

Regresión

Notebooks against technoindustrial progress





Editorial

Why and for whom is “Regresión”?

Regresión is a publication consisting of content critical of the values and the material basis of the techno-industrial system. We propagate these ideas (by means of the Internet and in print) not so that others may adopt our positions. We aren't looking for sympathizers, nor for the approval of those who call themselves “radicals” and “revolutionaries.” We publish these texts because we have something to say, because in the context of so much hypocrisy and so many lies, we must shout the TRUTH.

It is important to point out that, even though these texts are available to all, they aren't intended for the society at large. This is an intervention from our individuality to those few who dare to think beyond typical “radical and revolutionary” criticism. It is for those who have understood that the root of all the evils of our situation lies in the techno-industrial system and the civilization that drives it. It is for those who have left the utopias of old ideologies behind and have assumed their role as individuals within this complex reality. It is for those individuals who are tired of speaking, reading, and being “critical spectators,” and who believe that theory is only part of the foundation of their acts against the system. More than anything, however, the content of this journal is for those few people who are familiar with this discourse and practice, and for those who are new to these topics, we hope to be explicit enough so that they catch on quickly.

Why regression

The word “regression” can mean many things to various disciplines or sciences, but we are using it as the antonym to “progress”, specifically civilized and artificial techno-industrial progress. For us, it is important to look back to see how humans lived in the past, how they developed, and how they died from the beginning of the species until the present. It is only in this way that we will shed light on our present situation: how we have gone from being human to being simply an instrument of the system. The irresistible advance of technology (as it has been formulated by critics of civilization) is generating serious problems for the environment and human beings, problems which range from physical to psychological damage. The consequences of following the same path will lead us toward unimaginable catastrophes.

Some advocate a revolution or the building of a movement that would contribute to the overthrow of the techno-industrial system. We refer specifically to the ideologues who follow the words of Theodore J. Kaczynski literally. To a certain extent, it is understandable that they assert various propositions to resolve the central problem. Our position, however, does not see the formation of an international movement to overthrow the system as being viable. For that reason, we renounce the term “revolution.” The strategy, like the term itself, is too fanciful, it lacks a realistic view of things, and that is why we renounce it.

For many moons now, we have stopped dreaming of a “better world,” which is either politically or “primitivistically” correct. Today, all we see is our present, the pessimist present to which we are condemned, and even though this is what we assume, we don't surrender before it:

-The system always goes in the same direction, progress stops for no one and nothing.

-Wild nature for the most part will be exterminated or subjugated in the coming years. In our modern context, only the most deluded minds think that trying to “liberate” it is even possible.

-Maybe in 30 or 40 years (considering the current situation) all of the wild nature that is left will be reduced to recreational or tourist areas.

“Ecological” or “conservationist” organizations governed by “green” bureaucrats will regulate them as they see fit, so that those spaces are preserved for scientific and economic purposes. This has already happened in Europe, and in Mexico it is the current trajectory of things.

-The behavior of the human being is being domesticated to a deplorable and maddening degree. Only the strongest and most intelligent will be able to not fall for the system’s games, trying to resist and cling to their nature.

-The whole system (or most of it) will not fall to a movement that accelerates a revolutionary process. The only thing that can overturn this complex system is wild nature itself or its very own complex technology causing collapse.

-We do not trust nor do we hope for a movement, a “great crisis,” or the “revolution.” We do not hope for change. The present is all that we have.

We have no certainty that “revolutionaries” will hasten “the destruction of the system.” Frankly, we think that if one day a movement emerges that seeks to destroy the system, it will be crushed immediately. Would the nuclear, timber, pharmaceutical, automobile, mining, and oil industries allow such a movement to exist, a movement that seeks to halt the forces that propel science and technology? Would they allow that movement to obtain victories that destroy the techno-industrial system that they have forged over the decades? No, they would not allow it, unless they could find a manner to profit from the situation after the supposed “destruction” of the system.

The reality of things is rather bleak for those of us who criticize the techno-industrial system and want it to collapse one day. We have realized this, and we accept the situation as it unfolds before us. We assume our contradictions without falling into them, nor do we resign ourselves to accept what is being imposed on us.

For years, within political movement and intellectual circles of any given ideology, solutions to the problems of the time have been proposed, for example:

-According to the history of Mexico, after the arrival of the Spanish and the death of the governor of Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma (1520), the Mexica warrior Cuitláhuac led a war against the invasion. This leader led his men in a war against the Europeans with the aim of reviving that great Mesoamerican civilization. Cuitláhuac died of smallpox without achieving anything.

-During the independence movement, the priest Miguel Hidalgo led revolts against the Spanish crown (1810). He assembled men who wanted to be free of the creole ruling elite. They wanted to form a government not imposed on them by Westerners. They wanted mestizo rulers, etc. After a bloody war, they shot the priest and cut off his head. Did they achieve independence? Maybe we should ask the Spaniards who are still owners of a large part of what is considered Mexican territory.

