensions between the brotherhood and INAH, whose reputation in Huaquechula was seriously damaged because it was held responsible. On November 1 of the following year, an individual with kinship ties to members of the brotherhood barred public access to the ex-convent's atrium, leaving a group of confused and disgruntled tourists outside. Because the individual does not live in Huaquechula, townspeople were divided over his decision, possibly so divided that INAH employees actually received anonymous death threats. Although its officials re-opened the ex-convent on November 2, they were obligated to negotiate mutually acceptable hours of operation with the brotherhood.

The conflict between the brotherhood and INAH is not only over monies. It is also a conflict over access to the town's "secrets" hidden in the "back regions" of the ex-convent, secrets that, according to MacCannell are perceived to be "the core of social solidarity" (1973:592). If knowledge is power, then the power of the sacred—indeed, of the community itself—must not be dissipated by sharing it

with outsiders. Those households that construct new altars to the dead also are divided over the perceived costs and benefits of tourism during Day of the Dead, as the following excerpts from Morales Cano's interviews illustrate.

The majority of households that constructed new altars reported that they appreciate the tourist presence. "Tourists join us and the town becomes famous. Our economic status increases and we are no longer so poor," one respondent said. Others expressed pride in the fact that tourists come to learn about Huaquechula's traditions. Only a minority expressed indecision about or outright opposition to their presence.

The majority of households also reported that tourist behavior was acceptable, although many qualified their statements with specific examples that were less so. Several respondents claimed that tourists had stolen candles and candle holders from the altars. Another commented on the "arrogance" of some who ask to partake in the ritual meal because they claim there is no more food for sale in the main square. Others reported that tourists "sometimes leave their meal [untouched]" or even "throw their food in the street—sometimes they act as though we are their servants." One respondent expressed concern that children, left unattended, could knock over a candle and set the altar on fire. Since 1985, one of the most enduring complaints has been that tourists "bring one candle and 20 or 40 people enter the house." Others bring nothing at all. Some "do not even say a prayer [for the deceased]".

Recreational tourists, whether national or international, are motivated to attend the celebration not by the highly symbolic encounter with death that motivates family and friends, but by a quest for the pre-Hispanic "authenticity" that *indigenismo* promotes. By far the majority of tourists reported no difficulties in viewing the altars to the dead. The few who did, said that the homes in which the altars were displayed "were hard to locate" and that, once located, "the crowds were overwhelming." Most were impressed with the altars, others less so. "They are nothing special," said one; "It is a long way to come," especially when "one can see the same tradition in Puebla [city]," said others. Some complained that they had not been told that the altars were open to viewing only at certain times or on certain days. One even suggested, "The altars should be displayed in the town square so that they are easier to view." Like Greenwood's observation that the *Alarde* "is a performance for the participants, not a show" (1989:176), no doubt the townspeople of Huaquechula would say that the altars are for the souls, not for tourists.

Because there are no formal control measures in place, families who construct new altars have taken it upon themselves to informally control the crowds. Some invite tourists to join them in welcoming the souls at 2:00 in the afternoon; others ask them to leave the house 10 minutes before the arrival of the souls, at which time they hurry outside to mark a path of flower petals from the street to the altar before they allow anyone to re-enter. Some place a tray in front of the altar to encourage tourists to make small donations of money. Many



serve tourists the ritual meal in the street rather than in their homes, then close their doors for the rest of the day; others, especially those whose homes are near the center of town and thus are the most accessible to tourists, close their doors for the rest of the week. Even so, some tourists are reported to have tried to push their way inside.

Despite their attempts at informal control, most families allow both tourists and the media to take photographs or make short videotapes of the altars “so that they have a souvenir of Huaquechula” or because “it makes the town famous.” As long as they ask permission, “they are not hurting anyone”. In order to avoid supernatural sanctions such as illness, poor crops, or failed business ventures, townspeople are on their best behavior during Day of the Dead. “[Fights] are avoided, petty grievances are held in check, transgressions and injuries are momentarily forgiven, and. . .people try to act as amiably and as generously as possible with all whom they come into contact” (Nutini 1988a:298, 305). Several families disallowed photography and videotaping entirely because they were certain that, somehow, a profit would be made at their expense. Most, however, expressed resignation to this unwanted intrusion that, like the print media, is intended to capture the public imagination and increase tourism (Seaton 1999:11). Only one respondent believed that Huaquechula would benefit from national and international media exposure, although he was not sure how.

With regard to the costs of catering to tourists, the majority of representatives of households that had constructed new altars thought that, economically, “tourists contribute nothing” to the celebration. Through independent observation, it became evident that, in 1985, the cost of constructing the most modest of new altars was around \$ 175. By 1998, the cost had risen to around \$ 555. Not all households keep track of the number of tourists who visit the new altars. Those that did so, reported between 500 and 5,000 (an average of 2,236) tourist visits on November 1 and 2 alone. If one includes the meals, hot chocolate, and bread offered to guests from October 28 to November 7, the cost was estimated to be between \$ 1,665 and \$ 2,220 per household. Given that Mexico’s minimum wage is approximately \$ 4.00 a day, the amount of money that a household spends in preparing for and participating in Day of the Dead is substantial. Yet all it receives in return for its efforts are the customary votive candles or small cash donations. As one respondent commented, “It will not be long before we will be unable to celebrate Day of the Dead because we have to spend so much money”.