-In 1910, there was the “Mexican Revolution”. Emiliano Zapata was one of the most representative leaders who organized an armed struggle against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, as well as the rulers who followed him. He and his soldiers wanted a new constitution, one which granted land to the peasants and would create modern public services (electricity, water, sewage, education, etc.) They asked for democracy and not a dictatorship. They betrayed Zapata in an ambush and killed him. Did he accomplish his task? Maybe we should ask the current inhabitants of the region where Zapata fought, one of the poorest and most degraded regions of the country today in 2014.

-In 1968, the student movement spread throughout Mexico in the midst of a communist revival. These ideas were the tip of the iceberg after the October 2nd massacre [in Tlatelolco] in that year. Various guerrilla groups formed and waged a war to the death against the regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party [PRI], the party that emerged after the Mexican Revolution. One of these groups was the Communist League of September 23rd (1973), and, as its name indicated, its goal was to implant socialism in Mexico. Its leader, Ignacio Salas Obregón, organized kidnappings, armed robberies, gun smuggling, prison breaks, armed uprisings in the countryside and the city, attacks on politicians and businessmen, executions of police, etc. They disappeared Obregón once his group was defeated by the government, the paramilitaries, and infiltrators. Socialism never came to Mexico.

-In 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), led publicly by Subcomandante Marcos, took control of various municipal houses of government in response to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as well as to the maltreatment of indigenous people and the poor of Chiapas by consecutive federal governments. The initial goal of the EZLN was to “go to the capital and defeat the Mexican army.”

The EZLN waged war on the government, and the government counterattacked. After days of shootouts, downed helicopters, deaths, kidnappings, and tortures, a truce was called. The government offered reforms and rights to indigenous peoples, as well as autonomy to the Zapatistas for their “liberated spaces”. The initial goal of the EZLN was to overthrow the government. That didn’t work out, and they remain in their communities. Their “revolution” was only local.

-In 2006, there were many popular uprisings (the striking miners in Michoacán, the peasants of Atenco, etc.) that had the goal of creating a political crisis and accelerating the fall of the government. This occurred after a political campaign undertaken by the EZLN throughout the country. The movement of teachers in Oaxaca was an example of this. Out of a failed expulsion of the municipal and state police, the teachers were able to draw in the masses and forge a popular movement (the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca / APPO) that aimed at overthrowing the state government of Ulises Ruiz. After months of armed street battles, deaths (on both sides), and



disappearances of activists, the federal police removed the protesters by force from all of their strongholds. Everything appeared to return to normal. At the end of the ordeal, President Ruiz was still in office, and various leaders of the APPO joined political left parties. Did they achieve their goal of popular government? Of course not.

-During the presidential term of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), the government waged a war against the drug cartels, which left 60,000 dead (not counting those buried in hidden graves). The power of the drug lords is such that they have been able to buy off municipal and state presidents, politicians, the police, and even the army. This left the populace completely abandoned by the government. That's how the current self-defense groups arose, principally in Michoacán. These are armed groups in towns defending themselves from cartel assassins, extortioners, and informers for the narcotraffickers.

The goal of these groups is for everything to go back to normal in their communities. Unfortunately, Michoacán, until recently, was considered one of the most violent states in Mexico, and even the Americas.

What these historical cases have in common, and the reason we bring them up, is that, for many years, mass movements and ideologies have aspired to something more. They have defined ends, and many of them are so complex that they become illusory or impossible to achieve. Seen from a more realistic point of view, they seem well beyond the realm of possibility. Along with the historical events, there is the proposing of a "revolution against the techno-industrial system." This position has been advocated by Mr. Theodore Kaczynski since the publication of his article, "Industrial society and its future", in 1995. We repeat that we don't believe in this revolution, nor do we think it is ever going to happen one day, not in 1000 years.

The system's current state is untenable, and trying to overthrow it is just perpetuating the same self-deception into which leftist revolutionaries past and present have fallen. That is why we don't advocate for a total collapse. We aren't out to win the battle, we aren't aspiring to "liberate" the earth from the technological yoke so that wild nature can rise from its concrete tomb. We propose a criticism embodied in practice, in individual attack, without anything to show for it, without any hope of winning or losing. Disinterested attack, guided by reason and feeling, is what characterizes us. We are human beings who refuse to form part of any of this. We refuse artificiality in our bodies and our environment with all of our being.



Regresión is not a magazine containing criticism for the consumption of the passive. It does not contain tame articles for those who do nothing. It is for the lone wolves or the clans of accomplices who cast off fear and decide to burn machines and place bombs in institutions that attack nature. It is for those who decide to plan the murder of a particular scientist in the shadows...

In Mexico, from 2011 onward, some groups have come to light who align with how we think and act. These are the Individualities Tending Toward the Wild (ITS), the Direct Attack Terrorist Cells – Anti-Civilization Faction (CTAD-FA), the N.S. –Fera–Kamala y Amala (NS-F-KA), and now the Obsidian Point Attack Circle (CA-PO). All of these groups have carried out physical criticism against technology and civilization. They have done so not expecting anything to change, they have attacked for the sake of attack and to deliver blows to the megamachine. It is for this reason that one of the central aims of this publication is the creation of new groups that attack the material basis of the techno-industrial system and those who foster it. The terrorist war to the death against the system began in 2011 with these groups, and we would like to continue it. Thus, we support their attacks, their arson, and the execution of those who deserve it; those who have committed offenses against wild nature for years.

Let us continue on the war path, the same as that of our hunter ancestors.

May society and civilization tremble at our exploding dynamite.

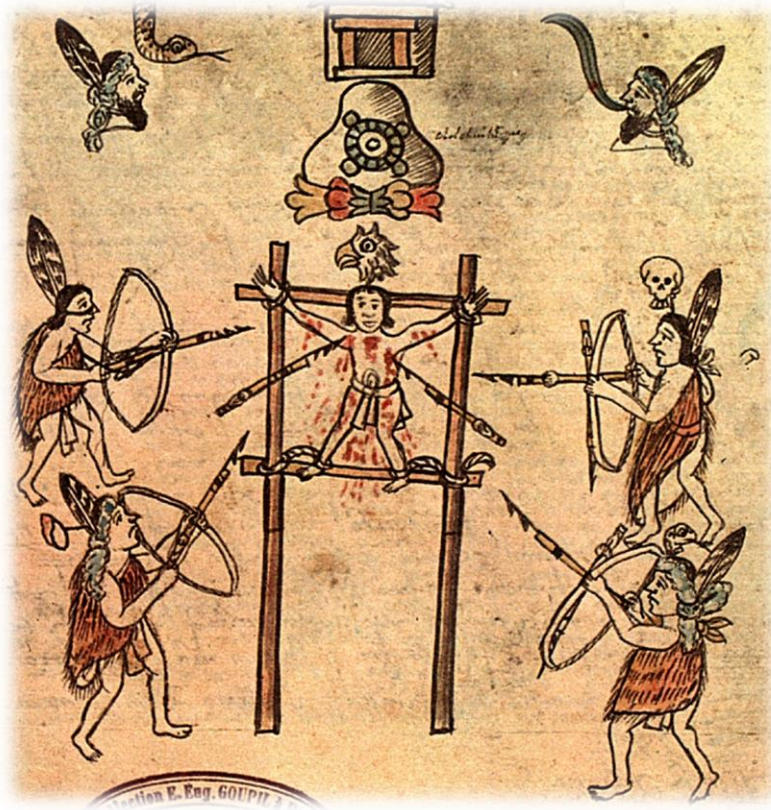
If technology doesn't stop, neither will our war against it.

If technology keeps advancing, so will terrorist groups opposed to it.

The Regresión Editors
April 2014.



Chilcuague, Chichimecas and Cinvestav



Guachichiles, the Zacatecos, the Guamares (the three Chichimeca groups that most ferociously resisted the Spanish invasion) used this plant for the hunt, but it proved useful in their fight against the invading Spaniards. The natives made a concentrate from the root and soaked their obsidian, bone, or wooden arrow points in it. When a Spaniard was shot with such an arrow, his muscles were paralyzed and he could no longer move, after which he was completely vulnerable to the attacking Indians. It should be pointed out that the Chichimecas not only attacked the Spaniards, but also anyone who accompanied them: black slaves, mulattoes, mestizos, young women, indigenous people, etc. The foreigners were all indiscriminately killed in ambushes in the desert and forests, since they all represented for the Chichimecas an invading foreign people. They were a threat to the tribe and their way of life in the midst of wild nature. It is said that when the Chichimecas had captured a fallen enemy alive who was incapacitated by the root, they took out the tendons from his back and used them to tie the arrowheads onto their arrows, atlatls, and axes, or they made strings for their bows.

The Chichimecas also used the root to escape when they were captured. They would store a piece of the root in their clothes (though many went about naked) or in their long hair and chew it when captured; within minutes they would start sweating profusely and foaming at the mouth, as well as crying and urinating all over themselves. The Spanish would think that they had a strange contagious illness and then leave the prisoner outside the city to die. After a while, however, the symptoms ceased since chilcuague causes the body to purge liquids but doesn't harm it in any other way. Thus, the savage, through his exceptional knowledge of his environment, was able to escape without being enslaved or shot.

Cinvestav

The Center of Investigation and Advanced Studies (Cinvestav) depends on the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), which is one of the most respected institutions in biotechnology, chemistry, genomics, etc. at the national level.