Various respondents specifically cited the lack of any economic assistance from the municipal presidency. “For as much as the presidency has promoted Day of the Dead,” said one respondent, “it has done nothing for Huaquechula” other than to move its offices into a newly refurbished building in the main square. Another commented that, although he no longer lives in Huaquechula, he still sees the same problems—“a lack of water and many unpaved streets”. The office of the presidency and the state-run health center have even asked those families who construct new altars to make the toilet facili-

ties in their homes available to tourists during Day of the Dead, thus placing another economic burden on the sponsors themselves. "We want help from the government so that the celebration can continue," one respondent said. "The same thing happened with Carnival, Day of the Holy Cross, and Holy Week—they are not celebrated like they used to be". The only ones who are thought to benefit from tourism are the town's established merchants, the numerous vendors who set up market stalls in the main square during Day of the Dead and, of course, INAH.

The breakdown in consensus between households over the perceived costs and benefits of tourism is related to the nature of Day of the Dead itself. Because most townspeople still believe that the dead serve as intermediaries between humans and the supernatural during the yearly agricultural cycle, "[no] effort should be spared to buy or make the best offerings, demonstrate ingenuity in the decoration of the ensemble, and show imagination and exactness in displaying the items" (Nutini 1988a:327). Not to participate to the fullest of a household's abilities is to disrespect the dead, but to participate to the extent that the state and municipal governments expect places the economic burden of tourism on those households that can least afford it. This has led to tension between those households that can afford to mount such extravagant displays (usually with remittances from family members who have left Huaquechula to find work) and those that cannot. Yet individual or collective opposition to such extravagance is not only difficult, but may invite the wrath of the supernatural. The state has capitalized on this obligation to the deceased in order to promote Day of the Dead as a thanatouristic attraction.

The fact that some individual households are attempting to informally control the barrage of tourists during the celebration suggests that they, like the Franciscan Brotherhood, possess at least a minimal amount of power to cause the state to re-examine its tourism strategies. In fact, partial solutions to their problems have come, first, from INAH and, second, from the Municipal Presidency. Every year since 1999, the former has constructed a replica of a new altar in the ex-convent and, although the viewing has not yet been accompanied by the ritual meal, the display is popular with recreational tourists. While this may be criticized as an obvious attempt at "staged authenticity" (Cohen 1995:13) on the part of INAH, it does relieve households of some of the economic burden of catering to tourists. Yet the same time, it has the potential to provoke further conflict between INAH and the Franciscan Brotherhood. In October 2003, the Municipal Presidency announced that it would supply 20 kilograms of mole (chile sauce) mix to the 26 families that would be offering the ritual meal to tourists during Day of the Dead (Lemuz 2003:7). It may have been no coincidence that, among them, there would be thanatourists who had a "personal stake" (Seaton 1999:3) in the celebration, that is, representatives of the Free Trade Area of the Americas who, the president felt, should be feted appropriately.

## CONCLUSION

According to Wood (1984, 1997), the relationship between tourism and cultural identity is an ongoing process mediated by the state within the wider context of globalization. This paper supports his argument by analyzing the process by which various levels of the Mexican state, in its roles as planner, marketer of cultural meanings, and arbiter of cultural practices, have been attempting to transform Day of the Dead in Huaquechula into a national and international tourism attraction. It further shows that these attempts have not been accepted passively by all groups within the community, especially not by the Franciscan Brotherhood or by all households that construct new altars for the dead. Because these two groups are key to the success of the transformation of Day of the Dead into a form of cultural tourism, the state has had to rethink several of its strategies. It has attempted to negotiate mutually acceptable hours of operation of the convent with the Franciscan Brotherhood. It has also supplied households with food for the ritual meal.

With regard to the potential of the National Program of Tourism (2001–06) to use tourism (in this case, thanatourism) as a rural development strategy within the wider context of the NAFTA and the future FTAA, the results to date have fallen short of the goals. First, although the state has provided Huaquechula with new roads, it has not expanded or upgraded its sewer and water system, which is key to maintaining some semblance of an agricultural economy and to meeting the demands of recreational tourists. Second, in the opinion of many townspeople (especially the Franciscan Brotherhood), INAH is unfairly appropriating the proceeds from the sale of Huaquechula's cultural patrimony, and the yearly influx of recreational tourists threatens to reveal the symbolic meaning of the ex-convent. Third, while economic benefits from cultural tourism have accrued to the municipal presidency, established merchants, and vendors, employment opportunities equal to or greater than the national average have yet to appear. The hotel cooperative has dissolved, only one family of artisans has received government funding to increase craft production, high school students receive tips, not wages, to act as tour guides during Day of the Dead, agriculture is on the decline, and more and more townspeople are relying on recurrent labor migration to make a living.

Still, the National Program of Tourism (2001–06) continues to be promoted as one of Mexico's few options for development. According to the former director of UNESCO's Regional Office of Culture for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Mexicans have to get the economic importance of culture through their heads" (cited in Audiffred 2001:43). Further, according to the Undersecretary of Mexico's Tourist Operations, "it is urgent to promote [tourism] as an alternative [form of] development and job creation" (cited in Posada García 2003:26) in the country's most marginalized municipalities. Thus, it appears that the state is willing to allow rural communities such as Huaquechula to have a say in "how," but not "if," their cultural

patrimony will be incorporated into its national and international tourism plans. **A**

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