Cinvestav has changed and genetically altered a number of wild native and foreign plants. One of these plants has been the chilcuague, the root of our ancestors, the one by which many were saved from death in their war against civilization; for we can say that the Mixtón War (1540-1541), the Chichimeca War (1550-1600), and the Guamares Rebellion (1563-1568) were all authentic wars against civilization, progress, and technology. The wild Chichimecas did not want

Chilcuague

This is an ancient native plant, also called the "Aztec root," "pelitre," or "golden root." It is a natural antibiotic used for digestive tract and respiratory infections. The root aids in treating inflamed gums, tooth decay, toothache, and lesions to the tongue, gums, and palate. Its extract helps to treat external wounds. The leaves are used by people in the Bajío (lowlands) of Mexico in hot sauces and alcoholic drinks. It is also used as insect repellent.



Chichimecas

The nomadic and semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers of what is now called Mexico (specifically in the central and northern part of the country) had comprehensive knowledge of their environment (as most native peoples around the world have had). They also knew the benefits and usage of the medicinal plants that grew in their region.

One of these plants was the chilcuague. The hunter-gatherers like the

the new rulers or even better ones for their land. They did not want to live in or defend the cities or the settlements of the defeated Mesoamerican civilizations. They did not seek victory. They sought to attack those who attacked and threatened them. They looked for confrontation, as one can gather from their cry, “Axkan kema, tehuatl, nehuatl!” (Until your death or mine!)

Ambitious investigators like Abraham García Chávez, Enrique Ramírez Chávez and Jorge Molina Torres of the Biotechnology and Biochemistry Laboratory at the Cinvestav-Irapuato are only some of those responsible for having converted the ancient chilcuague root into a simple commercial anesthetic for dentists.

The wild nature of the root has been perverted, and it has been converted to a product mixed with addictive chemicals for the propagation of civilization. The scientists with their technology have offended even that which is found under the earth. Using humanitarian and altruistic justifications, they cover up the true reality of domestication of the wild under the yoke of techno-industrial artificiality.

For this reason and many others, Cinvestav and similar institutions have been the target of many extremist cells from 2011 onwards:

-Beginning of April 2011: An explosive device was detonated in front of the National Institute of Ecology (INE) in Mexico City. The INE is the federal institution in charge of “environmental authorization” at centers such as the Cinvestav, allowing them to experiment and investigate wild flora and fauna on the biotechnological level. The “The Terrorist Cells of Direct Attack – Anti-Civilization Faction” claimed responsibility for the attack on September 5th, 2011 in an extensive communique. The group also noted that it had been operating for months but had not to that point issued any claims for their responsibility for their actions. It was only with the emergence of ITS activity that they decided to issue a formal communication.

-February 27th, 2011: The Earth Liberation Front took responsibility for the attack on a lab at the Inifap (National Institute for Forest, Agrarian, and Aquacultural Investigation). The individuals placed explosive devices in warehouses, greenhouses, and in the entrance of one of the buildings. Also, they left identifying and threatening graffiti against the scientists who work at that facility. Since 2005, the Inifap has collaborated with Cinvestav on experiments concerning genetically modified organisms, especially corn.

-August 9th, 2011: Hours after the group Individualities Tending Toward the Wild (ITS) published its communique taking responsibility for the attack on the Monterrey Institute of Technology campus in Mexico State, an attack that gravely injured the technologists, Alejandro Aceves López and Armando Herrera Corral, the alarms went off at the Cinvestav in Mexico City, since the brother of Armando Herrera, the world-renowned physicist Gerardo Herrera, was frightened by

a suspicious package in his office. He called the police’s bomb deactivation unit, which investigated the package and found it to be only a bundle of books. It was clear that investigators were shaken by these attacks.



-December 28th, 2011: The military police was alerted to the presence of a suspicious package in the Cinvestav facility in Irapuato (Guanajuato). The security cameras showed a man dressed in black who got past security and entered the facility. Soldiers removed the package and increased security around the facility. They also carried out an operation which consisted of helicopter patrols and checkpoints on the highway going towards Querétaro. The group ITS took responsibility for this action in its sixth communique (January 28th, 2012), as well as other attacks.

-November 8th, 2011: The noted biotechnology investigator at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) campus in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Ernesto Méndez Salinas, was shot in the head while driving his truck on one of the principal avenues of the city. According to the press and police reports, two men on motorcycle drove by and shot him, killing him instantly. The group ITS later took responsibility for the attack. The Biotechnology Institute of the UNAM where Méndez worked, along with the Cinvestav of the IPN, are the principal institutes for biotechnological study in Mexico. These two institutions constantly collaborate on the development of this technological evil.



-August 20th, 2012: The “Anti-Civilization Faction of the Earth Liberation Front” (FA-FLT) took responsibility for an attack with an incendiary device in front of the Mexican State Council of Science and Technology (Comecyt) in Toluca, Mexico State. The blast dealt damage to the building. Comecyt is another institution connected to Cinvestav. One of the most significant joint projects is “Abacus”: an investigative space that contains a supercomputer. Among the applied mathematical tasks being worked on by this computer are: the development of new medicines and surgical procedures, genetic sequencing, the study of gas contamination, subsurface model analysis, seismic movements, petroleum extraction, finance, market economics, the aeronautic and automotive industry, nanotechnology, and logistics. The Abacus Center is found in the middle of the forest of Ocoyocac, in Mexico State.

-September 4th, 2012: The FA-FLT was attributed with the arson of a Cimmyt truck (Investigative Center for the improvement of corn and wheat) in the municipality of Toluca, Mexico State. Cimmyt along with Cinvestav focuses on biotechnology and advanced genetic engineering, and also collaborates frequently with Cinvestav.

-September 2012: In an article published in the scientific journal, Nature, the biotechnology investigator of the Cinvestav, Beatriz Xoconostle Cázares, condemned the arson of her laboratory and a similar arson of the laboratory of her friend a month afterward. These acts were not publicized by the press, nor did anyone take responsibility for them.



-February 11th, 2013: A package bomb arrived by messenger to the nanotechnology investigator, Sergio Andrés Águila of the Biotechnology Institute of the UNAM in Cuernavaca, Morelos. The package failed to explode and the investigator was unharmed. The military police arrived at the institute and evacuated hundreds. ITS claimed responsibility for this



action along with the murder of the biotechnologist Salinas in 2011.

The investigator left Morelos for the city of Ensenada in Baja California where he currently works at the Center for Nanosciences and Nanotechnology of the UNAM.



-June 16th, 2013: FA-FLT claimed responsibility for the second detonation of an explosive device at the installations of the Comecyt in Toluca, Mexico State.

-February 18th, 2014: ITS claimed responsibility in its eighth communique for the sending of a package bomb on September 2012, along with two other attacks. This attack was directed to neurologists of the Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico (ITAM) in Mexico City. The ITAM’s specific areas of research are Neuronal Adaptive Behavior, Neuroscience, and Simulations (Cannes). ITAM collaborates frequently with Cinvestav in projects involving robotics, neuroscience, and advanced computing.

-April 14th, 2014: The group, “Attack Circle – Obsidian Point” claimed responsibility for the sending of a package bomb to the Rector of the UNAM, José Narro Robles. The Rector is in charge of organizing and facilitating scientific and technological projects at the distinct institutions and universities, among which is the Cinvestav.

These attacks are wholly justified. These scientists and academic leaders – along with their laboratories, institutions, and universities – deserve to be hit in one way or another. Wild animal and human nature will not be totally domesticated while individuals like this exist: those who oppose completely the techno-industrial system.



Illegal logging has all but wiped out Peru's mahogany. Loggers are turning their chain saws on lesser known species critical to the health of the rain forest.

Mahogany's Last Stand

By Scott Wallace/NatGeo

Photography by Alex Webb

Mahogany is the crown jewel of the Amazon, soaring in magnificent buttressed columns high into the forest canopy. Its rich, red grain and durability make it one of the most coveted building materials on Earth, favored by master craftsmen, a symbol of wealth and power. A single tree can fetch tens of thousands of dollars on the international market by the time its finished wood reaches showroom floors in the United States or Europe.

After 2001, the year Brazil declared a moratorium on logging big-leaf mahogany, Peru emerged as one of the world's largest suppliers. The rush for "red gold," as mahogany is sometimes called, has left many of Peru's watersheds—such as the Alto Tamaya, homeland of a group of Ashéninka Indians—stripped of their most valuable trees. The last stands of mahogany, as well as Spanish cedar, are now nearly all restricted to Indian lands, national parks, and territorial reserves set aside to protect isolated tribes.

As a result, loggers are now taking aim at other canopy giants few of us have ever heard of—*copaiba*, *ishpingo*, *shihuahuaco*, *capirona*—which are finding their way into our homes as bedroom sets, cabinets, flooring, and patio decks. These lesser known varieties have even fewer protections than the more charismatic, pricier ones, but they're often more crucial to forest ecosystems. As loggers move down the list from one species to the next, they're cutting more trees to make up for diminishing returns, threatening critical habitats in the process. Primates, birds, and amphibians that make their homes in the upper stories of the forest are at increasing risk. Indigenous communities are in turmoil, divided between those favoring conservation and those looking for fast cash. And some of the world's most isolated tribes are in flight from the whine of chain saws and the terrifying crash of centuries-old leviathans hitting the ground.

Illicit practices are believed to account for three-fourths of the annual Peruvian timber harvest. Despite a crackdown on mahogany logging that began five years ago and a sharp decline in production, much of the timber reaching markets in the industrialized world is reported to be of illegal origin. Most of those exports have gone to the U.S. but are now increasingly bound for Asia.

A short distance southeast of the Alto Tamaya, a 15,000-square-mile mosaic of protected areas known as the Purús Conservation Complex teems with gigantic trees that first sprouted from the jungle floor centuries ago. This region embraces the headwaters of the Purús and Yurúa Rivers, and tribes living in extreme isolation maintain a presence in its rugged upland folds. It is also believed to hold as much as 80 percent of Peru's remaining big-leaf mahogany.

Illegal loggers are using surrounding Indian settlements as a back door into the protected lands. Many communities have been tricked by men offering cash for help in obtaining logging permits, which they later use to launder mahogany illegally cut inside the reserves. Along the Huacapistea River, a Yurúa tributary that forms the northwestern border of the Murunahua Territorial Reserve, duplicitous dealings have left half a dozen Ashéninka communities impoverished and disillusioned. At the height of the rainy season I join Chris Fagan, executive director of the U.S.-based Upper Amazon Conservancy, and Arsenio Calle, director of Alto Purús National Park, on a foray up the Huacapistea River. Boyish in his oversize khaki fatigues, Calle, 47, has jurisdiction over much of the Purús Complex. "Arsenio has done a remarkable job removing loggers from the park," Fagan says. "But there is still strong demand for illegal mahogany." Fagan's organization created a Peruvian sister group called ProPurús to help the park service and indigenous federations protect the forests. One initiative involves organizing community "vigilance committees" to patrol around the edge of the national park and keep intruders out. ProPurús field director José Borgo Vásquez, a crafty 60-year-old veteran of conservation struggles throughout the Peruvian Amazon, is also aboard one of our motor-powered dugouts.

"The loggers are stealing from you and getting away with it," Borgo tells a gathering at our first stop, the Ashéninka village of Dulce Gloria. "Why? Because you are doing nothing to stop them." Borgo believes that conservation efforts will succeed only if local communities take an active role in the defense of their native lands. Two major obstacles, he says, are poverty and lack of education, which make the lure of cash so seductive and the need to protect the forest so difficult for many villagers to understand. A third obstacle is distance, which gives timber poachers an overwhelming advantage. The Amazon rain forest is so vast and its far-flung river valleys so remote that it is impossible to patrol everywhere effectively. The absence of authority on the ground has given rise to a sense among loggers that the forest is theirs for the taking. A local informant tells us that a logger named Rubén Campos is using an illegal track farther upriver to drag mahogany logs over the divide to an adjacent watershed. (Efforts to reach Campos for comment were unsuccessful.) Such a move would allow him to float any ill-gotten timber down to the Ucayali River and on to sawmills in Pucallpa, the regional capital, without the Ashéninka on the Huacapistea even knowing what he's taking.

The next day, in a downpour, local guides lead us deep into the forest in search of the illicit operation. We pass a giant mahogany tree, an X etched in its bark, apparently slated for cutting. Anchored by sprawling buttress roots, the great trunk rockets into the canopy, where its branches drip with orchids and bromeliads. A gash in the forest leads into the rain-soaked jungle and vanishes in a blur of electric green. We soon find the culprit—a John Deere skidder with outsize tires parked in a shed made from rusted sheets of corrugated metal. We press on, passing a dozen massive mahogany and Spanish cedar trunks awaiting removal by the skidder. Calle measures their diameter—about five feet each. He says the trees are hundreds of years old.

We reach a clearing dominated by a shaggy thatched shelter. It's guarded by a lone watchman, a specter of a man named Emilio, roused from his hammock by our approach. "A man needs to work," he says defensively. "If there's no other work, what can one do?" It's a question that vexes Calle as well. This logging operation is clearly beyond the bounds of legality; no one is authorized to cut this forest. But the camp itself is beyond Calle's legal reach.

Given the torrential downpour, it would be too difficult to follow the skidder path across the rain-swollen creek and into the reserve, so we turn back. Calle will alert authorities once he gets back to Pucallpa, but no one is likely to have the stomach for charging or prosecuting anyone. Without hard evidence from inside the reserve, it would be a tough case to pursue. Loggers are apt to be well connected to power brokers in Pucallpa. Honest cops often face smear campaigns, even outright dismissal, if they overstep boundaries. What's more, the government in Lima recently shifted forest enforcement responsibilities back to the regional governments, where officials are often more susceptible to arm-twisting. "The protected areas are going to be reduced to fragmented forest if we don't take a more proactive approach," says Calle, who fears loggers will now have even more latitude to undermine the rule of law.

The bad guys won't have any freedom at all in Edwin Chota Valera's territory, not if he can help it. Chota—a sinewy, 52-year-old firebrand with rakish, jet-black hair and a hawk's beak of a nose—is the leader of the Ashéninka village of Saweto, some 60 miles northwest of the Purús Conservation Complex. Since 1998, when local Ashéninka established Saweto, they have stood by helplessly as, season after season, logging crews floated colossal trunks downriver from the headwaters of the Alto Tamaya and Putaya Rivers to sawmills in Pucallpa.

In the face of these trespasses, a decade ago villagers undertook a quest to get the regional government in Pucallpa to grant them legal title to their land—more than 250 square miles of river-laced forest stretching from Saweto all the way to the Brazilian frontier. Their claim was ensnared for years in red tape, while poachers pillaged their forests. It appears their petition may finally be resolved later this year.

The illegal logging epidemic prompted U.S. lawmakers in 2007 to require a series of reforms as a condition for approving a free-trade agreement with Peru. The agreement committed Peru, among other things, to implement a plan of action on big-leaf mahogany that would comply with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Officials in Lima say they are experimenting with other measures, including an electronic monitoring system, that will help modernize Peru's timber industry. Changes have been slow to take effect and have brought little relief for many remote communities like Saweto, victims of timber mafias that have already snatched their mahogany for pennies on the dollar, if they paid anything for it at all.

But this is a new era for the Ashéninka of the Alto Tamaya. At a meeting in Saweto's one-room schoolhouse, a woman named Teresa López Campos urges her people to stand up to the loggers. "Where are we going to go if they drive us away from here?" she says vehemently. "This is where we will die. We have nowhere else to go."

Two days later ten or so Ashéninka men and women have come together under Chota's direction to follow illegal loggers into the headwaters of the Alto Tamaya and demand their departure. Since dawn we've been following the twists and turns of the emerald green Mashansho Creek through dense jungle along Peru's eastern border with Brazil. Poling dugouts through sand-rippled shallows, pausing to spear catfish in crystalline eddies, my Ashéninka hosts are biding their time, confident that somewhere upstream we'll confront a band commanded by an elusive man they call El Gato—the Cat. The expedition is fraught with risk, likely to incur the wrath not only of the loggers but also of their paymasters in Pucallpa—the sawmill owners and timber brokers, who are closely connected to the city's power elite.

The men of Saweto were away when El Gato motored upstream past the village a week earlier. Ignoring shouts from the women on the embankment to stay out of their forests upriver, El Gato kept right on going, his three boats piled high with enough food and fuel to keep his sullen-faced crew cutting trees in the backwoods all summer long.

"As long as we don't have title, the loggers don't respect native ownership," Chota says, standing at the rear of the canoe, propelling us with thrusts of a ten-foot pole. "They threaten us. They intimidate. They have the guns." The target of frequent death threats, Chota has repeatedly been forced to seek sanctuary among the Ashéninka's tribal relatives in Brazil, a two-day hike from here along ancient footpaths.

"Titling is a critical ingredient in the fight against illegal logging," agrees David Salisbury, a University of Richmond geographer who's sitting beside me. The lanky, fair-haired Salisbury has served as the villagers' adviser since he first learned of their plight while doing doctoral research in 2004. "The native communities are the ones most invested in their place," he says. "They're the most capable of making long-term decisions about how to use their homeland and resources in a sustainable way."

Peru's logging industry operates within a framework of concessions and permits designed to allow a community, company, or individual to extract a sustainable yield from a given area. Transport permits are also issued to track the chain of custody of a shipment from stump to sawmill and on to the point of export or final sale. But permits are easily traded on the black market, enabling loggers to cut timber in one place and say it came from somewhere else. The Alto Tamaya area offers a case in point. The government's nearest inspection station is several days downriver from Saweto, Chota tells me. So when it comes time for El Gato to float his logs out during next year's rainy season, he can claim that any timber he illegally cut in Ashéninka territory was harvested on a legitimate concession nearby. "Welcome to the land without law," Chota says, with a sweep of the arm. "From that inspection post all the way back here, there is no law. The only law is the law of the gun."

As we pole our way up Mashansho Creek, it becomes clear that outsiders are not the only ones pillaging the forest. We disembark on a beach where the high-pitched whine of a motor reaches us from back in the woods. Minutes later we come upon five young men, shirtless and barefoot, in the midst of toppling a massive copaiba tree. They're all Ashéninka, all relatives of our party's eldest member, "Gaitán" (not his real name). Amid a blizzard of sawdust and flying debris, Gaitán's son cuts deep into the trunk. Suddenly it cracks like a thunderbolt. Everyone dashes for cover, the saw still purring as the behemoth starts a free fall and lands with an earthshaking thump.

Pungent, pine-scented sap oozes from the fresh stump. The oil is renowned for its curative properties, and left standing, the tree could have fetched far more over the years for its medicinal oil than the onetime cash payout—probably less than a hundred dollars—that Gaitán's family will get for its timber. But with El Gato's crew on the loose in these woodlands, these men decided to lay claim to it first. Such are the distortions created by the absence of law; in this jungle free-for-all, it's finders keepers. Chota shakes his head in disgust at the sight of the copaiba stump. "Everyone who logs here is illegal, period," he says. "No one has the proper permits." Chota has been trying to wean the Ashéninka away from such destruction. But he must tread lightly or risk further dividing his people. Native communities can subsist on game, fish, and crops if their forests are intact. Still, they need things like clothes, soap, and medicine, and for many, logging—or taking handouts to let loggers in—is the only way to acquire those goods. As the sun drops low, painting the treetops in splashes of yellow light, the team decides it's time to leave the canoes behind and cut a straight line on foot through the jungle. The shortcut will put us upstream of El Gato. Trudging through dank forest as the last rays of sun fade from the sky, we ford the winding creek for a third time and look for a place to camp for the night.

Because permits are commonly used to launder wood taken from adjacent lands, Peru's concession system has been widely criticized for providing cover for illegal logging. But the forestry engineers and harvesters with a company called the Consorcio Forestal Amazónico (CFA) say they are trying to do things right. CFA operates a huge concession in the dense woodlands astride the Ucayali River in the heart of the Peruvian Amazon. The enterprise is the very model of rational exploitation, with fluorescent-vested saw operators guided to their targets by computerized maps and databases. Its 455,000 acres of primal forest have been divided into a grid of 30 parcels, each corresponding to a single year's harvest in a 30-year rotation plan.

At a base deep inside the concession, supervisors consult with plan the day's work. "Delineators" crouch over computerized maps that crews will take into the forest. Every harvestable tree is color-coded by species and identified by number. Each two-man crew will cut approximately ten trees by sundown, working a line through the forest that matches a strip of the larger map. Seed-bearing adult trees, which will be left standing to regenerate the woodland, are also identified.

"We try to leave the forest cover as undisturbed as possible," says Geoffrey Venegas, a Costa Rican forestry engineer who oversees the cutting. "We're light-years ahead of what I've seen elsewhere."

We clamber out of a pickup truck at an acre-size collection point fringed with piles of freshly cut logs, three to four feet in diameter, from trees with unfamiliar names: *chamisa*, *yacushapana*, and the aromatic *alcanfor moena*. There's hardly any mahogany in CFA's concession. For Venegas, the future of tropical hardwoods lies with these less glamorous trees. "We've identified 20 different species with commercial potential," he says. "This year we're cutting 12 of them." CFA executives say that making use of multiple species increases the value of the forest, providing a greater incentive to take care of it, even if mahogany and Spanish cedar have already been logged out. "Socially responsible" investors are impressed with the company's practices, its potential for long-term profits, and its certification from the Forest Stewardship Council, an international third-party auditing body that sets standards and recommendations for sustainable forestry. But the impact of even these practices comes as a shock to a visitor to a forest that just weeks ago was an untouched wilderness. In the stillness of midmorning a screaming piha's cry resounds through the woods. An iridescent blue morpho butterfly the size of an outstretched hand flits past, like a kite jerking in the breeze. Monkeys play peekaboo from a stand of uncut trees. The dry season is already well along, but the forest floor remains spongy, exuding a damp vitality resistant to drought—the hallmark of a healthy tropical rain forest. What will this forest look like 30 years from now, though, when rutted roads and feeder trails extend into the far corners of the concession, and when men and machines return here to begin the cycle anew? Will the forest have regenerated? CFA is banking on it. "If we're able to do it, the whole Peruvian timber industry will benefit," sales manager Rick Kellso says. "You can get a nice profit by doing things right. You don't have to be illegal."

Back in the upper reaches of Mashansho Creek, beneath a sky blazing with stars, Edwin Chota Valera and David Salisbury gather the Ashéninka around the campfire to plot tomorrow's showdown with El Gato. "He's going to ask to see your papers," Salisbury says, referring to the title the Ashéninka still do not have. "But remember, he has no papers either. He's logging here illegally. He has no justification for being here."

We enter the logging camp at first light, swarming the squalid huts before anyone has time to reach for a rifle. A fair-haired man in a yellow soccer jersey rises to his feet. His green eyes betray bewilderment.

"Are you the man they call El Gato?" Chota asks.

"I am," the man says warily. Without putting up a fight, he agrees to leave but pleads with the Ashéninka for permission to take out the trees he's already cut upstream. "We're just working people trying to put food on the table." There's a ring of defeat in his voice. He says he's mired in debt to a man named Gutiérrez, who fronted \$50,000 cash for the logging expedition. "That guy will hound me until the day I die," he says.

Chota is unmoved. "Things could turn bad for you if you stay up here," he warns. The government in Lima, Chota tells him, has promised indigenous communities a greater voice in their own affairs. "Things are beginning to turn in our favor."

But within days of our encounter with El Gato, vandals steal into Saweto under cover of darkness and sabotage three outboard motors that were used by Chota's party, a devastating blow to the impoverished community. The Ashéninka have little doubt who did it. Prosecuting the crime will be another matter entirely.

